

Texas Update – April 2009

In this issue:

1. HB 1876 Still Stuck in Calendars Committee – Please Keep Calling Your Reps!
2. FQHC Incubator Program Reauthorization Update
3. Twelve Month Eligibility for Medicaid/CHIP Expansion Update
4. House and Senate Budget Conferees Appointed
5. Commissioner Lakey Updates Health Committees on Swine Flu
6. Other Health Measures Being Considered in State Legislature
7. Federal Appropriations Update – Deadline for Bond Stabenow Letter Signatures Extended to May 1
8. [Registry Link](#) for New Advocates

Loan Repayment Bill – HB 1876 - Still Stuck in Calendars Committee, Keep those Calls Coming In!

Many thanks to all of you who have made calls to your state Representatives asking them to co-author HB 1876. As was reported in our Action Alert earlier this week, we suspect at least two House members on the Calendars committee are holding the bill back from a floor debate. We need as many co-authors on the bill to demonstrate widespread support and move it out of Calendars committee. Your calls are already generating new co-authors: [Check the list of bill authors here.](#) Moving HB 1876 will take a continued, concerted effort from the grassroots. If you haven't called your Representative yet, log in to the [Grassroots Action Network](#) to find phone numbers and talking points. We've received only four reports about calls through the network, but I KNOW more of you have called than that. If we haven't heard from you on what your representatives are saying, please call or [email a report](#) to us as soon as you can. Thanks for your participation!

FQHC Incubator Program Reauthorization Update – Set for House Floor Debate on Friday May 1

Despite some worry that the House bill to reauthorize the FQHC Incubator program was *also* stuck in Calendars committee, we are pleased to report that HB 1169 by Representative Martinez is set for a House floor debate Friday May 1. SB 526 by Senator Nelson has already passed the Senate and is awaiting a hearing in the House Committee on Public Health. The two bills are slightly different in the language that expands the program to allow for ongoing start up funds, although both versions give DSHS more flexibility in which projects to fund. The Senate version also includes "the Ogden amendment," a provision being attached to all bills that spend state funds. The amendment states the bill only takes effect if appropriations are made for that purpose in the state budget. Both House and Senate versions of the budget fully fund the FQHC Incubator program, so this amendment does not present a concern. Representative Martinez and Senator Nelson have committed to work together to ensure the bill passes.

Twelve Month Eligibility for Medicaid kids and CHIP Expansion – Some Key Coverage Measures Advancing in the Legislative Process

Several key bills relating to children's health coverage were passed out of committee this week.

HB 2962 by Representative Coleman and SB 841 by Senator Averitt both expand the CHIP program by creating a buy-in option for families between 200% and 300% FPL. Representative Coleman's bill also includes a full-cost buy in option for families between 301% and 400% FPL, excludes child support payments from income qualification, excludes assets in college savings plan from counting as income, directs the state to improve outreach efforts, AND (among other provisions) reiterates the federal law that FQHCs be reimbursed at their PPS rate in CHIP as they are in Medicaid.

HB 1541 by Representative Sylvester Turner authorizes the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to extend the coverage period for Medicaid children to twelve months if Texas unemployment rates increase more than is assumed in the Texas budget bill, which a wide range of experts expect WILL happen soon. Those higher unemployment rates, while bad news overall, will trigger HIGHER Federal Stimulus Medicaid match benefits for Texas, which can pay for this coverage. The bill leaves twelve month coverage in question after 2011, but is a step in the right direction and will give advocates time to prove the benefits of the extended coverage period for Medicaid kids.

GRASSROOTS NOTE: Twelve month Medicaid coverage would not be possible from this legislation alone – a key budget rider that was added as a floor amendment to the House budget allows for the funds necessary for twelve month Medicaid to be appropriated under the conditions noted in Rep Turner's bill. *This rider would not be in the budget right now were it not for advocates like you sending messages and making calls to your Representatives.* TACHC grassroots advocates sent in **more than 100 messages and calls** joining with more than 500 calls placed by other children's health advocate groups. Great work!!

House and Senate Conferees Appointed to Negotiate the State Budget

Over the coming weeks, House and Senate budget writers will come together to hammer out differences between the two chambers' appropriations bills. Senators Ogden, Shapiro, Williams, West, and Hinojosa will represent the Senate; Representatives Pitts, Raymond, Jones McClendon, Otto, and Zerwas will negotiate for the House. Conference deliberations began with a high level review of differences on April 29th. Detailed consideration will begin Monday May 4. In both versions of the budget, funding for the FQHC Incubator program and the Primary Health Care program are intact. The rider setting aside \$10 million in family planning funds has been stripped from the House but remains intact in the Senate version. The House includes provisions for twelve month Medicaid for kids while the Senate does not. These differences and many more indicate that much work lies ahead over the next several weeks before agreement on the final budget will be reached.

Commissioner Lakey Updates Senate Health and Human Services and House Public Health Committees on Swine Flu in Texas

Health committees in both the House and Senate heard from Department of State Health Services Commissioner Dr. David Lakey this week to update members on the swine flu outbreak in the state. He reported that the state was responding as swiftly and appropriately as possible to the situation. He referred members to the [DSHS website](#) for the latest information.

Other Health Measures Being Considered at the State Legislature

Enhancing health care quality along with an improved private health insurance system are hot reform topics at the state legislature. Senator Nelson is working on SB 7 to improve health care quality in the Medicaid and CHIP programs and lay the groundwork for a new health care reimbursement system that rewards providers for good health outcomes rather than the quantity of services. The bill includes, among other provisions pilot programs relating to obesity prevention, medical homes for Medicaid and CHIP recipients, and an electronic health information exchange program.

Private health insurance reforms are also underway this session. Senator Duncan is advancing SB 7, known as the Healthy Texas bill, which will offer Texas Department of Insurance-approved health coverage options for certain small businesses in combination with a state funded re-insurance plan that will keep costs affordable.

Both bills have passed the Senate and are making their way through the House. Keep an eye out for further updates on these reform efforts.

Federal Appropriations Update: [Deadline Extended to May 1 for Senators to Sign the Bond-Stabenow Letter](#)

If you haven't called now, there's still time left! The deadline for signatures on the Bond-Stabenow letter was extended to this Friday, May 1. Please contact Senators Cornyn and Hutchison today regarding their support for the \$412 million appropriations increase for the health center program by signing onto the Stabenow/Bond Dear Colleague Letter circulating around the US Senate. We need to get more Senators to support this appropriations increase if we are to be successful. You did a great job with our House members, now is the time to get our Senators from Texas.

Please call Andrew Blalock in Senator Cornyn's office at 202.224.2934 and Matthew Acock in Senator Hutchison's office at 202.224.5922. If Senator Hutchison's office says she won't sign the letter because she is on the Appropriations Committee, ask that community health centers be included in her personal wish list for priority projects to the Chairman. Thanks and let TACHC's Deputy Director, Jana Blasi (jblasi@tachc.org), know what they are saying.....

[Join the TACHC Grassroots Advocacy Network](#)