



Legislative Update

February 18 – February 22

The mood in Tallahassee during this week of Committee hearings continued to be one of high anxiety regarding the budget. Departments are cutting 4% from the current year's budget, affecting services immediately, and legislators are poised to whack another 3% from the overall state budget – equal roughly to \$2-billion – for the state fiscal year starting in July. Tensions mounted and resulted in testy exchanges among legislators and between legislators and executive branch representatives.

None were chillier than the reception received by Governor Crist's budget writers who appeared before the House Budget and Policy Council. Legislators there questioned whether the numbers being used were "real" especially since actual revenue collections were known to be \$200-million below the most recent projections

According to an article written by Steve Bousquet in the *St. Petersburg Times*, the state, over the past five years, significantly cut taxes while simultaneously spending money faster than collecting it. "Thanks to a housing boom and a federal economic stimulus package to combat a 2001 recession," Bousquet wrote, "general revenue spending over a five-year period rose 8.8 percent; meantime, tax collections rose by 6.6 percent."

No such federal relief appears to be coming this time especially as it relates to services to children and families. President Bush released the FY 2009 Federal Budget Proposal, the last of his administration. Although the budget proposal has a 5% increase in discretionary spending, most new dollars are earmarked for "security" programs. As in past budget proposals under his watch, children and families did not fare well.

The significance of the federal budget recommendations, of course, are that cuts to federal programs result in cuts to programs in Florida. "It's as if providers in Florida are looking down the double barrel of a revenue cutting shotgun," said Roy Miller, President of Children's Campaign, Inc.

State and federal updates are noted below. Please pay special attention to Promise 4 and the federal call to action to protect after-school initiatives.

Promise 1:

State Update:

Governor Crist released his 2008 legislative priorities this week. Included in these priorities was the elimination of an income cap to purchase KidCare coverage. By lifting the cap on full-pay enrollment, all children in Florida will become eligible to purchase health insurance through the KidCare program

Federal Update:

In order to maintain the current enrollment in the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP),

known in Florida as KidCare, it will cost \$21.5-billion over the course of five years according to the Center on Budget Policies and Priorities. The President's budget only calls for \$19.3-billion over the same time period. This would result in tens of thousands of children losing health insurance and leave no slots open for new children to enroll, a dangerous proposal in light of the current economy. While the President's proposal is an increase from the one he submitted last year, it will not allow states struggling to expand the program to cover their uninsured children.

The Center for Children and Families based at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute states in its analysis of the SCHIP budget, "If put into effect, the proposal would require more than half of the states in the country to scale back or refinance their SCHIP programs." This is in direct contrast to Governor Crist's current proposal, and would make the ability to expand Florida's KidCare program nearly impossible for the state.

President Bush's budget proposal also calls for flat funding for Healthy Start and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. These programs are designed to increase the quality of health care to mothers, infants and children as well as improve positive birth outcomes.

Promise 2:

State Update:

Governor Crist and Department of Children and Families Secretary Butterworth announced plans to ask the legislature for \$9.8-million in order to distribute hand-held devices to child protection workers. This device would improve the monitoring of children under care of the state, as well as cut down on paperwork for caseworkers.

"This tool will help our caseworkers focus on doing casework, instead of paperwork – and doing it in a family's living room, instead of behind a desk," stated Governor Crist in a press release on February 21, 2008.

Federal Update:

In President Bush's 2009 budget proposal the majority of child welfare services were flat funded, with decreases in Title IV-E Foster Care and the Social Services Block Grant.

The Social Services Block Grant, that provides states funding in a variety of child welfare programs including child abuse prevention, adoption services, foster care, child protection, independent living, etc, received yet another proposed \$500-million cut. In past years Congress has kept this vital funding stream from losing these much needed dollars.

The proposal provided a \$15-million increase for hard to place adoptions. The money would be awarded in a bonus to states that place children older than nine years of age.

Promise 3:

State Update:

Thanks to the passionate and visionary leadership of Senator Nan Rich (Broward County) and Representative Janet Long (Pinellas County), legislation has been filed to require a degreed teacher in every pre-k classroom by 2013.

The legislation, Senate Bill 702 and House Bill 741, recognizes the definite correlation between the education, knowledge and skills of a pre-k teacher in the classroom and the educational outcome for the children who participate. [View Senate Bill 702.](#)

When implemented five years from now, the change in statute would have a powerful impact on the quality of early education, bring about improvements in Florida's educational performance, pave the way for an increase in pre-k reimbursement rates, and provide advancement opportunities for all people who dedicate themselves to serving in child care settings in Florida.

Federal Update:

Flat funding was proposed for the Child Care Development Block Grant, the largest federal funding for child care for low income families. The lack of any new dollars will result in the loss of 200,000 child care slots, and will prevent the financing of new early learning initiatives.

The President proposed \$7-billion for Head Start. The proposed amount does not cover inflation costs nor does it provide enough for the changes required under the 2007 re-authorization.

The 2009 federal budget proposal does not include funding for a universal pre-kindergarten program for four-year-olds.

Promise 4:

Federal Update:

In a move strongly opposed by advocates, the President's 2009 Budget proposal calls for a 27% or \$300-million cut in 21 st Century Learning Centers Program, the funding stream for most after-school programs, and proposes converting the 21 st Century Learning Centers Program into a voucher program.

According to the Afterschool Alliance "A voucher program for after-school would undermine existing public, private and community partnerships that are working well, and destabilize after-school programs by making their funding even more precarious." Advocates stress that these changes to after-school funding would result in millions of children losing their after-school care. After-school programs have been shown to keep children safe, help working families by covering the hours between the end of school and work, and keep children from delinquency.

In order to urge Congress not to act on these proposed changes, the Afterschool Alliance is organizing a **National Call In Campaign to Support Afterschool** on February 25th and 26th. [View talking points for the call and find numbers for Florida congressional representatives.](#)

Promise 5:

State Update:

Former Representative Frank Peterman spent his first day as Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Justice this week. Top on his agenda is rebuilding his executive management team and announcements are expected this week. One of his first public appearances will take place this week at the Adolescent Treatment Conference sponsored by the Florida Juvenile Justice Association and the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association. Highlights of his remarks will be reported in our next edition of *Legislative Update*.

Federal Update:

In order to create a Child Safety and Juvenile Justice Block Grant, President Bush is proposing the elimination or consolidation of juvenile justice programs including Title II juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, juvenile justice monitoring, Title V delinquency prevention grants; victims of child abuse grants, and the juvenile accountability incentive block grants. According to the Administration the purpose of the block grant is to reduce incidents of child exploitation and abuse,

including those facilitated by the use of computers and the Internet, improve juvenile justice outcomes, and address school safety needs. This is the second year that the President has made this proposal. Congress is once again not expected to make the change to the juvenile justice funding stream.

To learn more about the FY 2009 Federal Budget Proposal visit the Voices for America's Children website and read their [FY 2009 Budget Analysis](#).

To read bills for each of the Promise areas simply click on the Promise of interest:

1. [Promise 1 - Pre-natal, Infant, and Child Health Care](#)
2. [Promise 2 - Safety, Permanence, and Services to Children in Out-of-Home Settings](#)
3. [Promise 3 - High Quality Pre-K, Child Care, and Early Learning Opportunities](#)
4. [Promise 4 - Safe and Enriching Before and After-School Experience](#)
5. [Promise 5 - Delinquency Prevention Programs and Services to Treat Children with Problem](#)

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We acknowledge the entire Legislative Team of Children's Campaign, Inc. who work tirelessly during legislative session on behalf of Florida's children.
