

House and Senate Vote on Health and Human Services Bill; Most Provisions Still Make Harmful Cuts

On May 17th, the House and Senate Health and Human Services Conference Committee members resolved differences between HF 927 and SF 760, their health human services omnibus bills (or spending bills). They withdrew a few of the cuts made in the two bills, but they still kept the vast majority of the cuts that were originally in one or both bills. The combined bill is now called SF 760.

The Minnesota Senate approved this bill without changes on Wednesday, May 18 by a 36 -28 vote. All Republicans but one voted in favor of it; the remaining no votes all came from Democrats. The Minnesota House approved it later that evening on a 69-63 vote. Three Republicans and all Democrats voted against the final bill; all other Republican representatives voted in favor of it.

➤ *Positive Changes Made*

- The House and Senate withdrew the proposal that would have cut \$4 million from the Family Support Grant. This action spares families who receive grants that help pay for added expenses that are directly related to their child's disability. The grant covers expenses for medications, respite care, specialized diets, specialized clothing, and specialized equipment.
- The House and Senate withdrew the cuts proposed for physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, eyeglasses, dentures, and prosthetics. They instead eliminated funding for "specialized maintenance therapies"; we are not sure what all this cut includes and need more information.
- The House and Senate restored funding for the Region 10 Quality Assurance Program and a statewide body to establish a new statewide quality assurance system.

➤ *Harmful Provisions Still in the Bill*

- A 20% wage cut for personal care attendants (PCAs) who provide services to relatives. This would apply to someone who provides PCA services to a child with disabilities that he or she is related to and is not that child's parent. It would also apply to a parent who provides PCA services to his/her adult son or daughter with disabilities. The 20% wage cut would be especially hard on rural Minnesotans. Having a relative provide PCA services in rural areas is sometimes the only option for families. Non-relative PCAs can travel many uncompensated miles to reach the individual or family, and many individuals needing PCAs require assistance off and on throughout the day, not during an extended block of time. In many cases, only relatives are available to provide these services. A 20% wage cut, however, creates a financial hardship and a disincentive for them to continue working as a PCA.
- No alternative services for those who would lose their PCA hours on July, 1, 2011. PCA staff help make daily life possible for people with disabilities, and in some cases, literally help them get out of bed each morning. The previous Legislature and Gov. Pawlenty agreed to provide at least a

minimal amount of services to the 2,800 Minnesotans who are projected to lose their PCA hours on July 1, 2011. While these alternative services will not fully make up for those being lost, there was a recognition by elected officials before this legislative session that something needed to be done for those people with disabilities affected by these cuts.

- **A freeze and rollback on waived services.** "Waived services" is a technical name for those supports that help people with disabilities increase their independence and be a part of their communities, as well as help families raise their child with disabilities at home. The freeze on these services means that the 4,000 Minnesotans with disabilities who have been waiting for waived services will now face an indefinite wait. People with disabilities who find themselves in crisis, due to factors such as the loss of an aging parent, will be without services when they most need them. The rollback means that no one will be able to get a waiver until the number of individuals served by the waiver returns to March 2010 levels. This rollback to March 2010 is expected to take seven months. The Department of Human Services has calculated that this freeze and rollback will mean 1,250 Minnesotans with disabilities be forced into more expensive nursing homes.
- **A cut in funding to counties that normally covers expenses for unexpected increases in needs for their residents with disabilities who receive waived services.**
- **A cut to funds for the counties that help fund, among other services, supports to people with disabilities and their families like respite care.** Respite care helps parents get a break from the stresses of caring for a family member with disabilities.
- **Cuts to numerous grants for adults and children who have mental illness.** We are getting further analysis on this provision to see exactly which grants are cut.
- **A repeal of the Medicaid expansion for adults with very low income that Gov. Dayton approved in January.** The expansion would have provided improved access to health care to 100,000 Minnesotans, many of whom have disabilities. The Senate bill instead reinstates the General Assistance Medical Care (GAMC) program, the previous program for adults with very low incomes, which was revised in 2010. Only four metro hospitals participated in last year's revised GAMC after dramatic cuts were made in payments to providers. Only two of those four providers have said they would participate again if this revised GAMC program were reinstated. The benefits under this version of GAMC would also be less than what would be available under the Medicaid expansion.
- **A cut in Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) assistance by \$50 a month for every disabled parent in a household.** These families are some of the most disadvantaged in our state and are struggling just to maintain basic living expenses. They currently participate in our "welfare-to-work" program; they are not only unemployed but face the added challenge and expense of having someone in the household with a disability.
- **Enrollment of children and adults with disabilities into managed care, technically called Special Needs Basic Care (SNBC).** This would provide them with acute health care, but disability advocates have criticized this major change in services without giving advocates a chance for input or a hearing. Amount saved to the state: \$26,000,000.

➤ *Reforms That Were Deleted*

- **Deletion of provisions promoted by The Arc Minnesota that would reform human services and give us better value for our human services dollars.** The deleted provisions would have improved case management and given people with disabilities more flexibility to spend personal care assistance dollars more effectively and efficiently.