



Senate Select PPACA Committee Recommends Against Medicaid Expansion



This week, the Senate Select Committee on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act recommended against expanding eligibility for services under the current Medicaid State Plan or pending Medicaid reforms awaiting final approval from the federal government.

In a letter detailing their recommendation, a majority of the Select Committee expressed concern over adding an estimated one million new enrollees to the current Medicaid system. Members opposed to expansion cited the critical stage of implementation for the statewide Medicaid managed care reforms passed by the Legislature in 2011. In addition, a majority of the Members shared their frustration at the budgetary demands generated by the current Medicaid program and Florida's limited ability to enact meaningful reforms to this entitlement. The committee also proposed several options that utilize private insurance to provide quality coverage for more Floridians.

"I appreciate the Committee's thorough consideration of this important component of the federal law. I intend to accept the recommendation of Chair Negrón and the majority of the Select Committee," said Senate President Don Gaetz. "I understand that this decision is one of the most challenging and far reaching choices facing Florida as we begin to experience the many impacts associated with the federal government's implementation of PPACA. I was pleased to hear support on both sides of the expansion debate for the development of a Florida-based alternative. I appreciate the leadership of Chair Negrón and Chair Bean, who discussed various ideas with the Select Committee on Monday. Moving forward, any alternative plan will take the form of a proposed committee bill."

Additionally, on Monday, the Florida House Select Committee on PPACA recommended against expanding Medicaid or creating a state exchange.

The Senate Committee on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act began its comprehensive assessment of the impact of PPACA on Florida in December. As critical decisions continue to be made, our republican legislators encourage citizens to remain engaged in the process and visit the Senate's PPACA website at <http://www.flsenate.gov/topics/ppaca>.

Florida's Education Committee Votes to Strengthen Higher Education

Florida's college students may soon have more opportunities to earn a university degree. On Tuesday, the Education Committee passed Senator Bill Galvano's Bill 1720, which would strengthen higher education by broadening access to a college degree and improving the state's top tier university programs.



The bill allows the Florida College System to waive fees to achieve a \$10,000 bachelor's degree for Florida students, as well as encourages colleges to include industry certifications in degree programs and expedites funding for high-demand degrees. The bill links education to jobs and the economy by ensuring that students entering the Florida College System have the best quality developmental education resources to ensure they are prepared for the rigors postsecondary schooling. Additionally, the bill authorizes the Board of Governors to create an online arm of a preeminent research university that offers fully online undergraduate programs.

Family Medical Leave Bill Moves through Committee

Some local governments have begun the process of adopting sick-time measures that expand on federal Family Medical Leave requirements and are inconsistent with leave requirements in other counties. Currently, the state abides by the federal Family Medical Leave Act which provides for twelve weeks of unpaid medical leave each year where an employee is eligible for unpaid medical leave if they work for an employer who employs more than 50 people and they have worked at least 1,250 hours in that 12 month period.

SB726 by Senator David Simmons, which passed out of the Community Affairs Committee, preempts the regulation of family and medical leave benefits to the state and creates the Employer-Sponsored Benefits Study Task Force and will study family and medical leave benefits for employees in Florida and submit recommendations to the legislature. Following this thoughtful debate and analysis, a fair and uniform policy can be developed that will protect the rights of both employees and employers in this state.

Senate Education Committee Votes to Increase School Safety

The Education Committee met on Tuesday with a primary focus of addressing and improving school safety. Senator Negrón's Senate Bill 284, which aims at increasing emergency safety in Florida's schools, passed unanimously. Currently, each district school board is required to establish a clearly directed safety and security plan, this bill will allow private schools in that district to opt into the communication plan to ensure that in the event of an emergency they are given immediate notice.

In a bipartisan effort to address school safety, Chairman Legg, (R—Lutz), and Senator Dwight Bullard, (D—Miami), passed SB 626 which empowers K-12 school principals to take disciplinary action in the event of online (cyber) bullying and requires the Florida Department of Education to craft policies to prevent this epidemic. "The bill works on both the state and individual school level to give schools the ability to punish bullies, even if they are hiding behind a keyboard and a mouse," said Chairman John Legg.

The Florida Senate Takes on Cancer with Two Great Bills

Senate Bill 1660 sponsored by Senator Anitere Flores builds on the good work of the Bankhead-Coley Cancer Research Program which provides peer-reviewed grant awards by adding more accountability for institutions receiving state funding in order to improve their ability to attract additional federal funds. By increasing funding endowments for salaried research chairs, the state can provide more stability for promising researchers whose work has the capability to attract more national grants to Florida institutions.



Wednesday, Senate Bill 422 the Cancer Treatment Fairness Act, sponsored by Majority Leader Lizbeth Benacquisto, passed unanimously through the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee. Currently the law requires that health plans covering cancer treatments with intravenous (IV) medications are only responsible for the cost of an ordinary doctor's visit, while those receiving orally-administered cancer medications may face hundreds or thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses. In 2008, less than 10 percent of cancer medications existed in an oral form. In 2013, that number is expected to grow to 25 percent if not more, making orally-administered medications an increasingly important component of cancer treatment. This bill will correct this disparity by treating costs associated with orally administered cancer drugs the same as intravenous drugs.

"Our focus should be on the patient and ensuring that our laws keep pace with advancements in medicine in a way that makes sure to treat patients fairly," said Senator Benacquisto. "

Republicans Give: Sen. Wilton Simpson, Supporting Education in Pasco County



On Saturday, Senator Wilton Simpson and his wife Kathy, as well as Superintendent Kurt Browning and his wife Kathy, hosted the 8th Annual Cinderella Ball benefiting Pasco County Public Schools. The Pasco Education Foundation annually holds the event disburses more than \$700,000 each year in creative teaching grants, scholarships, awards, and computers to the students and staff of Pasco's public schools.

"I was honored to co-host this important benefit to raise funds for our students and teachers," said Senator Simpson, "The money raised this weekend will go toward a broad range of scholarships and grants that will allow teachers and students to succeed in the classroom."