What Policies Will Be Best for Tennessee Children?

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How Will Proposed Legislation Affect Children?

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth’s mandate includes reviewing and making recommendations on the state’s budget for programs and services for children, to making “recommendations concerning establishment of priorities and needed improvements with respect to programs and services for children and youth” and issuing impact statements on proposed legislation. Each year Commission staff researches bills filed in the General Assembly, and the Commission votes to make recommendations based on the impact of the proposed legislation. The Commission’s 2015 Impact Statement report considers legislation focused on:

- Implementing a TCCY Second Look Commission recommendation for a chief medical examiner and improved medical examinations of child fatalities;
- Deleting the “Intractable Pain Act” to limit access to and addiction to opioid medications;
- Consideration of bills related to juvenile justice, schools and transfer of youth to adult courts;
- Improved collection of demographic data by law enforcement;
- Regulating electronic cigarettes;
- Efforts to eliminate human trafficking.


TCCY Legislative Reporting

You can sign up to receive weekly reports and updates of the bills and the legislative process. TCCY will begin weekly updates on March 6.

In its role as an advocate for children, TCCY also monitors and reports on legislation as it moves through the legislative process.

- **TCCY Legislative Updates:** [http://www.tn.gov/tccy/legupdat.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/tccy/legupdat.pdf)


What Are the State’s Priorities?

Governor Bill Haslam released his budget for the upcoming year at the annual State of the State speech in early February. The Governor had asked departments and agencies to anticipate a 7 percent reduction when they submitted their 2015-16 budget requests, and his final budget calls for $200 million in cuts. The budget also adds money to the state’s reserve (or rainy day fund).

The proposed budget fully funds the state’s Basic Education Program (BEP) and the funding formula for higher education. Haslam proposed salary increases for K-12 teachers. The Governor also proposed programs to help bridge the gap between high school and college and a program to provide assistance to adults who failed to complete college.

Issues of interest to child advocates are:

- Reduction in the number of youth to be held at Woodland Hills Youth Development Center (with an associated reduction in staff) and additional funding for Wilder and Mountain View Youth Development Centers,
- Funding for Family Resource Centers has been moved to recurring funding;
- TennCare funding, with some concerns regarding mental health service reductions;
- $1.5 million for Healthy Start and Child Health and Development (CHAD) home visiting programs continued in non-recurring funding;
- Includes $250,000 for non-recurring funding for the Amachi Initiative, a mentoring program for the children of inmates.

More information about the Governor’s proposed budget is available:

- **State Budget Information:** [http://1.usa.gov/1A41OqQ](http://1.usa.gov/1A41OqQ)
- **PowerPoint Presentation on State Budget:** [http://1.usa.gov/1uA3Q1N](http://1.usa.gov/1uA3Q1N)
- **Legislative Budget Hearings:** [http://1.usa.gov/1Arye2u](http://1.usa.gov/1Arye2u)
Children’s Advocacy Days Coming Soon

Every day across the state, there are people working to improve the lives of children and youth. Some provide care and important services, some are volunteers helping a child in need and, some speak out on behalf of kids to improve their well-being. By their actions, they are all advocates. And, they are all everyday superheroes!

On March 10th and 11th, 2015, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth’s 27th annual Children’s Advocacy Days will celebrate these "Superheroes of Advocacy."

- Register for Children’s Advocacy Days: http://bit.ly/1yYlqKX

Continuing Efforts to Expand Health Care Coverage

Despite support from the business community, health care providers and citizens who traveled to the Capitol from across the state, the Governor’s program to provide health care access to the working poor, Insure Tennessee, failed in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee by a vote of 4 to 7. In his State of the State speech, the Governor joined advocates in expressing hope that expansion would be reconsidered and passed.

CHIP Reauthorization Still Needed

Funding for the Children’s Health Insurance (CHIP) will end on September 30, 2015, if action is not taken by Congress. The federal percentage of CHIP funds is higher than that for Medicaid (70 percent compared to 57 percent). The program is a block grant, and states set income eligibility standards and benefit levels within federal guidelines.

Tennessee’s CHIP program, CoverKids provides health care coverage for children and pregnant women with incomes up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level who do not have insurance and whose incomes exceed the limits for TennCare. Well-child visits and Immunizations are covered totally, but there are co-pays for other services. TCCY supports an administration bill filed in the Tennessee Legislature calling for continuation of CoverKids through 2020.

Support Home Visiting Programs

Home visiting programs, research shows, are among the most effective programs in preventing child abuse and getting at-risk families to a good start. The Governor’s budget includes continued non-recurring funding for two of the Department of Health’s home visiting programs. Child Health and Development (CHAD) serves children who are at risk of child abuse and neglect or developmental delays or those with developmental delays. Healthy Start is a voluntary program designed to reduce infant and child mortality, prevent child abuse and neglect and promote family health. The program enrolls at-risk families to prevent problems before they occur. Neither of these programs is available statewide.

According to the Department of Health, 3,700 families received home-visiting services during fiscal year 2013-14. Research from the program models shows they improved immunization status, decreased child abuse and neglect, increased breastfeeding initiation, decreased smoking by mothers, increased child development screening and delayed subsequent pregnancies by mothers receiving services.

The federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program is set to expire March 31,
2015. National organizations are calling for action to extend the program and assure programs can continue to enroll at-risk families.


**KIDS COUNT Data Snapshot: Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States**

A new KIDS COUNT® Data Snapshot, Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States, looks at improvements in the assessment of one of the central measures of child well-being: the percent of children who suffer from the stress and hardship of poverty. Poverty is linked to a range of other health, educational and opportunity outcomes that make a difference in how well children are doing.

The KIDS COUNT® report first asks the question, “What if?” What if there were no programs to help families care for their children, to make sure they have adequate food, housing, help if children or parents are disabled and to provide other services? The answer is that one in every three children in the United States and in Tennessee would be poor.

The report then looks at the effect of public policies to help children. Nearly a quarter of a million Tennessee children and 11 million U.S. children are raised from poverty when the effect of federal programs is considered. They reduce the percentage of Tennessee children in poverty from one in three (33%) to less than one in five (17%).


**Updates: TCCY Says Good-bye to Administrative Services Assistant Diane Baham**

Diane Baham (at right) retired from TCCY after almost 31 years with the state. Eight years after beginning work with the state at age 19, she moved to TCCY’s predecessor, the Children’s Services Commission, to work for eight years. She moved to work with the Legislature’s Select Committee on Children and Youth and then left state service to finish a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education. After working for 10 years in the private sector, including teaching at Vanderbilt’s Susan Gray School, she returned to work at TCCY. The Commission honored Diane at its meeting Friday, followed by a celebratory lunch with staff. Please join TCCY in wishing Diane a great future.

**Mark Your Calendar**

- March 4, **Coffee County Anti-Drug Coalition and Children’s Advocacy Center co-host 2015 UNITE: Building Strong Families Conference,** Tullahoma National Guard Readiness Center, 1402 E. Carroll St., Tullahoma.
- March 10-11, **Children’s Advocacy Days,** War Memorial Auditorium, Nashville. Register at [https://cad2015.eventbrite.com](https://cad2015.eventbrite.com).

March 12, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Council on Children Mental Health Meeting (postponed from Feb. 19), Location TBA. Contact Melissa McGee at Melissa.McGee@tn.gov.

March 12, 6 p.m.-8 p.m., Urban Child Institute and UT Health Science Center present “Brain Awareness Night,” Urban Child Institute, 600 Jefferson Ave., Memphis. Free, with limited space. Register at http://bit.ly/1A4TS1A.

March 12-14, Health Disparities Conference, Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities Research and Education (CMHDRE), Sheraton New Orleans Hotel. To register/learn more: http://bit.ly/tcyey83, or contact event organizers: (404) 559-6191.

March 13-14, 2015 Caregivers Conference to connect and educate foster and adoptive parents, Long Hollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville. Registration $70 per couple; $55 per individual. Information at http://www.jonahsjourney.org/conference.

March 17, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., 26th Annual Brain Injury Association of Tennessee Conference, co-sponsored by the Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury Program. Lipscomb University, Nashville. CEUs available; fee. Online registration: http://bit.ly/tcyey84; For more info, contact Jean Doster: (615) 741-1230 or jean.doster@tn.gov.

March 18, Behavioral Health Day on the Hill, War Memorial Auditorium. Sponsored by Tennessee Coalition for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. Contact tstarling@mhamt.org.


March 30-April 1, 102 Annual Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare, Franklin Marriott Cool Springs. Contact tlawson@tcsw.org for more information.

In the News


Research Information


Tennessee KIDS COUNT Facts


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