



Legislative Update

Friday, February 11, 2011

This update is published regularly during the General Session, monthly during the interim, and other times as needed. This update highlights the various issues that will be heard by the legislature during the Legislative Session that may affect low-income Utahns.

The Budget

Today marks the end of the third week of the 2011 Legislative session. The first three weeks were dominated by budget discussions as the legislature was required to pass a base budget bill by Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2011. Each appropriations subcommittee was tasked with reducing the budget by 7-10%.

State agencies presented proposals to the legislature to cut their budgets and then the appropriations subcommittees ranked the cuts by priority with the hope of being able to backfill at least some of the cuts when the new revenue numbers come in later this month.

[HERE](#) is the list of cuts.

Alerts and News from the Hill

Asset Building

CAP Utah keeps a running Legislative Agenda list on its website that tracks priority bills and provides updates on the status of any legislation that may affect low-income Utahns. It can be found [HERE](#) and will be updated regularly throughout the session.

Legislative Agendas and Minutes can be found on the [Utah Legislature's Website](#)

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Advocates Calendar

At this point, no cuts have been made to the EITC/VITA ongoing funding from the state, but \$58,000 of one-time money has been cut. The appropriations subcommittee will put together their prioritization lists on Tuesday. These dollars are used to support the statewide Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. In addition to the Individual Development Account (IDA) funding was reduced \$89,500. It is prioritized at #6 on the backfill list.

SCR2 - "Financial Responsibility and Concurrent Resolution" is a bill sponsored by Senator Jones that encourages Utahns to take advantage of the financial stability resources in the state. It has passed out of the Senate and is now on the House Workforce Services and Community and Economic Development Committee agenda for 2/14/11.

Education

Education funding is a big concern up at the capitol and various bills are seeking to address the need to fund enrollment increases.

HB 72 - "Taxes and Related School Funding Amendments" is being sponsored by Rep. Noel and would reduce property taxes, increase the sales tax on food and provide for some school funding equalization. However, this bill will disproportionately shift the tax burden onto low-income Utahns and will result in a tax increase on all unprepared food purchased in the state. The bill was presented before committee this week but was not voted on. CAP Utah testified in opposition to the bill.

Other education bills CAP Utah is monitoring are the Optional Full-Day Kindergarten bill (HB111), the K-3 reading amendments bill which would change assessment deadlines (SB38), and a Public School Funding bill (HB65) that would amend some property tax levies for funding of public schools. There is also a Senate Joint Resolution to move control and supervision of the public education system away from the municipalities and under the purview of the Governor

The Family Investment Coalition's Advocate's Caucus will be held every Wednesday during the General Session from 12:15 - 1:15 in the Olmstead Room of the Senate (East) Building. We will discuss the budget, our legislative priorities, and collaborate with other advocates. For more information, contact [Drew Martinez](#).

(SJR9).

Work Supports

Emergency Food Network funds and the Food Stamp Administration matching funds were not on the initial cut lists and, at this point, will maintain their 2011 funding levels.

The General Assistance (GA) program was also not on the cut list, but the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) is taking cuts by having to reduce the number of Full-Time Employees (FTEs). DWS plans to phase out 140 eligibility positions over the next year through attrition and the finding of additional efficiencies in case management. The recent development of myCase, an online system that allows customers to look up information about their benefits without having to call eligibility workers, is one of many ways they are trying to reduce costs.

DWS is also seeking to redesign their Regional Workforce Services Boards by allowing for a more responsive, ad hoc approach than the structured format that currently exists. SB19 will also require that these new regional councils continue to forge partnerships on the local level with government, community groups, the business community and education to best serve the needs of Utahns who use DWS for job placement, training and educational services.

Housing

Both the Olene Walker Housing Fund (OWHF) and the Pamela Atkinson Homeless Trust Fund (PAHTF) were set to be cut last week, but both programs have been restored to their 2011 funding levels as of this week.

Other housing bills include HB245, which would centralize the housing choice vouchers for the state, making it easier for Utah families to access affordable housing by being able to get on one centralized waiting list instead of each separate local list. This bill has passed favorably out of the House standing committee and is now on the House floor.

SB154 - "Utah Fit Premises Act Notice Requirements" would put more requirements on owners to provide information and disclosures to tenants about their rights before a rental agreement is signed and would protect tenants from retaliatory action if they seek to assert their rights. This bill has not yet been released from the Senate Rules Committee.

Other housing bills that deal with foreclosure have had bill files opened, but no text is available at this point.

CAP Utah will be monitoring any bill that affects affordable housing, tenants' rights and Utility Assistance in Utah.

Health and Human Services

The Department of Health, the Department of Human Services and the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation have all taken cuts to programs that help low-income Utahns and people with disabilities that may or may not be restored. While CAP Utah does not track the details of these cuts, we do monitor the cuts and support other advocates at the capitol who work on these issues.

HB211 is a bill by Rep. Menlove that would require clients of PCN to participate in community service hours to continue to receive coverage, if they are so able. The bill has passed out of the the Senate Standing Committee and is now on the Senate Second Reading Calendar.

Sen. Robles' SB41 bill would allow legal immigrant children to receive medical assistance and CHIP in Utah regardless of how long they have been in the country. It is currently stalled in the Senate Rules Committee.

Rep. Dunnigan is running a bill that would reduce barriers to enrolling and staying on CHIP and Medicaid through the use of technology. It is currently on the House Third Reading Calendar.

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