



COMMITTEE WEEK UPDATE FOR THE UPCOMING 2012 SESSION
Friday, September 23, 2011
Conclusion of Committee Week 1

We have just concluded the first of the scheduled committee weeks before the January start of the 2012 Session. As always, we seemed to jump right in with both feet! Below is a brief review of this week's happenings.

On Monday:

Senator Gaetz of Crestview was confirmed as Senate President Designate. He will take the reins from President Haridopolos after this Session. It is no surprise as a fiscal conservative Republican, that he will focus on creating jobs, bringing down unemployment, strip regulations and reform education.

On Tuesday and Wednesday:

Justin Senior, Medicaid Director at AHCA, who has been on the job for less than a month, gave presentations to 3 House Health Care committees and to the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee on Medicaid Reform. It is apparent that the Feds will require a Medical Loss Ratio (MLR) of 85/15 in Florida's Medicaid Reform pilot project. Senate HHS Appropriations Chairman, Joe Negron said that terms mandated by the federal government are reasons why Florida should have the option of withdrawing from Medicaid. Negron floated a similar idea earlier this year but House Republicans refused to go along. Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich made sure to point out that many Democrats wanted a medical loss ratio from the beginning. She added that she did not share Negron's point of view that Florida should consider withdrawing from a program where more than half the funding comes from the federal government. "I would not want the federal government thinking everybody unanimously feels that it's a legitimate option for us to want to opt out," Rich said. Negotiations are ongoing with the Feds but Medicaid Director Justice Senior should have another, more clear, update from the Feds by October on other changes that are being requested by CMS.

In Senate HHS Appropriations, Chairman Negron started off the meeting with a "discussion" on ROI and soft services. Let's just say we yet again have a very uphill battle directly with him on getting any funding support out of the Senate. A couple of the quotes below sum it up.

News Services of Florida - *NEGRON TEES OFF ON 'SOFT' PROGRAMS*

In a monologue touching on issues ranging from drug prevention to Head Start, Sen. Joe Negron indicated Wednesday he wants to closely scrutinize spending on what he described as "soft social services." Negron, chairman of the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee, proposed funding cuts this spring for substance-abuse and mental-health treatment programs --- an idea that the House fought. But as he opened the first subcommittee meeting leading up to the 2012 session, Negron again questioned the results of such programs. To further illustrate his stance, he criticized the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program, which has been used since the 1980s to try to persuade school children not to use illegal drugs. He said his three children went through the program --- including doing the "chanting," as he described it --- but pointed to studies questioning its effectiveness.

"The problem with D.A.R.E. is that we now know conclusively that D.A.R.E. does not work, that it is a complete waste of money," Negron said. Similarly, he criticized the federal Head Start program, which was designed to help low-income children prepare to enter school. But Negron said a study showed the program did not make a difference. Negron, on the other hand, praised Florida's Healthy Start program, which provides prenatal care to at-risk women. He said that program has tangible benefits, such as helping women avoid having low-weight babies. "We shouldn't do things just because they feel good," said Negron, whose comments did not draw any immediate response from other subcommittee members.

Florida Independent- During a Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Appropriations meeting today, Negron, the chair of the committee, said that social services in the state are not "services," but are financial "investments." Negron, R-Palm City, said that programs such as Head Start, which he referred to as "soft social services," should be treated like investments. "They are like Goldman Sachs," he said. The idea that we can crowd people into a space and indoctrinate them with ideas, make it exciting, make it noisy, have shirts, have balloons and your child has been baptized and is now drug-free ... I wish it were true," he said. "I wish that was the way life worked, but it isn't the way life works." Public health spending saw big cuts this past year. In particular, [services for women and children](#) are suffering through a significant reduction in state funding. Negron said that in the months to come, the committee should make sound financial decisions about the state's social services.

Negron has instructed Amy Baker, Director of the Office of Economic and Demographic Research for the Legislature and OPPAGA to do a detailed report on ROI and soft services. Negron states "let's be honest and sober enough and admit if these services work or not". "What it really comes down to is parentage and upbringing. There is only so much the Legislature can do". No follow up comment was made by other committee members.

To listen to a podcast of the Senate HHS Appropriations and Committee and Senator Negron's remarks go to the Council web site at <http://www.fcmh.org/legislative/capitol.asp>.

In Senate Children and Families and in House Health and Human Services Quality Subcommittee, AHCA gave an update on the ALF workgroup (FCCMH President Bob Sharpe is a member of the workgroup). The workgroup has meet over the summer and will meet again (today in Tampa) and once again in South Florida. It is clear that there will be at least one Senate and one House bill that will come out of the final report. The Senate, with Senator Storms, Chair of Senate Children & Families Committee, on the ALF workgroup, it is clear their focus will be on changing ALF regulations. The House, with Rep. Hudson taking the lead, has more of an issue with AHCA and how AHCA inspects and when it inspects ALFs. Right now there are over 3000 ALFs in Florida and 274 inspectors that not only inspect ALF's but other residential facilities including nursing homes, CSUs, and RTFs.

Secretary Wilkins, DCF, presented to both Senate Children and Families and to the House Health and Human Services Access Services Subcommittee on the department's implementation of behavioral health managing entities. DCF will "aggressively" role out this plan. He stated that he believes managing entities can reduce DCF costs and can help track who gets what services and can provide better care. Wilkins said that DCF is on track to launch 4 by the 1st of the year with a year to transition.

Wilkins also made it clear he would like local communities to eventually become much more involved with mental health and substance abuse funding. He strongly believes in faith based services and will focus in on this in the next couple of years.

On Thursday:

Thursday was spent entirely on re-districting.

Next committee week is scheduled for the first week of October.

Articles of interest:

<http://www.gainesville.com/article/20110921/APN/1109210996?p=1&tc=pg>

<http://floridaindependent.com/48593/negron-social-services-investments>