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CCLP's Policy Matters

Colorado Center on Law and Policy/Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute

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That's a Wrap!

The 2008 Legislative Session comes to a close

The 2008 Legislative Session will be remembered as a mixed bag of successes and setbacks, with both steps toward progress and missed opportunities along the way. The Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) and the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute (COFPI) focused on a variety of bills and issues that impact health care, state tax and budget policy, and self-sufficiency for lower-income families.

"The challenges Colorado faces when it comes to health care, fiscal policy, and economic self-sufficiency are too great to resolve in one year," said Maureen Stevenson Farrell, Executive Director at CCLP. "So while we recognize some of the progress made, we also know that a lot of work remains on key issues like the Earned Income Tax Credit and broader health care reform."

"In terms of fiscal policy, the legislature created some winners and losers-helping out mutual fund companies and other special interests with some tax breaks, but not really doing anything significant for low-income working families," said Kathy White, Project Director for COFPI.

"The Legislature took some steps to lay the foundation for reform and increase access to health care in Colorado." Elisabeth Arenales, Health Program Director for CCLP and a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Care Reform. "However, we have a very long way to go."

"We face a lot of serious fiscal challenges, and we're seeing the consequences of those challenges as Colorado continues to lag behind other states in education, health care, higher education, and transportation," said Carol Hedges, Senior Fiscal Analyst at COFPI. "Broader fiscal reform was not addressed this session, but it's something we have to keep moving forward on."

Listen to Kathy White and Elisabeth Arenales giving their take on the end of the session with legislative wrap up interviews on both [KGNU](#) and [Public News Service](#).

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CCLP and COFPI Legislative Summary

Making a List and Checking it Twice:

Legislation aimed at helping low-income families in Colorado

While the Legislature missed some opportunities to make bold positive changes for low-income families in Colorado, such as restoring the Earned Income Tax Credit, there were some successes and good steps that were taken for low-income Coloradans. Below is a summary of some of the bills that passed in the Legislature and that CCLP supported through the Women's Family Action Network:

HB 1265- This bill allows counties to subsidize child care for families up to 85% of state median income. It raises the current income ceiling from 225% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 309% of FPL. Many of these families have faced the loss of hundreds of dollars per month in child care subsidies with a 10 cent per hour raise. In many counties the "break- even" point at which earnings can cover the full cost of basic needs is above 225% of FPL.

SB 177- This bill includes a 20% increase in the monthly TANF cash grant, effective January 2009, with the authority to go higher delegated to the State Board of Human Services. This would raise the grant from \$356 per month for a family of three to about \$420 per month. Even if the Board raises the grant to 30%, a family's income would still be below 33% of FPL.

SB 160 & 161 - SB 161 streamlines applications for Medicaid and CHP+ by allowing income to be verified through the Department of Labor database, rather than requiring parents to document income. SB 160 expands eligibility for CHP+ from 205% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 225% of FPL, and gives HCPF the authority to expand to 250% FPL, subject to available appropriations. This is projected to increase enrollment in CHP+ by about 9,000, with the potential for a total increase of 50,000 if expanded to 250% FPL and enrollment strategies are effective.

HB 1356- Tenants would have a right to "habitable" space in exchange for their rent under this bill. Landlords and tenants would have responsibilities to keep rental housing stock habitable. Elements of this "warrant of habitability" include the right to heat, electricity and running hot and cold water, extermination of rodents and vermin.

HB 1387- Renews the diversion of \$12-\$13 million per year from the Severance Tax Trust Fund for four years. About half the money would be used for weatherization of homes for low-income individuals. Eligibility would be under 85% of area median income, which, for example, is 309% of Federal Poverty Level in Metro Denver. About half would be used as utility payments for those with incomes under 185%

of Federal Poverty Level.

To Be or Not To Be:

A TABOR reform proposal on the ballot?

Toward the end of the session Speaker Andrew Romanoff unveiled a bold TABOR reform proposal, HCR 1014, which would have been a positive step toward untying the constitutional knot that binds Colorado's fiscal situation.

Carol Hedges, Senior Fiscal Analyst at COFPI, testified in committee in support of the proposal. Her complete testimony can be seen [here](#).

The proposal stalled in the Legislature, but two slightly amended versions have begun to work their way through the process to get on the ballot. While these measures contain innovative ideas to start to untie our constitutional fiscal knot, they are very late out of the starting block for a victory in 2008. COFPI will soon release a summary on the proposals. Stay tuned to see what happens!

A Healthy Start?

How health care reform fared in the 2008 Legislature

Elisabeth Arenales, along with three other members of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Care Reform, presented the Commission's findings to the Legislature in January. Since then, CCLP has worked tirelessly to promote health care reform through a variety of bills.

Some positive steps were made along the way. As examples, CCLP supported and worked to pass SB 161 helping to remove administrative barriers to enrollment in Medicaid and CHP+ and HB 1072 which will create a Medicaid Buy In Program for working people with disabilities. CCLP also took a leadership role in working with sponsors and advocates to amend SB 217, which the Center believes will advance the conversation in Colorado about comprehensive reform, including furthering important conversations about an individual mandate, public program expansions, health insurance market reforms, affordability, subsidization and benefits. These measures help to lay the groundwork for the ultimate goal of comprehensive health care reform.

For a review of what happened with various health care legislation this

session, click [here](#).

For a summary of health-related legislation that CCLP worked on and followed, click [here](#).

Case Not Closed:

Update on Exempla Case and Related Hospital Transfer Issues

The Legislature passed HB 1203, which requires the Attorney General to consider any lessening of access to health care services whenever determining whether to hold a public hearing on a hospital sale transaction. The Governor must act by June 5th, as he can sign, veto, or let the bill become a law without his signature.

In the Boulder County case to stop the proposed transfer of two Exempla hospitals, a hearing on motions to dismiss and all other pending motions is likely to be set in September. Until then, the case remains in limbo.

In the Denver County case, Exempla v. Sisters of Charity and Community First Foundation (CFF), a second judge has recused himself, so a third judge, William Robbins, has been appointed for the case. A hearing date has yet to be set on a motion to send the case to arbitration. Likewise, no hearing date has been set for motions filed by the various parties which would require the other parties not to interfere. For example, Exempla is trying to keep Sisters of Charity and CFF from changing the control of the operation from Exempla's operating joint venture, and Sisters and CFF want to proceed by prohibiting Exempla from interfering with the proposed hospital transfer. There are other pending motions as well, which likely will be heard once a hearing date is set.

Stay tuned at www.cclponline.org for new updates on these cases.

Food Fight:

Congress pushes through on Farm Bill, Food Stamps

As food prices skyrocket across the country, Congress is poised to pass the 2008 Farm Bill, which includes substantial new investment in nutritional programs, including the Food Stamp Program, which is being renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

The new investments include \$7.8 billion for the Food Stamp Program, \$1.26 billion for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and \$1 billion for the free fresh fruit and vegetable snack program, which is targeted to schools with high shares of low-income families.

Changes to the Food Stamp Program also include ending years of erosion in the purchasing power of food stamps by raising and indexing for inflation the program's standard deduction and minimum benefit. These changes would help about 11 million low-income people, including families with children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Congress also incorporated other new improvements such as -
Streamlining and simplifying administration of the Food Stamp Program, - Eliminating the cap on the dependent care deduction, which reduces the chances that families will have to forego food to pay for decent and safe child care. - Improving the program's resource limits and no longer counting retirement accounts and education accounts toward the resource limit. - Helping emergency feeding organizations such as food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens meet increasing demand and rising food prices by increasing annual funding for commodity purchases for TEFAP from \$140 million to \$250 million and subsequently adjusting this amount for food inflation. - And dramatically increasing the availability of fruits and vegetables in low-income schools

The U.S. House voted in favor of the Farm Bill on May 14 with a veto-proof (over two-thirds) majority that included Colorado's Rep. DeGette, Rep. Perlmutter, Rep. Salazar, Rep. Udall and Rep. Musgrave. The bill also passed the Senate a day later by veto proof margin of 81-15, with both Sens. Allard and Salazar voting yes. Congress expects to have the Farm Bill to the President, who has renewed his veto threats, by May 20 and vote to override the veto before they recess for the Memorial Day holiday.

For a complete analysis of the 2008 Farm Bill from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, click [here](#).

Check back at www.cclponline.org later this month for more analysis about what kind of impact the Farm Bill will have on Colorado families.

The Price is Not Right:

Coloradans finding it harder to make ends meet

As families see sharp increases in food prices, gas prices, health care costs, as well as the fallout from the mortgage crisis, the issue of economic self-sufficiency and the debate about policy solutions to move people toward it are more important now than ever before.

More and more families are finding that they are unable to stretch their wages to meet these rising costs for basic yet vital necessities. It begs the question, what is an adequate income? And how does that standard vary among different families and communities in Colorado?

What does it take to make ends meet? How much does it take to be self-sufficient? And what kinds of common-sense, innovative policies can Colorado pursue to help more families get there?

These are the critical questions. Because families are so often right on the brink of making ends meet when they enter or reenter the workforce, carefully targeted policies, including tax policies, can and should play a critical role in helping families break out of the cycle of poverty and head towards economic self-sufficiency.

To find out more about economic self-sufficiency, check out [The Self Sufficiency Standard for Colorado 2008: A Family Needs Budget](#).

Promotions

CCLP in the Media

In recent weeks, CCLP and COFPI staffers have been making the rounds in the press.

Kathy White and Elisabeth Arenales gave legislative wrap up interviews with both [KGNU](#) and [Public News Service](#).

Carol Hedges' testimony in committee was quoted in this [Denver Post write up](#) about Speaker Romanoff's TABOR reform proposal.

Elisabeth Arenales was quoted in this [Colorado Springs Gazette story](#) about health care reform, as well as featured in a Colorado Public Radio story on health care legislation.

[Click here to read and hear interviews and stories.](#)

Grant Announcements

The Colorado Trust Foundation recently awarded COFPI a three-year \$150,000 grant to continue its work on fiscal reform in Colorado.

The Rose Community Foundation, which helped support this year's update of the Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard, also awarded COFPI a \$50,000 grant for education and outreach work on the Self-Sufficiency Standard and VisionKEI, the online Self-Sufficiency Calculator.

CCLP also received a \$15,000 grant from The Denver Foundation for our Affordability Project. The Project, which CCLP undertakes in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson funded, Colorado Voices for Coverage, will contribute to the health care reform discussion by assessing what Coloradans can afford to pay for health care.

The entire CCLP/COFPI team is deeply appreciative and tremendously grateful for the continued support of these outstanding organizations.

2008 Economic Self-Sufficiency Tables

The new 2008 Colorado Economic Self Sufficiency Standard Tables are now available on the Colorado Department of Local Affairs website. Click [here](#) to find out what it takes for your family to make ends meet in Colorado.

The Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard measures how much income is needed for a family of a given composition in a given place to adequately meet their basic yet needs-without public or private assistance. The Colorado standard measures this for 70 different family types in each of Colorado's 64 counties.

For more information about the tables and the Colorado Self-Sufficiency Standard, please contact Tracey Stewart at 303-573-5669 ext. 314 or tstewart@cclponline.org.

Self-Sufficiency Tables

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