



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



Smart Investments in Hard Times **Legislative Update: May 2009**

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Connecticut lawmakers face especially tough budget choices this year, but they are also considering an assortment of bills that would greatly benefit the health, safety, and learning of children and youth. Here are some of those smart investments in these hard times.

Policy Proposals

I. Children in the Recession

HB 6411, An Act Concerning Reduction in Child Poverty and Investment in Prevention

This bill addresses the immediate economic situation for families by requiring a state plan for preventing unnecessary difficulty in accessing services. Without such action, children will fall through the cracks. The last two recessions showed us that children stay poor for five to seven more years after a recession ends. (Approved by these committees: children, human services, appropriations, public health.)



(continued)

II. Child Health

HB 6402, An Act Concerning HUSKY Reform

This bill seeks to embed in the state HUSKY program core components of a preventive, early intervention health system and also to maximize federal funds through strategic Medicaid waivers. The bill would enhance maternal and child health, with attention to maternal depression, smoking cessation, and implementation of research based in home therapy for families with young children. (Approved by these committees: human services, appropriations.)

HB 6496, An Act Concerning Green Cleaning Products in Schools

By October 1, 2010, school districts would be required to implement “green” programs for cleaning and maintaining their schools. Cleaning products would have to meet guidelines or standards set by a national or international certification program approved by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), in consultation with the environmental protection commissioner. They would also have to minimize, as far as possible, potential harmful effects on human health and the environment.

School districts must provide an annual written statement notifying staff and, if they request it, parents or guardians of enrolled students of the green cleaning program. Districts must publish notice of the program on the board of education's and each school's website or, if there is no website, publicize it in another way. They must also notify parents or guardians of transfer students and newly hired staff about the program.

SB 1080, An Act Concerning access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants

Beginning July 1, 2010, the bill requires each chain restaurant in the state to make available to consumers the total number of calories for each standard menu item as that item is usually prepared and offered for sale by the restaurant. The bill defines “chain restaurant” as a restaurant that is part of a group of 15 or more restaurant locations nationally, doing business under the same trade name, offering predominantly the same type of meals, foods, or menu, regardless of the type of ownership of the individual restaurant locations. A “standard printed menu” is a printed menu provided by a restaurant to individual customers.

HB 6152, An Act Establishing a Catastrophic Medical Expenses Pool

This bill seeks to help families struggling to pay medical debt who have exhausted their health insurance or cannot get health insurance coverage for those needs.

The Office of the Health Advocate will administer a Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund to assist families with extraordinary expenses not covered by private insurance or expenses that are necessary for the health and well being of the child but beyond the income of the family. The goal of the fund is to ensure the optimal health of the child, keep children at home and support families experiencing extreme financial hardships caring for their ill child.

SB 735, An Act Improving Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

The bill seeks to enhance non-motorized transportation alternatives, promote healthy lifestyles,

encourage smart growth and reduce congestion by adopting a complete streets policy, establishing a permanent bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee, devoting a minimum percentage of funds to programs that improve bicycle and pedestrian access and authorizing the issuance of Share the Road number plates.

III. Fatherhood

HB 6486, An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families

The bill seeks to promote positive relationships between parents and children with a focus on addressing the barriers to non-custodial fathers concerning child support and economic self sufficiency.

- Strengthens the existing Fatherhood Council activities and requires DSS to report on progress meeting the goals included in the 1999 law. Goals include the effectiveness of any child support arrears management and teen fatherhood reduction efforts; and also the effectiveness of programs aimed at employment and reduction of poverty.
- Allows the family support magistrates to order non-custodial parents to participate in an educational, training, skill building, work, rehabilitation or similar program in order to acquire skills necessary to obtain employment and be better able to pay child support.

IV. Education Reform

HB 6569, An Act Concerning Reporting of School Graduation Rates

The bill seeks to establish a uniform method of reporting on student drop outs in order to have accurate data to track and monitor students in an effort to hold school districts more accountable. It also includes provision for keeping students in school until 18 years of age unless a parent allows them to leave school. Current law allows a student with parental permission to leave school at age 16 .

V. Consumer Protection

HB 6572, An Act Concerning Banning Bisphenol-A In Children's Products...

Connecticut is the first state in the nation to ban the sale, manufacture or distribution in the state of infant formula and baby food stored in containers made with bisphenol- A and reusable food and beverage containers.

- Starting October 1, 2011, it bars anyone from selling or offering for sale any food product stored in a jar or can made with bisphenol-A unless the container is labeled accordingly.
- Authorizes the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) to enforce the ban and labeling requirements, within available appropriations. Early Care and Education System

VI. Early Care and Education System

HB 5841, An Act Concerning a Uniform Reporting Form for Preschool & Child Care Programs

The bill passed unanimously from the House and is currently on the Senate Calendar. This bill requires the Department of Social Services, in collaboration with the Departments of Public Health and Education, to develop a single form to report certain information necessary to receive state funding. The departments can develop a reporting form with minimal additional administrative costs.

HB 6544, An Act Simplifying Procedures for Early Care and Education Facilities

The bill seeks to streamline and simplify procedures among regulatory agencies related to early child care and school readiness programs.

- The Departments of Social Services, Education and Public Health shall conduct a joint study of the requirements and procedures related to early childcare and early childhood education to simplify procedures for caregivers. The study shall include an examination of the regulations and other requirements of the departments that apply to caregivers of young children. The departments shall (1) identify existing requirements and procedures that are duplicative or unnecessary, and (2) make recommendations for simplifying requirements and procedures for caregivers.
- Requires DSS, DPH and Education to submit a report on the findings and recommendations to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to human services, education and public health, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

SB 941, An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and Planning

The bill seeks to further the development of a coordinated early care and education system. It establishes a new Office of Early Childhood and Planning, Outreach and Coordination within the Department of Education. The Department would assume the responsibility of planning, developing and maintaining a birth to three system; early childhood system development related to accountability, data development, school readiness longitudinal study, efficacy of the pre-K inventory assessment and developing and implementing a strategic communication framework and outreach.

The bill also establishes a new Early Learning Advisory Council, with executive and legislative appointments. The Council will coordinate among state agencies the continued development of a birth to nine early childhood system through public and private funding sources, and ensure compliance with the Head Start Law.

The bill also would change requirements for teacher qualifications for School Readiness Programs. Programs would be required to have at least 50% of its teachers to hold certification with an endorsement in early childhood education, or hold a bachelor's degree from and

institution of higher education accredited by the Board of Governor's of Higher Education or regionally accredited, and the remaining teachers hold an associate's degree from an institution of higher education accredited by the Board of Governor's of Higher Education or regionally accredited, and requires all such teachers to complete a program of study approved by the Commissioners of Education and Higher Education.

Budget Highlights

These are highlights from the two-year budget approved by the legislature's Appropriations Committee. The plan awaits final action by the full legislature and the governor. "FY 10" refers to the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2009 and ends June 30, 2010. "FY 11" refers to the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2010 and ends June 30, 2011.

Early Childhood

Department of Social Services:

Child care services: TANF/CCDBG, \$103,872,455 in FY 10 and \$95,915,536 in FY 11.

School readiness quality: \$4.6 million in FY 10 and again in FY 11. (Connecticut is required to spend \$3.2 million on school readiness quality by the CCDBG grant. This is \$1.4 million above the governor's proposed spending.)

Child day-care centers: \$10,617,392 in FY 10 and again in FY11 (Same as 2008-09 budget.)

Child day care, local: \$5,263,706 in FY 10 and again in FY11 (Same as 2008-08 budget.)

Department of Education:

Early Childhood Education Cabinet: \$210,000 in FY 10 and 335,000 in FY 11, Funding of \$744,335 is eliminated from the Early Childhood Advisory Cabinet in FY 10 and funding of \$619,345 is eliminated in FY 11 along with two corresponding positions from the Early Childhood Cabinet. Additionally, funds of \$2.4 million are eliminated from the birth to nine systems development account which would have been used to support the research and activities of the Cabinet. (Same as governor's budget.)

New office of Birth-to-Three established: \$400,000 in each FY 10 and 11: The new office would assume some functions of the Early Childhood Cabinet, work with non-profits and third party providers to secure grant funding for the state, and compete for available dollars associated with the federal stimulus plan, and work with other agencies on issues related to birth to three. (SB 941 implements this provision and makes changes to the role and function of the existing

Cabinet and creates a new Early Learning Advisory Council.)

Community planning: \$450,00 each in FY10 and FY11 to continue the community partnership planning and implementation of the Cabinet. It is anticipated that the W.C. Graustein Memorial Fund will match those dollars.

Early literacy: \$150,000 in each FY 10 and 11- for early literacy. It is anticipated to get matching dollars from Annie E. Casey Foundation.

School readiness: funded at 2009 level , approximately \$86 million dollars.

Reach Out and Read: funding eliminated, same as governor \$ 150,000

Priority school grant: \$117,721,188 in each FY 10 and 11; decrease from 2008 \$127,061,405 and 2009 \$124,139,970.

Family resource centers: \$6,041,488 in each of FY 10 and 11- decrease of \$300,000 from 2008-09 budget.

After School

\$2,994,752 in each FY 10 and 11 for extended day in priority school districts; \$5 million each in FY 10 and 11 for After School Competitive Grant. Same as 2008-09 funding.

Health

The state HUSKY program serves approximately 330,000 children and parents. The Appropriations budget does not implement co-pays and restores self-declaration of income for verification purposes. It includes funding for outreach and the Children's Health Council -- function performed by CT Voices for Children for analysis and evaluation of HUSKY.

Department of Social Services:

- Children's Health Council- \$218,317 in each FY 10 and 11.
- HUSKY outreach- \$1,206,452 in each FY 10 and 11
- HUSKY Program- \$ 81.3 million in FY 10 and \$ 112.5 million in FY 11 (increase from 2009 to reflect increase in caseload)
- Healthy Start - \$105,935,000 in FY 10 and 11 (same as 2009)
- Services to children and pregnant women maintained- The recent reauthorization of the SCHIP program, HUSKY B, allows inclusion of these populations with a 65% reimbursement rate.
- Eliminates proposed co-pays
- Funds medical interpreters under Medicaid
- Implement the Family Planning Waiver- \$2 million in each FY 10 and 11 for expanded services under the 1115 B waiver, the state receives 90% reimbursement.

- Fund smoking cessation programs- \$1 million in each year for the Medicaid program- will address one of the major causes of low birth weight among low income women.
- Restores self declaration of income for reauthorization in Medicaid
- Maintains current premiums for HUSKY B- The program is divided into three income bands
1) 185% - 235% of FPL pays no premium; 2) 236%- 300% FPL has a monthly premium of \$30.00 for families with 1 child and \$50 for families with 2 or more children; 3) over 300% FPL pays full premium.

Department of Developmental Services:

Birth-to-Three Program: \$35,243,415 each in FYs 2010 and 2011 (an increase of \$6.2 million over the 2008-09 budget)