



April 15, 2008

An Update on the Tax and Budget System

***Please note, we are sending this initial e-brief to several groups that have worked with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, including the Kids Count Network. If you would like to receive the Moving Families Forward e-brief in the future, please reply to csmith@aradvocates.org.*

Welcome to the first e-brief of Moving Families Forward! This e-brief will provide updates and alerts on state and federal tax and budget issues that impact low-income children and their families.

Our goal is to give you information you can use to educate policymakers about the importance of adequately funding programs that serve low-income children and their working families. By working together to make positive changes, we can build a system that supports working low-income families with necessary services such as quality healthcare and education so that we can move all families forward!

Medicaid Regulations Update

We have good news on the Medicaid front! The U.S. House of Representatives this week passed "Protecting the Medicaid Safety Net Act of 2008 (H.R. 5613)," which places a moratorium until March 2009 on seven Medicaid regulations issued by the Department of Health and Human Services. This bill overwhelmingly received bipartisan support and passed by a vote of 349-62, which is more than enough votes to overturn the Administration's threatened veto. We would like to thank Congressmen Berry, Boozman, Ross and Snyder for voting for this legislation, and we are particularly grateful for Congressmen Ross and Snyder and their staffs for their work as co-sponsors of the bill. This legislation will allow many of Arkansas' children and their families to continue to receive the same level of Medicaid assistance for school-based and rehabilitation services. For more information on the bill, please visit the House Committee on Energy and Commerce website at http://energycommerce.house.gov/MedicaidProtection_110/HR5613.BillSummary.pdf.

Our attention now turns to the Senate, where it will be important to secure as much bipartisan support for moratoria on the seven regulations as possible.

Farm Bill Update

Substantial progress in moving the 2007 Farm Bill towards final resolution has been made this week as Congress passed another one-week extension. The 2002 Farm Bill was set to expire on March 15, 2008. Since March, Congress has approved short-term extensions to give more time for the Joint Conference Committee members to negotiate a new five-year program. Senator Lincoln serves on this committee. Members of the committee disagree over funding for the bill and how to pay for that funding. News reports indicate that the proposed final compromise would increase nutrition spending by \$500 million to a total of \$10 billion over 5 years. It is still unclear how the \$10 billion would be allocated among food stamps and "The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)" versus other aspects of the title.

“The Farm, Nutrition, and Bioenergy Act of 2007 (S. 2903),” also called the 2007 Farm Bill, is comprehensive legislation that modifies the federal farm support, food assistance, agricultural trade, marketing, and rural development policies. The bill has ten titles. Our attention has focused on Title IV, Nutrition, which addresses domestic food and nutrition and commodity distribution programs, such as food stamps and supplemental food assistance for low-income families. For more information on the status of the bill, please visit the House Committee on Agriculture website at <http://agriculture.house.gov/index.shtml>.

Contact Us

If you would like more information on the topics discussed above, please contact Candice Smith, our federal tax and budget policy director, at csmith@aradvocates.org. If you would like information on a state tax and budget issue, please contact Pat Bodenhamer, our state tax and budget outreach director, at pbodenhamer@aradvocates.org.