

CREATING PATHWAYS TO WORK

The Newsletter of Rhodes to Independence

FEDERAL NEWS

Final Agreement on the House and Senate Budget: To Be Determined

The House and Senate approved their own versions of the FY 2009 Budget Resolution on March 13 and 14. The two bodies must work out their differences and enact a final Resolution. They must settle on a total for next year's appropriations in the face of rising need among families hit by the worsening economy.

Both the House and Senate provide domestic funding above the current cost of services, but even the higher House figure (approximately \$20 billion over the current service level) is inadequate to meet the multiple needs. For example, home heating oil has shot up 33 percent in the past year and 1.2 million households had their gas or electricity shut off last spring. But although families must pay more, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) reduced its annual assistance to families from \$464 in 2006 to \$378 in 2008 in order to stretch their funding farther. The cost of groceries is also up dramatically, 5.1 percent overall since February 2007, but with staples like eggs (25 percent), milk (17 percent) and rice or pasta (13 percent) skyrocketing. Emergency food programs and the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program (WIC) will need enough to cover both rising costs and more qualifying families because of lost earnings. School districts and states facing declining revenues need more federal help to prevent cuts. And a growing number of injured veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan must be served. (For more information, see <http://www.chn.org/humanneeds/080307a.html>)

The Bush Administration's Budget

President George W. Bush released the administration's proposed 2009 Budget early this year. Many services and programs that are supportive of people with disabilities and at-risk populations would be funded below current levels including WIA job training and employment services (Adult Training down 19% from FY 08, inflation adjusted, 11% for Youth Training, inflation adjusted), the Office of Disability Employment Policy (down 55% from FY 08), Dislocated Worker Assistance (down 18%) and Community Service Employment for Older Americans (down 34%).

If the FY budget request is enacted, the effects will be felt directly in the Ocean State. For example, the reduction in WIA funding the estimated number of job training losses would be 625.

In addition, many health, Mental Health / Substance Abuse, Community Service, Education and Housing services programs are also cut below current levels.

(For details on the Bush Budget, request and service cuts see:

<http://www.chn.org/issues/budget/>

For information on Federal funding for Key Job training, Vocational Education during the Bush Administration (FY 2002-FY 2009) (Dept of Labor), see:

<http://www.workforcealliance.org/atf/cf/{93353952-1DF1-473A-B105-7713F4529EBB}/Federal%20Funding%20for%20Key%20Programs%20Graphs%201-08.pdf>

March 2008: In the U.S., 80,000 Jobs Lost. Rhode Island Unemployment Rate Rises To 5.8%

U.S. employers slashed jobs for the third straight month in March and unemployment rose to nearly a three-year high, offering the latest signs that the economy has fallen into a recession. The Labor Department's report, released April 4, 2008, showed a net loss of 80,000 jobs last month. That marks the third straight month that jobs have fallen - the longest period of decline since early 2003.

The new report also pegged job losses in January and February at 76,000 each month. Those revisions added an additional 67,000 job losses to previous readings. The Labor Department now estimates that the economy has shed 232,000 jobs in the first three months of this year.

In March, the RI Department of Labor and Training announced that Rhode Island's monthly job count declined by 1,200 in February 2008, reducing the number of jobs to 487,800. This represents the lowest job count since April 2004 (486,200).

Additionally, the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in February 2008 ticked up 0.1 of a percentage point to 5.8 percent from January's jobless rate of 5.7 percent. This marks the highest RI unemployment rate since November 1995.

In February, the number of unemployed Rhode Island residents—those residents who classify themselves as available for and actively seeking employment—increased to 33,400, an increase of 500 from January and a year-over-year increase of 5,000 from the previous February. The number of unemployed has been trending upward since March 2007 and the current jobless level is the highest since November 1994.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in March 2008 the Ocean State had the 7th highest rate of unemployment in the nation.

Sources:

http://money.cnn.com/2008/04/04/news/economy/jobs_march/index.htm?cnn=yes-66k and www.dlt.ri.gov/News_Releases/pdfs/NR_032`08.pdf

U.S. House of Representatives Committee Releases Report on State Impact of Medicaid Regulations

On March 3, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform released a report entitled *The Administration's Medicaid Regulations: State-by-State Impacts*. This report details the state-by-state impact of seven regulations issued by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Service (CMS) in the areas of cost limits for public providers, graduate medical education, outpatient hospital services, provider taxes, rehabilitative services, school administration and transportation services, and case management services.

To gather information, the Committee wrote to each state Medicaid Director requesting a state-specific analysis of the impact of each of the regulations.

The Committee received responses from 43 states and the District of Columbia, accounting for approximately 95 percent of total Medicaid spending. The report analyzes these responses, and finds that the state estimates of the fiscal impacts of the regulatory changes are significantly higher than the \$15 billion impact projected by the Administration.

According to the states who responded to the Committee, the regulations would reduce federal payments to them by \$49.7 billion over the next five years. Other findings include the following:

- The regulations would reduce federal spending by shifting costs, not through greater efficiencies;
- The regulations would disrupt existing systems of care for fragile populations; and
- The regulations would impose significant administrative burdens and costs on state Medicaid programs.

The large discrepancy between the state estimates and the CMS estimates suggests that the regulations are likely to have a much larger fiscal and programmatic impact on state Medicaid programs and state budgets than federal policymakers realize.

In Rhode Island, it is estimated that in its proposed form Medicaid regulation would have an immense negative impact in the following areas, among others: coverage of rehabilitative services (loss of federal funds in 2008 - \$125.7 million; over 5 years \$628.5 million); targeted case management (the RI Medicaid State Plan has included targeted case management for as many as 12 discrete Medicaid-eligible populations based upon age, disability, illness or condition...dating as far back as 1991 – loss of federal funds in 2008 \$1.4 million; over 5 years \$7 million) and payments for costs of school administrative and transportation services (RI would lose all federal funds for school-based administration after February 26, 2008 – loss of federal funds in 2008 \$1.9 million; over five years \$9.5 million).

(The report and related documents are available at <http://oversight.house.gov/story.asp?ID=1778>.)

As this newsletter went to press, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health voted to delay until April 2009 implementation of a series of Medicaid regulations instituted by the

Administration. There is strong, bipartisan support for the legislation. The Health Subcommittee of the Committee on Energy and Commerce passed the bill, Protecting the Medicaid Safety Net Act of 2008 (H.R. 5613), unanimously by a voice vote. The full committee unanimously voted to approve the bill this week. However, the White House has promised to veto the bill. A companion bill has been introduced in the Senate. S.2819. While there is strong support in the Senate and the House for blocking the regulations, the ultimate outcome is unclear.

Senator Dodd Announces Disability Savings Act of 2008

On March 11, Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut announced a new piece of legislation, the Disability Savings Act, which would modify the federal tax code to allow tax-advantaged savings accounts for disability expenses. The accounts would not affect eligibility for federal benefits and would allow families of people with disabilities to set aside up to \$250,000 for disability-related expenses. This legislation represents a new strategy to promote asset development for individuals with disabilities and would enable families to support individuals with disabilities through tax advantages.

(More information can be found at <http://dodd.senate.gov/index.php?q=node/4316>.)

EEOC Provides Information on Employment of Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued two question-and-answer (Q&A) guides providing technical assistance for employers and veterans on workplace issues affecting veterans with service-connected disabilities. The new Q&A guide for

employers explains how protections for veterans with service-connected disabilities differ under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

The document further describes how the ADA in particular applies to recruiting, hiring, and accommodating veterans with service-connected disabilities. The EEOC enforces Title I of the ADA, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments.

The second Q&A answers questions that veterans with service-connected disabilities may have about the protections they are entitled to when they seek to return to their former jobs or look to find their first, or new, civilian jobs. The document also explains changes or adjustments that veterans may need, because of their injuries, to apply for, or perform, a job, or to enjoy equal access to the workplace.

(Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A Guide for Employers is available at <http://eoc.gov/facts/veterans-disabilities-employers.html>, and *Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* is available at <http://eoc.gov/facts/veterans-disabilities.html>.)

EMPLOYERS MAY ACCESS MORE THAN 1,700 JOB CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH THE WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

Employers nationwide now have access to a free database of 1,769 new job candidates with disabilities seeking work in a wide variety of fields. Federal employers can tap into this ongoing recruitment resource online, and private sector, other government and nonprofit employers can

request unlimited searches by calling a toll-free telephone number.

"Finding and retaining qualified workers is vital to all employers," said Karen M. Czarnecki, Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy. "The Workforce Recruitment Program serves as a pipeline for organizations to hire workers in summer jobs, train and evaluate them, and then transition them into permanent positions when they graduate from college."

The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities, co-sponsored by the Labor Department's Office of Disability

Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Defense compiled the database by sending recruiters to nearly 200 college campuses across the country to interview eligible undergraduate and post-graduate students. Many of the students are seeking summer job opportunities, while others have graduated and are looking for permanent employment.

Source: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

RECENT REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

The Social Security Administration has released the 2008 Red Book: A Summary Guide to Employment Supports for Individuals with Disabilities under the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income Programs

What is new for 2008 includes the following:

SSA increased the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) amount for individuals with disabilities, other than blindness, from \$900 to \$940 for 2008.

SSA increased the SGA amount for individuals who are blind from \$1,500 to \$1,570 for 2008.

SSA increased the monthly earnings amounts that are used to determine if a month counts for the Trial Work Period (TWP) from \$640 to \$670 for 2008.

For 2008, SSA increased the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Federal Benefit Rates (FBR) from \$623 to \$637 for an eligible individual and from \$934 to \$956 for an eligible couple.

SSA increased the income amounts that will have no effect on eligibility or benefits for SSI beneficiaries who are students.

For 2008, SSA increased the monthly amount from \$1,510 to \$1,550 and the yearly maximum from \$6,100 to \$6,240.

For 2008, the monthly Medicare Part A Hospital Insurance Base Premium is \$423, and the 45 percent-Reduced Premium is \$233. The Part B Supplementary Medical Insurance monthly Base Premium is \$96.40.

The Red Book is available at:
www.socialsecurity.gov/redbook/

Parent Resources Update: Special Needs Parent Toolkit

A guide is available from the Department of Defense (DoD) to help military families and others with special needs children navigate the maze of medical and special education services, community support and benefits and entitlements. The Toolkit is broken down into six colorful modules that can be easily downloaded and printed.

This information has recently been updated, and can be accessed by visiting this link:
[http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/displaypage.do?parentfolderId+102.\)](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/displaypage.do?parentfolderId+102.)

Inclusive Livable Communities for People with Psychiatric Disabilities

The National Council on Disabilities (NCD) released a report on March 17, 2008 that looks at barriers and solutions relating to people with psychiatric disabilities fully participating in their communities.

This information has recently been updated, and can be accessed by visiting this link:
<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/displaypage.do?parentfolderid+193>

Roadmaps for Enhancing Employment of Persons with Disabilities through Accessible Technology

The U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) and the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) recently collaborated to host a “Business Dialogue” on accessible technology and disability employment issues. The participating businesses were asked to develop “Roadmaps” of successful business policies and strategies to enhance the hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities through accessible technology – practical steps that can be adopted throughout the general business community. The resulting 29-page report was released in November 2007.

(For more information, see
<http://www.atia.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3489>)

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