

Legislative Report #4, February 17, 2013

The General Assembly was in session Monday, February 11th – Thursday, February 14th. The House and Senate reconvene on Tuesday, February 19th for day 19.

Department of Community Health Budget - Department of Community Health Commissioner David Cook came before the House Appropriations Health Sub-Committee this week and outlined plans to cut the Medicaid reimbursement rate by 0.74 percent for health care providers, excluding hospitals, primary care, FQHC, RHC, and hospice providers. Access to care for Medicaid patients who require services such as dental care, oncology, gynecology, and obstetrics and other non-primary care services could be jeopardized under this spending plan. Commissioner Cook claimed in an Atlanta Journal Constitution article that the cuts were necessary because the department busted its budget last year by \$32 million and that the mistake won't be repeated. To read the article click [here](#).

Amended Budget – The Senate is expected to begin work this week on the state's FY 2013 Amended budget, which ends June 30th. State Senator Tim Golden. (R-Valdosta), Chair of the Senate Appropriation Department of Community Health Sub-Committee has said, "My top priority for the amended budget is to restore funds for the state's medical residency program, which would have a huge impact here in South Georgia. I will report further in future articles about state support for the South Georgia Medical Education and Research Consortium, whose goal is to have more than 100 medical students completing their residency program in South Georgia in just a few years." To Read HB 105, the Amended budget, click [here](#).

Mental Health Bill – SB 65, which passed 51 –2, allows licensed professional counselors to involuntarily commit to an institution for 72 hours patients who appear to be mentally ill and a danger. According to an AJC article, Sen. Renee Unterman, R-Buford, said Senate Bill 65 particularly lets rural communities help patients with mental health issues without delaying or hindering critical care. "In South Georgia, there are not enough professional and not enough community-based services," said Unterman, the bill's sponsor. "We have more people out there in need who are not getting services."

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Health Insurance Navigators – On Wednesday the House passed HB 198 by a vote of 154-16. The legislation requires health insurance navigators to be licensed in order to help uninsured Georgians and businesses use a federally backed online health insurance exchange. It establishes training and licensing procedures for the navigators, whose positions are required elements of the Affordable Care Act. The navigators cannot advise consumers to opt for specific plans, but they can help consumers learn about Medicaid eligibility, federal tax subsidies and health plan options. Navigators would have to undergo 35 hours of training to be licensed. Some navigators would be exempt from the training if they met certain requirements. Enrollment in the federally run health care exchange will begin this fall.

Governor Signs SB 24 into law - The legislation transfers decisions on the hospital provider fee from the Legislature to the Department of Community Health and allows them to fill a \$500 million shortfall in the state Medicaid program. This will protect hospitals from having to cut important services to Medicaid patients, and keep the doors open for many rural hospitals avoiding possible closure because they would have faced a 20 percent reimbursement cut or more. The current provider fee expires in June.

The DCH Board will still have to approve the assessment when they meet later this month.

To view the Governor's speech before signing SB 24 into law click [here](#).

To read AJC article click [here](#).

In the News.....

Study says Medicaid expansion would enrich state

By Andy Miller

The theme of the Affordable Care Act as a job creator in Georgia gained steam Wednesday after release of a report on the projected benefits of Medicaid expansion.

An estimated 70,000 new jobs would be gained if Gov. Nathan Deal approved expansion of the state's Medicaid program, according to the report, from Georgia State University's Bill Custer.

The study, commissioned and released by Healthcare Georgia Foundation, also said expansion would produce an economic impact statewide of \$8 billion annually.

Deal, though, has remained steadfast in his opposition to Medicaid expansion, citing an estimated \$4.5 billion cost to the state over 10 years.

The U.S. Supreme Court last year tossed out the provision of the ACA that would have penalized states for not expanding Medicaid. That made expansion optional, with individual states deciding whether the federal incentives offered are worth it.

In Georgia, more than 690,000 low-income people would be added to the Medicaid rolls under the ACA.

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Talks break down for mega contract for Medicaid

By Andy Miller

State officials have halted negotiations on a multimillion-dollar contract for a new electronic eligibility system for Medicaid and other health programs.

The state canceled its request for proposal (RFP) last week after months of negotiating with the highest-scored vendor, which industry officials identified as Deloitte.

Now seemingly back at Square One, the Department of Community Health says it will do much of the work to set up a new eligibility process on its own.

“As a result of the negotiation’s length, and with the additional clarity from the federal government, DCH has concluded that the department can accomplish a large portion of the work in-house, achieving compliance and saving the taxpayers’ money,” the agency said in a statement to Georgia Health News.

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