

Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida, Inc.

SCALED BACK BUDGETS MOVE FORWARD

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United Way of Florida
United Way of Florida, Inc.
307 E. Seventh Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32303
850/488-8287

This week, more than 1500 children, advocates, parents, and professionals met in Tallahassee for the 13th Annual Children's Week. While the Capitol was festooned with thousands of construction paper cutouts of children's hands and the excitement of the days reverberated throughout the Capitol, the normally festive mood of participants was significantly tempered by the fiscal catastrophe facing health and human service programs in both the House and Senate proposed budgets. As Department of Children and Families Secretary Bob Butterworth stated, the cuts are "unconscionable".

For the first time in Florida history, the state has less money to spend than it did the year before for two years running. Consequently, the \$61.5 billion budget proposed by the House is 9.6% lower than the 2007-2008 budget passed by the 2007 Legislature. The majority of human service programs, ranging from prenatal care (Healthy Start) to care for those in their final days of life (Hospice) are facing cuts, many of them significant.

The House and Senate appropriations committees (known as the Policy and Budget Council in the House and the Fiscal Policy and Calendar Committee in the Senate) voted out their budgets yesterday. Next stop for both budgets are the floors of their respective houses next week, where they are likely to change very little.

Advocates and many Democrats have clamored throughout the session for the Legislature to ameliorate the impact of the devastating cuts by eliminating some of the \$35 billion in sales tax exemptions that are on the books, raising other taxes, or using funds held in reserve. However, Republicans - and some Democrats - remain staunchly opposed to raising taxes when tax payers are struggling through the difficult economy and (more importantly?) in an election year.

In recognition of the draconian nature of the cuts, this week the House reversed itself on one of the philosophical underpinnings of its original budget.

Not only has the House agreed to sweep some trust fund moneys into general revenue - another position the House originally held - but this week House leaders stated their intention to give Governor Crist authority to tap into about \$1.7 billion in reserve funds if the budget crisis continues through the next fiscal year and additional cuts need to be made. They proposed that Governor Crist be authorized to use about \$700 million from the Budget Stabilization Fund, which currently contains about \$1.4 billion and was created by voters in 1992 to provide a financial cushion in the event of economic hardship. House leaders say those hard times are now. House leaders would also authorize Governor Crist to use about \$1 billion from the Lawton Chiles Endowment Fund, the \$2.4 billion account created after Governor Lawton Chiles successfully sued tobacco companies and won a \$13 billion settlement. If used, it would be the first time the principal of the Fund would be invaded.

If the economy continues to slump as expected, Governor Crist may indeed have to utilize this authority to offset potential deficits, which are prohibited by the Constitution. Any potential use of the budget stabilization or tobacco fund would have to be approved by the Legislative Budget Commission, comprised of legislators. Not only would this provide an opportunity to perhaps more quickly address potential fiscal issues, it would likely delay or eliminate the need for the Legislature to come back into special session to address deficits, something legislators would be loathe to do in an election year.

**SAMPLING OF CUTS IN PROPOSED HOUSE AND SENATE
2008-2009 STATE BUDGET**

DEPT.	PROGRAM	SENATE	HOUSE
AWI	School Readiness (subsidized child care)	-\$17 M	-\$12.4 M
DOH	Healthy Start	-\$3 M	-\$5 M
DOH	Children's Medical Services	-\$7.5 M	-\$13 M
DCF	Community Based Care	-\$25 M	-\$25 M
DCF	Healthy Families	-\$3.8 M	-\$3.8 M
DCF	Independent Living	--	-\$7 M
DOT	Transportation Disadvantaged Medicaid Non-Emergency Transportation Services	-\$2.9M	-\$2.9M
DOEA	Long-Term Care Ombudsman	-\$1.4M	--
DOEA	Home Care For The Elderly	-\$500,000	-\$1M
DOEA	Community Care For The Elderly	-\$1.5M	-\$3M
DOEA	Alzheimer's Disease Initiative	-\$600,000	-\$1.4M
DOEA	Contracted Services	--	-\$250,000
DOEA	Johnnie Byrd Alzheimer's Center	-8.5M	-\$9.8M
DOEA	Telehealth Support Project	-\$250,000	-\$250,000
DOEA	Sunshine For Seniors	-\$158,000	-\$158,000
DOEA	Senior Center Grant Award	-\$10 M	--
DCF	Foster Care	-\$25 M	-\$32 M
DJJ	Juvenile Assessment Centers	-\$3.7 M	-\$3.7M
APD	Group Homes for Developmentally Disabled	-\$43.5 M	-\$ 24 M

MEDICAID REFORM EXPANSION IN HOUSE BUDGET

The House implementing bill, which makes changes to the way programs will operate under the appropriations bill, originally expanded the Medicaid Reform Pilot Program to Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties in July 1, 2009 and then to Hillsborough, Pinellas, Polk, Pasco, Manatee, Highlands and Hardee Counties in July 1, 2010. Last night, the House Policy and Budget Council passed an amendment delaying the expansion in Miami-Dade and Monroe until 2010. The Senate, where President Ken Pruitt has voiced opposition to expansion, does not include expansion provisions.

As noted in past Legislative links, all of the preliminary studies of the Medicaid Reform Pilot Projects, including the one by researchers at the University of Florida commissioned by the Legislature, have been unified in their conclusions that significant problems exist in the pilot projects and that it is premature to expand reform efforts to new areas until additional data is available.

HUNGRY IN AMERICA

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP), 40% of homeless Americans went one or more days in the last 30 without anything to eat because they could not afford food (compared to 3% of poor Americans.) Twenty percent of America's homeless population eat one meal or less each day. For more statistics on homelessness and poverty in our country, visit [NLCHP](http://www.nlchp.org).

BILLS HEARD THIS WEEK

(Some information below is excerpted from legislative staff analysis)

HB 3 Children's Zones (Bendross-Mindingall and others)

Founded in 1970, Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. (HCZ) is an innovative, non-profit, community-based organization that works to enhance the quality of life for children and families in some of New York City's most desolate neighborhoods. HCZ's 15 centers serve more than 12,500 children and adults, including over 8,600 at-risk children.

An integrated network of services and support that provides family stability, opportunities for employment, adequate and affordable housing, a quality education, and youth development activities for adolescents has been developed. Of the ten programs that make up the HCZ Project, nine focus directly on the needs of children and one on the broader community.

HB 3 implements idea #69 from the book 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. It creates a statutory mechanism for communities to create "Children's Zones," using the Harlem Children's Zone as a model. Specifically, the bill:

- Provides a nominating process for areas within communities to be designated as children's zones;
- Provides for the creation of a planning team, a strategic community plan, and focus areas to be included in the plan;
- Provides for the creation of a not for profit corporation to implement and govern a designated children's zone; and
- Creates the Magic City Children's Zone pilot, specifies geographical boundaries of the zone, provides for a board of directors, specifies membership on the board, provides duties for the board, and provides for a report.

\$3.6 million in non-recurring General Revenue and \$28,362 in non-recurring tobacco settlement funds are appropriated in the bill to the Department of Children and Family Services, for the 2008-2009 fiscal year as a grant for a three-year period for the purposes of implementing the provisions of this act.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Healthcare Council; 17 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 111 Hurricane Preparedness (Nehr and others)

This bill provides that no sales tax will be collected on certain items from June 1, 2008 through June 12, 2008. This coincides with the first day of hurricane season (June 1).

The list of exempt items includes: (a) any portable self-powered light source selling for \$20 or less; (b) any portable self-powered radio, two-way radio, or weatherband radio selling for \$75 or less; (c) any tarpaulin or other flexible waterproof sheeting selling for \$50 or less; (d) any ground anchor system or tie-down kit selling for \$50 or less; (e) any gas or diesel fuel tank selling for \$25 or less; (f) any package of AAA-cell, AA-cell, C-cell, D-cell, 6-volt, or 9-volt batteries, excluding automobile and boat batteries, selling for \$30 or less; (g) any cell phone battery selling for \$60 or less and any cell phone charger selling for \$40 or less; (h) any nonelectric food storage cooler selling for \$30 or less; (i) any portable generator used to provide light or communications or preserve food in the event of a power outage selling for \$1,000 or less; (j) any storm shutter device selling for \$200 or less; (k) any carbon monoxide detector selling for \$75 or less; (l) any reusable ice selling for \$10 or less; and (m) any single product consisting of two or more of the items listed in (a)-(l) selling for \$75 or less; (n) any boat anchor selling for \$100 or less; any marine battery; or any fender, anchor chain, dock line, or similar device used to protect a boat tied up at a dock and selling for \$300 or less; or (o) any missile resistant, impact-rated single garage door selling for \$500 or less or double garage door selling for \$1,000 or less.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council; 13 Yeas, 0 Nays

Bills Heard This Week Continued

HB 241 Homelessness (Culp)

The bill implements idea #99 from the book 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. It establishes Housing First, which is an approach to homelessness that stresses the immediate return of individuals and families to independent living, as an alternative to the prevalent system of emergency shelter and transitional housing. The bill:

- Defines the phrase "children and youths who are experiencing homelessness" to mirror the federal McKinney-Vento definition.
- Amends the current definition of the term "homeless" to include changes in the proposed federal HEARTH Act.
- Encourages local coalitions for the homeless to adopt the Housing First approach to ending homelessness.
- Encourages the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF or department) and the community-based care lead agencies (CBCs) to develop and implement procedures to reduce the number of young adults who become homeless after leaving the child welfare system.
- Creates a 3-year Youth Housing Continuum Pilot Program in Hillsborough County to be administered by Connected by 25 (a program provider of youth services).
- Amends the school code definition of "homeless child".

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Healthcare Council; 18 Yeas, 0 Nays

CS/SB 276 Food Donation by Public Food Service Establishments (Judiciary Committee, Rich and others)

CS/SB 276 provides that this act may be cited as the "Jack Davis Florida Restaurant Lending a Helping Hand Act."

The bill amends s. 768.136, F.S., which limits liability for food donations to a nonprofit or charitable organization. The bill expands the definition of "perishable food" under the statute to include foods that have been prepared at a public food service establishment licensed under ch. 509, F.S. The food donation statute's current definition of "donor" could be read to include public food service establishments; however, the bill clearly provides that the term "perishable food" includes foods that have been prepared at a public food service establishment licensed under ch. 509, F.S.

It appears that, under the current law, perishable food donations that receive this immunity include those foods "that have been frozen or otherwise require refrigeration to remain nonperishable for a reasonable length of time." Currently, it is not clear whether non-refrigerated restaurant prepared foods would receive immunity. The bill clarifies this uncertainty by ensuring that the protection from criminal or civil liability extends to all foods that have been prepared at a public food service restaurant establishment licensed under ch. 509, F. S. The bill does not require that the public food service establishments refrigerate or freeze the prepared food in order to maintain the food nonperishable. However, any donor must comply with laws regulating health or sanitation under ch. 509, F. S., such as temperature, storage, or cleanliness.

Last Action: 04/02/08 HOUSE Substituted for HB 0099; Read Second Time; Read Third Time; Passed (Vote: 116 Yeas / 0 Nays)

SB 318 Exceptional Students with Disabilities/Cost (Constantine)

The bill specifies which school district is financially responsible for providing exceptional student education (ESE) services when a student receives the services in a district other than his or her assigned district. In these circumstances, the cost of providing ESE services would be paid by the school district where the student's parent resides. In the case of a student who no longer resides with the parent, the school district where the student last resided with the parent must pay for the ESE services.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Education Pre-K - 12; 6 Yeas, 0 Nays

SCR 362 Equal Rights for Men and Women (Margolis and others)

This senate concurrent resolution proposes state ratification of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution

In 1972, Congress passed the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the United States Constitution. The proposed ERA provides:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

A proposed constitutional amendment requires ratification by three-fourths of the states (i.e., 38 states).

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable by Judiciary; 8 Yeas, 3 Nays

HB 575 Contributions to Relieve Homelessness (Cusack)

This bill requires that application and renewal forms for motor vehicle registration and driver's license, renewal of driver's license or duplicate driver's license applications include an option to make a voluntary contribution of \$1 to aid the homeless.

Any contributions collected would be deposited into the Grants and Donations Trust Fund of the Department of Children and Family Services and used by the State Office of Homelessness. The State Office of Homelessness will use the donations to supplement grants, provide information to the public about homelessness in the state, and provide literature for homeless persons seeking assistance.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council; 13 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 625 Independent Living Transition Services (Glorioso)

The bill amends a provision related to independent living transition services to provide a reference to "family foster homes" and "residential child-caring agencies" regarding authority to approve participation in age-appropriate activities for children in out of home care. The bill also requires the Independent Living Services Advisory Council (council) to include in the report due to the Legislature on December 31, 2008, an analysis of the system of independent living transition services for young adults who attain 18 years of age while in foster care prior to completing high school or its equivalent and recommendations for action by either the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF or department) or the legislature. The council is also required to assess and report on the most effective method of providing assistance to these young adults to enable them to complete high school or its equivalent by examining the practices of other states.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Healthcare Council; 18 Yeas, 0 Nays

SB 668 Child-restraint Requirements (Senator Posey and others)

The bill revises child restraint requirements for children passengers in motor vehicles. Motor vehicle operators will be required to use child restraint devices for certain children through 7 years of age instead of the current 4 years of age. Under the bill's provisions, a safety belt alone is no longer sufficient protection for any child aged 4 through 7 years. In addition, the bill specifies certain child safety seats are appropriate restraint devices for children aged through 4 years, and certain child booster seats are appropriate restraint devices for children aged 4 through 7 years. The infraction is a moving violation punishable by a fine of \$60 plus court costs and add-ons, and by assessment of 3 points against the driver's license.

The bill provides exceptions to the child restraint law for persons who are:

- Visiting the state;
- Transporting the child gratuitously and in good faith in response to a declared emergency situation or an immediate emergency involving the child; or

Bills Heard This Week Continued

- Acting generally as a Good Samaritan.

The court must dismiss a first violation if the operator produces proof of purchase of a federally approved child restraint device.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with 1 Amendment by Transportation; 7 Yeas, 1 Nay

HB 739 Guardian Advocates for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (Ambler and others)

House bill 739 provides substantive changes to section 393.12 and 393.13, F.S., relating to the appointment of guardian advocates for persons with developmental disabilities. The bill provides that:

- The court must appoint a guardian advocate from a list of persons in preferential order giving first preference to health care surrogates.
- The name of the proposed individual to serve as guardian advocate is deleted from the required items in a petition for the appointment.
- Guardian advocates are not required to be represented by counsel unless required by the court.
- Court appointed attorneys for the person with a developmental disability are to come from the office of criminal conflict and civil regional counsel or private attorneys in accordance with s. 27.40, F.S.
- Court appointed attorneys must complete specified training unless waived by the court.
- Attorneys may not represent both the individual with a developmental disability and the guardian advocate.
- The right of an individual with a developmental disability to consent to or refuse treatment is subject to the powers given to the guardian advocate or guardian.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Healthcare Council; 18 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 769 Education for Children in Shelter Care or Foster Care (Kelly)

The bill provides authority for the court to appoint a surrogate parent for a child in proceedings under chapter 39, Florida Statutes, who has or is suspected to have a disability for the purpose of educational decision making under certain specified circumstances, specifies the individuals the court can and cannot appoint, and requires the court to defer to the district school board's appointment of a surrogate parent if such appointment is made prior to the court's appointment.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Healthcare Council; 17 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 839 Emergency Health Care Providers (Homan and others)

The term "sovereign immunity" originally referred to the English common law concept that the government may not be sued because "the King can do no wrong." Sovereign immunity bars lawsuits against the government or its political subdivisions for the torts of officers or agents of such governments unless such immunity is expressly waived.

This bill extends the concept of sovereign immunity to healthcare entities and healthcare workers providing emergency medical services. The effect of such extension is that tort liability of an emergency medical provider would be limited in each tort incident to \$100,000 per individual and \$200,000 overall. The medical provider that caused the tort would be required to reimburse the state for monies paid out and would be subject to professional discipline for failure to reimburse the state for the liability.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Temporarily postponed by Safety & Security Council

SB 846 Medicaid Provider Service Networks (Rich, Dean, and Dawson)

Senate Bill 846 provides authority for the Agency of Health Care Administration (AHCA or "the agency") to contract with specialty provider service networks (PSNs) that will provide a comprehensive system of care to Medicaid recipients with psychiatric disabilities.

Bills Heard This Week Continued

The bill requires AHCA to assign recipients, in areas where a specialty PSN is established, who meet the diagnostic criteria or who have been served by community mental health agencies, and who fail to make a choice, to this specialty PSN. It also allows Medicaid recipients who do not meet the diagnostic criteria or have not been served by community mental health agencies to voluntarily enroll in the specialty PSN. When more than one capitated managed care network provider is available for assignments, AHCA must assess a recipient's psychiatric disability and take the assessment into consideration before making a mandatory assignment.

The bill requires AHCA to conduct a special open enrollment for all individuals who meet certain diagnostic criteria once a specialty PSN becomes operational in a geographic area and requires AHCA to include an explanation of the choice of any specialty PSN or specialty managed care plan in all enrollment and choice counseling materials provided by AHCA.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; 8 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 879 Early Learning (Kelly)

HB 879 transfers the requirement to establish a statewide child care resource and referral network from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI). It transfers the duties of the Child Care Executive Partnership Program from DCF to AWI and early learning coalitions. It also permits early learning coalition boards to engage in board business by telecommunication methods.

With regard to the voluntary prekindergarten program, the bill provides that: (1) private prekindergarten instructors will no longer be subject to re-fingerprinting procedures when they are rescreened every 5 years so long as there has not been a break in employment for longer than 90 days; (2) substitute instructors will no longer be required to possess the same accreditation as normal instructors, so long as they are of good moral character and screened in accordance with level 2 background screenings; and

(3) accreditation standards will require written standards that meet or exceed the state's licensing standards and at least one site visit to the provider prior to accreditation.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable by Economic Expansion & Infrastructure Council; 13 Yeas, 0 Nays; 04/02/08 HOUSE Now in Policy & Budget Council

SB 988 Transitional Services for Young Adults with Disabilities (Wise)

CS/SB 988 creates a statewide Health Care Transition Services Task Force for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities. The Department of Health shall provide staff support to the task force.

The task force shall convene by August 31, 2008 and obtain input from key stakeholders, community stakeholders, public agencies, the medical practice community, and youth who have chronic special health care needs and disabilities and their families to assess the need for health care transition services and to identify barriers that impede access to comprehensive medical treatment and health care for youth and young adults who have chronic special health care needs and disabilities.

The task force is then required to:

- Develop a statewide plan to promote the development of health care transition services. The plan should put forth different models that accommodate the geographic and cultural diversity in the state and that are adapted to the local needs of communities and to local health services delivery systems. Furthermore, the plan should promote the integration of health care transition services with transition programs for education, vocation, and independent living.
- Identify common or comparable performance measures.
- Collect and disseminate information concerning best practices.
- Identify existing and potential funding sources.

Bills Heard This Week Continued

The task force shall present a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by January 1, 2009, and shall expire upon the submission of the report.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Health Policy; 5 Yeas, 0 Nays

HB 1029 Protection of Minors Online (Kravitz and others)

HB 1029 requires Internet access providers (defined by the bill as an entities that provide consumers with public access to the Internet) who know that a subscriber resides within this state, to make available to the subscriber a product or service that enables the subscriber to regulate a minor's use of the service to access the Internet. Requirements for such products and services are specified by the bill.

HB 1029 also requires interactive computer services to:

- Upon the request of any law enforcement agency investigating certain sex offenses involving minor children, take all necessary steps to preserve records and all other evidence in its possession pending issuance of a court order or other legal process;
- Make a report of such facts and circumstances to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The bill also states that no provider of an interactive computer services shall be held liable for taking certain actions or failing to take certain actions that affect a user based on a good faith belief that such user's electronic mail address, instant message name, or other similar Internet identifier appeared in the National Sex Offender Registry or any analogous state registry.

The bill also specifies that it is not a defense to certain lewd and lascivious exhibition offenses and certain child pornography offenses that the victim was actually a law enforcement officer posing as a minor.

This bill creates a condition of probation requiring that certain sex offenders be subject to lifetime supervision.

Such supervision involves monitoring of an offender's e-mail or other Internet-based communications and history of websites an offender has visited. Such supervision also involves periodic, unannounced inspections of an offender's computer.

Last Action: 04/01/08 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Safety & Security Council; 16 Yeas, 0 Nays

SB 1458 School Breakfast Programs (Wise)

The bill requires the expansion of school district breakfast programs to middle and high schools by the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year and requires schools, in which 80 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, to provide universal free school breakfasts.

Specifically, the bill requires that by the 2010-2011 school year:

- All schools must expand school breakfast programs to the middle and high schools.
- All school districts must provide universal free breakfast to all students attending a school in which 80 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- At those schools, at least 10 percent of the breakfast meals must be served at an alternative site location which may include "breakfast in the classroom," "Grab 'n' Go" breakfast, and "breakfast on the bus."
- School administration must allow students to access a breakfast point-of-sale and consume the breakfast in the classroom for a period of 15 minutes, if the school bus runs late.
- Annually, the district's school food service must provide public information regarding school breakfast program availability. The information must be communicated through school announcements and written notice sent to all parents.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Education Pre-K - 12; 7 Yeas, 0 Nays

SB 2626 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (Storms)

Senate Bill 2626 provides the Legislature's overall goal to ensure the effective coordination, integration, and management of publicly funded substance abuse and mental health services that are cost-effective, accessible, and consumer and family oriented, and that achieve the performance and outcome measures established by the Department of Children and Families.

The bill directs the department to establish geographic areas that are appropriate for the contracting of services through community-based provider networks and provides departmental discretion in establishing these geographic areas.

It provides that a substantial portion of funds currently allocated to the department's district and region operations for the management of contracted substance abuse or mental health services be allocated to the community-based network. Persons employed by the department to manage substance abuse and mental health services shall be given hiring preference by the network if he or she meets the qualifications.

The bill provides that the community-based networks selected by the department are recognized as independent vendors and may also contract with other organizations to manage plans and services to increase the network's cost-effectiveness.

The bill provides that DCF and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) shall execute managed care contracts with community-based networks and submit a plan to the Legislature by December 1, 2008 detailing their proposal to blend and integrate funding sources to better coordinate service delivery through a single entity in each area of the state.

The bill directs the department to adopt criteria and processes for qualifying community-based networks and specifies 20 different criteria to be met in order to be qualified as a community-based network.

The bill outlines 19 responsibilities for community-based networks. According to DCF, these responsibilities are appropriate for an entity assuming the role within a geographic region. Some of these responsibilities include:

- Reorganizing or developing services to meet priority unmet needs;
- Establishing an organized and unified system of care that is easier for consumers to access and navigate;
- Monitoring provider services to measure compliance with standards and contractual requirements; and
- Working with consumers, advocates, and referral agencies to identify community service needs.

The bill directs the department to coordinate the development and implementation of a statewide management information system.

The bill requires that the department initiate a process giving the community-based networks in districts 1, 4, 12, 11, and the Suncoast region the opportunity to contract with the department as a community-based network for their service area by March 2009. During FY 2009-200 10, any community-based network that has formed in another area of the state shall be given the opportunity to contract for that area.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; 7 Yeas, 0 Nays

CS/SB 2654 Autism Spectrum Disorder (Banking and Insurance Committee, Geller, and others)

Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 2654 requires large group health insurance plans to provide coverage for diagnostic screening, intervention and treatment of autism spectrum disorder in children. Health insurance plans cannot deny, refuse to issue or reissue coverage, terminate, or restrict coverage because the individual is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Bills Heard This Week Continued

To be eligible for benefits and coverage, an individual must be diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder at 8 years old or younger. Benefits and coverage must be provided to eligible persons that are under 18 years old or who are in high school. Coverage cannot be subject to dollar limits, deductibles, or coinsurance provisions that are less favorable than those applied to covered physical illnesses under the health plan. However, coverage for behavioral therapy is subject to a maximum benefit of \$36,000 per year. Beginning January 1, 2010, the \$36,000 maximum benefit is to be adjusted annually on that date to reflect annual changes in the medical inflation component of the Consumer Price Index.

The act is effective January 1, 2009 and applies to health insurance policies or plans issued, renewed, entered into, or delivered on or after that date.

Last Action: 04/01/08 SENATE Favorable with CS by Health Policy; 6 Yeas, 0 Nays



United Way of Florida

UNITED WAY OF FLORIDA, INC.

307 East Seventh Avenue

Tallahassee, FL 32303

Phone - (850) 488-8287

Fax - (850) 681-9137

Theodore G. Granger

President & Editor

Beth Meredith

Chief Operating Officer

Kay Racine

Office Manager

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