

Public Policy Update

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From Steve Larson, Public Policy Director



➤ *House Health and Human Services Omnibus Bill to Be Unveiled April 26th*

After weeks of waiting, Rep. Tom Huntley will release his House Health and Human Services (HHS) Omnibus bill on Monday, April 26th at Noon. On Tuesday April 27th, the House Health and Human Services Finance Division, which Rep. Huntley chairs, will take public testimony on the bill, and immediately after that, it will make amendments to the bill and get it ready for a committee vote. The Senate has not indicated when it will release its HHS Omnibus bill.

➤ *Hearing on Critical Access Dental and State Operated Services Dental Clinics*

On Wednesday, April 21st, Senator Berglin's Health and Human Services Finance Division held a hearing on her Critical Access Dental and State Operated Services Dental amendment. Last week Senator Berglin held a news conference announcing she was not going to allow the Department of Human Services (DHS) proposal to close six State-Operated Services (SOS) dental clinics to go forward. In an unusual maneuver, she proposed an amendment to the upcoming HHS Omnibus Bill, which would restore the unallotment of critical access dental services and would prevent the closure of SOS dental services. Because Senator Berglin's amendment is for a bill yet to be determined, it is not available online for your review. The committee seemed to be in unanimous agreement about the necessity of Sen. Berglin's amendment. The amendment was laid over for possible inclusion in the Senate's HHS Omnibus bill.

➤ *Race to the Top*

Minnesota was not successful its first application to access additional federal funding for education, formally called "Race to the Top" money. All parties (Governor Pawlenty, state legislators, the Minnesota Dept. of Education, and the Minnesota teacher's union) have expressed dissatisfaction with the failure of the initial application. This week they began to work together on a second application in a more collaborative manner. Gail Hoffmann, our Education and Children's Advocate, is monitoring the development of the second application, due in June, for any opportunities to improve the education of students with disabilities.

➤ *Disability Policy Seminar Means Full Days of Workshops, Hill Visits*

Members of The Arc of Minnesota staff and board - Pat Mellenthin, Tim Nelson, Larry Kugler, and Cindy Johnson - attended the Disability Policy Seminar in Washington, D.C. on April 12-14. They were joined by four staff and volunteers from Arc Greater Twin Cities - Kim Keprios, Meredith Salmi, Roberta Blomster, and Erin Zolotukhin-Ridgeway - and two staff from the Institute on Community Integration - Beth Fondell and David Johnson. Attendees received a full day's update on the recently approved federal health care reform law, including a presentation from Connie Garner (right), the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee's Director on Disability and Special Populations. The second



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day of the seminar was devoted to other federal disability policy issues, and on the third day, attendees visited all 10 members of Minnesota's Congressional delegation. Attendees were able to meet face-to-face with three members of Congress - Sen. Franken, Rep. Paulsen, and Rep. Walz - and met with staff at the other offices. The informative power point presentations and policy papers from the seminar are available on The Arc of the United States web site at <http://www.thearc.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=2173>

➤ *PCA Alternatives Hearing Held*

The state Senate Health and Human Services Finance Division held a hearing on April 20th on the development of alternative services for people who will lose eligibility for Personal Care Assistant (PCA) services as a result of the 2009 budget cuts. Anne Henry of the Minnesota Disability Law Center (right) testified and expressed concern that changes to the PCA program may result in some adolescents going into out-of-home placements and other individuals using more expensive services such as Home Health Aides. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) provided their testimony on the need to identify and evaluate a range of options that will enable people to continue to live independently after they lose eligibility. DHS believes the new comprehensive assessment tool COMPASS will improve the identification of needs and provide more targeted services to individuals; however, specific services for those losing eligibility haven't been identified yet. Federal health care reform may provide some individuals increased access to home- and community-based services. There will be continuing attention to the development of alternative services after the conclusion of the 2010 Legislative Session. (Provided by Arc Greater Twin Cities' *Policy Preview*, April 21, 2010)



➤ *More Chapters of The Arc Host News Conferences*

Our series of news conferences highlighting proposed cuts to services and supports to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities concluded with events in Duluth on April 14th and Waite Park on April 21st. At each news conference, several members of The Arc shared their stories about the impact of past and proposed cuts to themselves or their families. Both news conferences were well covered by the media. Links to the coverage generated by these news conferences are on our website (www.TheArcOfMinnesota.org). Click on the Media link, then click on the link at the bottom of the page that says, "Arc Chapter News Coverage."

➤ *Our Messages to Legislators Are Getting Through*

Our message to protect disability supports is having an impact on legislative leaders' thinking. In a recent interview for the Minnesota Legislature's publication *Session Daily*, Speaker of the House Margaret Anderson Kelliher talked how a series of proposed tax cuts to investors would be paid for. She said she would like to see them paid for by improve tax compliance and that she didn't support efforts to cut local government aid or services for people with disabilities. Let's keep sharing our messages, and let's keep making inroads!

➤ *Using Our News Coverage To Send Messages to Your Legislators*

One way of letting your state legislators know about the impact of past and potential budget cuts is to forward them news articles from recent press conferences hosted by The Arc of Minnesota and local chapters (see "More Chapters of The Arc Hold News Conferences" above). Through those articles, legislators can hear and read personal testimony and personal stories about the impact that state budget decisions are having on our citizens. As mentioned above, there are links to those news articles on our website. Go to the Media Page of

our site (www.TheArcOfMinnesota.org); there you'll find the links to materials and stories from The Arc of Minnesota press conference on March 23rd. If you click on the "Arc Chapters News Coverage" link at the bottom of that page, you'll be directed to links to news coverage generated by recent local chapter events. Feel free to forward any of the articles to your legislators.

➤ *Other Messages to Communicate to Legislators*

In your contact with state legislators, you can also communicate these 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., "Protect PCA Services: A Message From A Constituent"). Legislators and their staff will more likely give your communications a higher priority if they know you live in their legislative district.

➤ *Tuesdays at the Capitol*

The Arc of Minnesota, working with the Minnesota Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities, is hosting Tuesdays at the Capitol during the remainder of this legislative session. 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

➤ *Invest in Minnesota's Event Promotes Balanced Approach to Budget*

Invest in Minnesota is a coalition of groups advocating for balanced solutions to our recurring state budget problems, including more revenues raised in a fair manner. The Arc of Minnesota and Arc Greater Twin Cities are supporters of these efforts. Invest in Minnesota is hosting a Day of Action on May 5, 2010 to advocate for a more balanced approach to our budget deficit this year and in 2011. From 10:30 – 11:30 a.m., they will host a training session at Christ Lutheran Church at 105 University Avenue in St. Paul, just kitty corner from the State Capitol. From noon – 1:30 p.m., you will gather in the State Capitol Rotunda to meet with your legislators. Fact sheets will be available for those visits. Contact Leah Gardner at Invest in Minnesota with any questions at 651-757-3063 or leah@mncn.org.