

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA
**LEGISLATIVE
DAILY BRIEF**



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MARCH 3, 2004

KIDCARE

Both KidCare bills (SB 2000 & HB 1073) saw heated debate today on the floor of both the Senate and House of Representatives. These bills are aimed at providing funding for the 100,000 children who are currently on the waiting list for this program.

After much discussion, both chambers amended their respective bills. Most of the debate on the amendments dealt with the enrollment period and removing children with access to employee-sponsored health benefits if the cost of participation was not greater than 5% of a family's income, rather than the 7.5% that was proposed. The change in percentage of family income would make more children eligible for the program.

The bills will be up for final debate and vote on Thursday, March 3. Despite some serious points of disagreement on the details of the bills, it is the goal of the leadership of both chambers to have a final bill to the Governor by the end of the week.

AIF supports expanding access to KidCare as long as safeguards are put in place to make sure that parents with health insurance are not dropping their coverage in order to receive subsidized care for their children.

BANKING AND INSURANCE

The Senate Banking and Insurance Committee met today and passed SB 1744 by Senator Durell Peaden (R-Crestview) which authorizes the statewide extension of the pilot program establishing Health Flex Plans by the Agency for Health Care Administration and the Office of Insurance Regulation. Health Flex plans permit health insurers, health maintenance organizations, local governments and other public or private community-based organizations to offer alternative health care coverage products to uninsured Floridians.

A strike everything amendment was adopted to clean up various provisions of the bill. Joy Ryan of HIAA said that some health plans are concerned that these flex programs should have a phased-in licensing requirement as the program grows. Senator Skip Campbell (D-Tamarac) agreed there should be some solvency protection involved. The bill will now head to the Senate Health, Aging & Long Term Care Committee.

AIF strongly supports the expansion of Health Flex Plans as a way to address the health care needs of Florida's working poor. This program provides a tailored approach to health care without the burdens of mandated benefits.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND VETERAN'S AFFAIRS

HB 533 relating to Community Development Districts (CDDs) by Representative Ken Littlefield (R-Zephyrhills) was passed unanimously by the House Local Government and Veteran's Affairs Committee. This legislation changes the elections timeframe for CDDs, however, it will not adversely affect the Developers seats on the CDD. Furthermore, amendments were adopted to permit CDDs to enforce deed restrictions within developments that do not have a mandatory homeowners association and to move the CDD election cycle to coincide with November elections.

OTHER BILLS OF INTEREST:

HJR 151

The House Judiciary Committee met this morning and without any debate, unanimously passed HJR 151 by Representative Chris Smith (D-Ft. Lauderdale). HJR 151 is a proposed constitutional amendment which would prohibit an increase in the assessed value of homestead property for senior citizens over the age of 65, and whose household income does not exceed \$20,000 annually.

Chairman Jeff Kottkamp (R-Cape Coral) mentioned that he was happy to see that the Democrats had embraced the idea of less taxation. After a round of laughter, the bill was passed. If this proposed amendment is ultimately passed by both chambers, it would be on the November 4, 2004 general election ballot. HJR 151 will now be heard in the House Finance & Tax Committee.

SB 1606

The Senate Banking and Insurance Committee also passed SB 1606 by Senator Mike Fasano (R-New Port Richey). This bill allows spouses of military personnel who are relocated due to station orders, unit deployment or active duty orders to collect unemployment benefits. Under current law these spouses of such military personnel are presumed to have voluntarily left their employment when relocating for purposes of this military service and are ineligible to receive benefits. Under this bill such resignation from employment will not constitute a voluntary separation from the employer.

There was no discussion or debate on the bill and it passed unanimously. Staff indicates that this provision will not fiscally impact individual employers, but the funds will come from the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund. However, the anticipated amount of these specific types of claims is estimated to have a minimal impact on that trust fund of around \$6.9 million out of the \$1.2 billion it pays annually. The bill's next stop will be the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development. The House Companion (HB1183) has not been referred to committees

PCB-HLG-01

A proposed committee bill relating to military installations was adopted by the House Local Government and Veteran's Affairs Committee. This legislation provides funds and economic incentives for Florida's military bases in hopes of preventing their closure during the federal government's base realignments. The military industry provides approximately \$44 Billion in economic stimulus to Florida's economy each year.

Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

- For more information on all of the important legislative information concerning the business community, go to our "members only" Florida Business Network web site at <http://fbnet.com>
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