State Employees Health Insurance Changes Proposed

HB 5009 (Magar) revising provisions in the State Employees’ Group Insurance Program passed the House Appropriations Committee 22-2. The bill is part of the Appropriations Conforming bills and is designed to save the State an estimated $45.8 million.

Alzheimer’s Disease Legislation Passes Committee

Rep. Matt Willhite and Rep. Scott Plakon, who lost his dear wife to Alzheimer’s Disease last year, have shepherded changes to the Alzheimer’s Disease Advisory Program through Legislative Committees this week.

Vaccinations Immunization Registry Passes Committee

“The truth and facts for vaccines are overwhelming.”
~ Rep. Ralph Massullo
CS/HB 213 requires health practitioners to enter vaccinations into the immunization registry and affects all children and students.

House & Senate Appropriations Committees Pass Funding Bills

“No man’s life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session.” ~ Mark Twain

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees amended and passed appropriations bills this week. Although the bills are only about $400 million apart with large reserve fund amounts are established by both appropriations bills, the policy driving the budget allocations differ.

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Alzheimer’s Disease Legislation ~

The number of Floridians with Alzheimer’s Disease is estimated at 540,000. Several programs are funded by the legislature through the Alzheimer’s Disease Initiative, including memory disorder clinics, respite care, adult day care centers, and the Alzheimer’s Brain Bank. The Alzheimer’s Disease Advisory Committee was created in 1985, with 10 members appointed by the Governor.

CS/CS/HB 449 (Willhite, Plakon) relating to Alzheimer’s Disease passed the House 114 – 0. The bill expands the membership of the Alzheimer’s committee to 15 members, adding a first responder and designating appointees of the Senate President and House Speaker. The bill also requires the committee to submit an annual report by September 1 of each year. The Dept. of Elder Affairs must use the committee’s report to review the Alzheimer’s disease state plan and to submit an updated state plan to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives every three years, beginning November 1, 2020. A memory disorder clinic at Miami Jewish Health System in Miami-Dade County is established. The bill removes the requirement that memory disorder clinics be funded before June 30, 1995, to avoid decreased funding due to additions of memory disorder clinics. The Senate companion, CS/SB 860 (Stargel) is in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

(Appropriations Bills continued)

“In war, you can only be killed once, but in politics, many times.” ~ Winston Churchill

This week the House and Senate Appropriations Committees amended their proposed bills, which will be considered by the full chambers next week. The House Appropriations bill, HB 5001, is $89.902 billion, with $37,193.8 billion for Health & Human Services (HHS). The Senate Appropriations bill, SB 2500, is $90.325 billion, with $37,738.1 billion for HHS. The difference is only about $400 million. Nevertheless, differences in policy areas included a $100 million cut to universities by the House, a cut to Visit Florida and Enterprise Florida by the House, hospital cuts by the House, a cut of PECO projects by the House; however, the Senate Appropriations bill has a more negative impact on the safety-net hospitals than the House Appropriations bill.

The FSU College of Medicine is appropriated $605,115 in lottery funds in the House and Senate bills. In addition the Senate Appropriations bill in Specific Appropriation line item 152 allocates $ 35,153,776 in General Revenue and $13,019,086 in Trust Fund authority. The House Appropriations bill in Specific Appropriation line item 152 allocates $35,110,428 in General Revenue and $13,019,086 in Trust Fund authority to the FSU medical school. Also, noted is $1 million in the UWF base for the Physician Assistant Program in both bills.

Some highlights of the HHS Appropriations bill include the following:

**Senate HHS**
- Florida Medical Schools Quality Network -- $2 million
- Graduate Medical Education Program -- $8 million
- Opioid Response -- $49 Million
- Substance Abuse/Opioid Crisis -- $7.2 million
- Centerstone Psychiatric Residency -- $250,000
- UF Health Center for Psychiatry -- $100,000
- Aging Resource Centers -- $1 million
- Community Care for the Elderly -- $5 million
- FIU Neighborhood Help program (recurring base) -- $2.4 million
- UF College of Dentistry community clinics (recurring base) -- $714,519
- King Biomedical Research -- $10 million
- Bankhead Coley Cancer Research -- $10 million
- Alzheimer Research -- $5 million
- UM Miller School of Medicine Stroke Registry -- $200,000
- Nova Southeastern University -- Clinic-based Service Outreach $100,000
- FQHC Psychiatry Residency Slots -- $480,000
- UF Powell Center for Rare Disease Research -- $50,000
- FSU Panama City – Rural Mosquito Surveillance -- $50,000

**House HHS**
- Florida Medical Schools Quality Network -- $1 million
- Graduate Medical Education Program -- $4.9 million
- Hospital Medicaid reimbursement rates reduced 3% -- -$110 million
- Opioid Response -- $49 Million
- Centerstone Psychiatric Residency -- $200,000
- Aging Resource Centers -- $567,391
- Alzheimer’s Disease Initiative -- $1.7 million
- Community Care for the Elderly -- $2.1 million
- Home Care for the Elderly -- $600,000
- FIU Neighborhood Help program (recurring base) -- $2.4 million
- UF College of Dentistry community clinics (recurring base) -- $714,519
- King Biomedical Research -- $10 million
- Bankhead Coley Cancer Research -- $10 million
- Alzheimer Research -- $5 million
- UM Miller School of Medicine Stroke Registry -- $250,000
State Employees Health Insurance

State employee (including university employees) health insurance and benefits are provided by the Legislature through the annual Appropriations Act and the State Group Insurance Program (SGI Program), which is administered by the Division of State Group Insurance (DSGI) within the Department of Management Services (DMS). The SGI Program includes health, life, dental, vision, disability, and other supplemental insurance benefits. The plan year runs from January 1 through December 31. The DSGI also oversees the State Employees’ Prescription Drug Program (Prescription Drug Plan). DMS contracts with CVS/Caremark, a pharmacy benefits manager (PBM), to administer the state employee Prescription Drug Plan, which has an open formulary. The open formulary covers all federal legend drugs for covered medical conditions, and uses very limited utilization review for traditional or specialty prescription drugs.

In 2017, the legislature passed Ch. 17-88, Laws of Florida, which indicated that for the 2019 group insurance plan there would be four categories of plans available to state employees: Platinum plans with a 90% actuarial value; Gold plans with an 80% actuarial value; Silver plans with a 70% actuarial value; and Bronze plans, with an 60% actuarial value (high deductible). The bill called for a consultant to analyze the potential impact of changes in the bill; the analysis indicated that current state employee premiums might rise, while benefits may decrease. On Feb 20th this year, Gov. Ron DeSantis asked the Legislature to put the 2017 changes on hold for a year.

Chair Magar explained that HB 5009 directs DMS to take steps to modernize the State Group Employees Insurance Plan. There are four major components of this plan. (1) DMS is required to implement drug formulary management cost savings measures. This would save the State an estimated $45.8 million annually. (2) Beginning with plan year 2021, DMS is required to align procurement of health and pharmacy benefit contracts simultaneously so that the HMO, PPO, and pharmacy benefit plans begin and end on the same date. (3) The bill requires DMS to contract with HMOs on a regional or statewide basis, rather than on a county-by-county basis. (4) The bill permits DMS to allow international prescription services to state employees as a voluntary supplemental benefit. This would allow state employees to get prescription drugs directly from Canada as it is currently done in Pasco County, City of Sarasota, Flagler County, Indian River County, City of St. Cloud, Palm Beach County and Highlands County. Importation plans are also supported by Gov. DeSantis and included in CS/HB 19 and CS/SB 1528. For those bills, approval from the federal government is necessary before such programs can be implemented.

There was no public testimony on the bill and there is no Senate companion; however, the bill will be included as an Appropriations conforming bill in the Appropriations Conference Committee deliberations between the House and Senate.

Changing the Smoking Age?

SB 1618 (Simmons), the “Tobacco 21 Act,” raises the legal smoking age from 18 to 21. The bill includes electronic cigarettes. It is moving in both the House and the Senate.

Immunizations Registry Legislation Passes the House Health & Human Services Committee

“Ignorance and dogmatism has caused many of the evils that we see in our world today. We need to address that as a people; and as individuals in whatever we do.”
~ Rep. Ralph Massullo

CS/HB 213 (Massullo) relating to an Immunization Registry passed the House Health & Human Services by a vote of 16-0. The bill requires all medical personnel who administer vaccines to public and private K-12, college or university students’ immunization data and information into the existing and secure, HIPAA-compliant Department of Health (DOH) registry, currently called Florida SHOTS. It maintains existing ability for patients, guardians, and parents of minors to opt out of the registry. It gives access to the registry for designated school staff in order to verify compliance with Florida’s vaccination requirements in lieu of form 680 during school enrollment. It also does not change current law listing required vaccination schedules and requirements. If a student opts out for medical or religious reasons, a form must be filed with the school, college or university.

An amendment clarifying that any individual records or information will be totally removed from the registry by parent or guardian who decides to opt out. It also clarifies that the administering the parent or guardian must provide the opt-out form to the health care practitioner or entity upon administration of the vaccination, who will in turn submit the form to DOH or the parent or guardian may submit the opt-out form directly to the DOH.

Opposing the bill in public testimony was Mackenzie Fraser, from Health Freedom Florida. She said she represented more than 300 families in the Tallahassee Our Vaccine Choice group. Fraser said she is the co-founder of Health Freedom Florida, which represents over 6,000 families statewide. She said they oppose “current corrupt system” and the bill violates families’ right to privacy and it unlawfully expands DOH’s authority. Fraser indicated an opt-in program would be better.

Dr. Massullo said that immunizations are a sensitive issue. As a governing body we always have to balance what is right for our people in the state. Public health is a very important issue. Measles was declared eradicated in 2000. But the growing trend to delay and avoid vaccination has caused that situation to change. The WHO indicates that delaying and avoiding vaccination is one of the biggest risks to the world’s health. Just two days ago, Rockland County, New York, declared a state of emergency for 300,000 of its residents. Unvaccinated children are banned from any business, attending schools, places of worship or any public buildings and the parents face a misdemeanor charge. He indicated that it is irresponsible to not look at truth and facts when we approach any situation. And the truth and facts for vaccines is overwhelming, particularly because of the rise of what’s happened in recent years. Dr. Massullo said the studies show for certain that we can see from medical evidence that this does not cause any issues for children.

The Senate companion bill, CS/SB 354 is in its final committee of reference.
Florida Medical School Dean’s Day
This week the Council of Florida Medical School Deans came to Tallahassee for their annual legislative visits. Florida State University College of Medicine participants included: Dean John Fogarty, Dr. Kristin Price (PGY2 - IM Resident at TMH), Jared Barber (Year 4 medical student), Meghan Lewis (Year 4 medical student), & Dr. Alma Littles. Both Year 4 students matched in Family Medicine; Senator Gayle Harrell is in the photo on the left with the happy group.

Additional Resources:
Advocate for Florida State:
http://www.advocateforfloridastate.fsu.edu/site/PageServer?pagename=deploymenthome
FSU Governmental Relations:
http://govrel.fsu.edu/
The Florida Channel:
http://thefloridachannel.org/
Florida Senate: http://www.flsenate.gov/
Florida House of Representatives:
http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/
Florida Governor’s Office: http://www.flgov.com/

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