

# Capitol Update



June 2, 2015 Volume 15, Issue 11(SS)

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### Special Session 2015A Update

Special Session 2015A has started and legislators are in Tallahassee to complete the budget process that stalled during regular session because of disagreements between the House and Senate leaders over Medicaid expansion and hospital Low Income Pool (LIP) funding. These bodies are still negotiating over these issues but with a firm commitment to complete the budget in time for the Governor to look it over before the July 1<sup>st</sup> deadline.

While the House and Senate work on their budget allotments for their respective budgets, advocates are poised to remind legislators and advocates of budget issues that are important to their constituencies during the budget conference period that should start as early as Thursday evening.

**During the last month all the Councils budget priorities and requests have remained the same (please see next section of this Update) except for our Early Steps/funding request. The Council was requesting \$5 million dollars for the program to be divided between children's services and case coordination, but now all \$5 million dollars needs to go to children's services due to a proposed state funding reduction of \$1.6 million dollars that will reduce the amount of services available for each child.**

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### Early Steps/Part C-\$5 million dollars needed

Please click [here](#) to see the flier from the Florida Consortium of Advocates for Infants and Toddlers

Early Steps is administered by Children's Medical Services (CMS) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C. The Early Steps Program provides Florida's infants and toddlers, from birth to 36 months, who have a developmental delay, or a condition that places them at risk for developmental delay, with early intervention services and supports that improve a child's chances to develop to their full potential by achieving their developmental milestones. Research shows that

achieving these milestones is essential to developing a child's ability to learn, speak, and move at optimal levels later in life

**This year the Council and other advocates are asking the legislature for an increase of \$5 million dollars for the program. This increase in funding will be used to ensure continuity of care for the Early Steps program services.**

The program needs at least \$5 million dollars to support the increase in children enrolled in Early Steps, the projected increase in referrals, and the projected decrease in the state contribution for local providers.

**In summary, the program needs more funding due to the following factors;**

- **Increased enrollment:** Florida's enrollment for 2013-2014 increased 5% causing a significant reduction in the service dollars available to spend per child.
- **Increased referrals:** Increased referrals and the skyrocketing number of children with complex needs, including those with autism, have strained the program's operating capacity. Some providers are already having over a 5% increase in referrals this year.
- **Reduced program funding from the state:** a proposed state funding reduction of \$1.6 million dollars mean a reduction in per child funding that is available for early intervention services.

Our staff and Council members hear from families whose children have participated in the Early Steps Program and are now young adults who are participating in post-secondary activities and programs. These families attribute their children's success in large part to the important early intervention services that their children received when they were infants and toddlers.

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## **Other important Council Special Session Budget requests**

### **Increased Funding for the iBudget Waiver: Increasing Provider Compensation and Providing Funding for individuals on the iBudget Waitlist**

In the last few weeks, the Braddock report, **The State of the States in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities-Tenth Edition 2015** has Florida ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in the funding spent in total for individuals with developmental disabilities! With this statistic in mind, two of the Councils legislative budget priorities for the iBudget waiver are extremely relevant and important;

#### **1) An Across the Board 7 % Provider Rate Reinstatement is Required this Year to Begin the Process of Stabilizing the iBudget Service System:**

Retaining a qualified workforce is reaching crisis proportion with very large turnover rates. Florida needs to offer providers a rate that will maintain and improve the availability of a

qualified workforce that can adequately address the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.

**2) Funding to Continue Moving 2,039 Individuals with Developmental Disabilities from the Waitlist to iBudget HCBS Services:**

The funding allocated in FY 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 was a significant step in the right direction, moving 2,313 off the Waitlist, thus far. However, more than 20,000 individuals with developmental disabilities are still waiting for basic services. Many have been waiting for more than 5 years. Being without services puts major financial, physical and emotional strain on caregivers with social and economic consequences for our state.

We need to continue to move individuals off of the waitlist and on to the iBudget HCBS waiver. This year, we are asking the Legislature for \$12.3 million in General Revenue (this includes the 7% provider rate increase previously mentioned for the 2039 individuals coming off the waitlist), supplemented by \$18.1 million in federal matching funds. This funding would not only move individuals who have come onto the waiver since July 1st with intensive needs (Category 3) or who are living with a caregiver over the age of 70 (Category 4), but would also at least enable the individuals with developmental disabilities who are transitioning from school to adulthood (Category 5) to be served by the iBudget HCBS waiver. The transition years are a critical stage in life for individuals with developmental disabilities, as they are separating from the services provided through the school system. Without the waiver funding, these individuals will remain at home with no job, few meaningful activities, and limited social connections, losing the skills learned in high school.

If you want to share your opinion on these issues, contact your [legislators](#) and let them know how you feel about increased funding for Early Steps, the iBudget Waiver services and providers.

The Legislators in leadership are particularly important to contact in this process; [Senate President Andy Gardiner](#), [House Speaker Steve Crisafulli](#), [Senate Appropriations Chair Tom Lee](#), and [House Appropriations Chair Richard Corcoran](#).

**Two committees of importance are the [Health care Appropriations Committee in the House](#) and [the Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee in the Senate](#).**

**If you want to share your opinion about this program, you can contact members of these appropriations committees as well.**

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