

# Public Policy Update

March 8, 2010

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From Steve Larson, Public Policy Director



## ➤ *General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC)*

An agreement on GAMC solution was reached on Friday March 5<sup>th</sup> by the Governor and legislative leaders. They announced the agreement in a joint news conference late that afternoon. Their proposal would preserve the GAMC program as it current exists until May, when a scaled-back program will begin. Those eligible for GAMC will still be served, but health care providers will receive dramatically less money. For more info: [www.startribune.com/politics/state/86655412.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQUoEYqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc: Yyc:aUUzZ](http://www.startribune.com/politics/state/86655412.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQUoEYqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc: Yyc:aUUzZ)

The new proposal will go through the legislative process for approval, including possible committee meetings and then passage in the Senate and House. Finally settling this contentious issue will benefit thousands of low-income adults with disabilities and allow us to focus on our major budget issues.

## ➤ *Supplemental Budgets*

With GAMC settled and work on the bonding bills hopefully moving towards agreement, the Legislature can now turn towards the overwhelming task of agreeing on a supplemental budget. Let's take a moment before tackling the budget, however, to reflect on a statement by state economist Dr. Tom Stinson during the last week's budget forecast news conference:

“There's a mathematical relationship called a balance budget multiplier in macroeconomics that says cutting government spending is more detrimental to the economy than raising taxes...[W]hen you cut government spending, you lose that first round of spending, whereas if you raise taxes, some of the economic activity that was going on before comes out of savings.”

Dr. Stinson's remarks, while a bit technical, suggest that increased revenues should play a role in balancing our state budget. Consistent with this theme, The Arc of Minnesota is an active member of the Invest in Minnesota coalition as we continue to promote a balanced approach to our state's budget crisis. Unfortunately, as hard as we wish, a balanced approach will not happen this year. So back to the task at hand.

The next step in the budget process will be to slightly modify the Governor's supplemental budget proposal to partially restore the state's cash flow account. We believe that the slightly improved budget outlook should instead mean fewer cuts to disability services. The Senate and House will share their supplemental budget proposals shortly; we'll closely examine their impact on services for persons with disabilities.

## ➤ *Race to the Top (Bottom)*

On Thursday, March 4th, the United States Department of Education announced that Minnesota was not selected in the first round of funding for \$330 million from the Obama Administration's Race to Top initiative for improving student performance. On Friday all parties involved in Minnesota's application process spent time criticizing each other for Minnesota's failure to be selected. Gail Hoffmann, The Arc of Minnesota's Education and Children's Public Policy Advocate, identified early in the application process that improving the

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education for students with disabilities did not seem to be included in this process or in Minnesota's application. If there is a second round in this application process, we will advocate strongly to remedy this situation. Go to: [www.twincities.com/ci\\_14516093?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com&nclick\\_check=1](http://www.twincities.com/ci_14516093?IADID=Search-www.twincities.com-www.twincities.com&nclick_check=1) for more on this story.

### ➤ *This Week's Message to Legislators*

With the state budget deficit lower than projected, our message to legislators this week is "A lower deficit should mean fewer cuts to supports for people with disabilities." We also ask you to communicate the following messages throughout this session:

- Maintain independence of persons with disabilities.
- Cuts to human services are a form of taxation that targets our most vulnerable citizens.
- Cuts to human services create more job losses.
- Innovations in disability services will provide sustainable solutions (e.g., CDCS).

When you communicate with legislators by phone or e-mail, make sure you identify yourself as a constituent. When sending an e-mail, identify yourself as a constituent in the subject line of your message (e.g., "CDCS Works: A Message From A Constituent"). Legislators and their staff will more likely give your message a higher priority if they know you live in their legislative district.

### ➤ *Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) Hearing:*

On Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, Senator Linda Berglin's Health and Human Services Budget committee hosted an hour-long hearing on Consumer Directed Community Supports. The Arc of Minnesota had asked for the hearing to highlight the successes of CDCS and to identify the barriers preventing its further expansion. Matt Bogenschutz, from University of Minnesota's Institute for Community Integration, began by providing an overview of CDCS, emphasizing the Institute's findings on the benefits of CDCS and some of the challenges. Jean Bender, Past President of The Arc of Minnesota, and her son David then testified on how their family has benefited from CDCS by developing an individualized, community-based plan for David which builds on his strengths and interests and costs less than more formal services.

Steve Piekarski, PICS/Lutheran Social Services, shared with the committee the high levels of accountability that are built into the program when individuals and families work with their fiscal support entity. I then shared a strong statement written by Dakota County staffer Karen Conrath about the major benefits of paying parents of minors and spouses to provide care to their loved ones. I also made these recommendations in my testimony:

- Find a way to make the CDCS budget methodology work so individuals transitioning from children's to adult services can continue to stay on CDCS. Currently 60% drop off CDCS when transitioning to adult services.
- When implementing the new COMPASS assessment tool in 2011, we must ensure the development of an individualized budgeting process as soon as possible so more individuals can access CDCS.
- Develop a new model for promoting and administering CDCS statewide by contracting with private non-profit organizations to carry out these responsibilities.

### ➤ *Tuesdays at the Capitol:*

The Arc of Minnesota, working with the MN Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities, is hosting Tuesdays at the Capitol. This is a variation of the vigil we conducted for the last month of the 2009 Legislative Session, when individuals with disabilities and their allies lobbied outside the Senate and House chambers and met with their legislators. This year, different disability organizations will sponsor each Tuesday. For more on sponsoring a Tuesday at the Capitol, contact Anni Simons at 651-523-0823, ext. 112 or [asimons@arcmn.org](mailto:asimons@arcmn.org)