

# THE WEEKLY WHIP

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2007

## **HB 754: Children & Working Families Healthcare Act of 2007**

*Hearing: Friday, 2/16 at 1:00p.m. in HGO*

Approximately 800,000 Marylanders are uninsured. Nearly 90% of these people are in working families, and young adults run the highest risk of being uninsured. From 2000 to 2005, the number of Marylanders with employment-based and private coverage decreased, while the number of uninsured increased by 23%.

Since 1990, daily emergency room visits have increased by 55%, while six acute care centers have closed. The largest numbers of ER visitors are uninsured people, and 1/3 of these visits could have been handled by a primary care physician.

Last week, the Speaker joined Chairman Pete Hammen in announcing legislation to provide access to health insurance to nearly 250,000 uninsured Marylanders. It is the most comprehensive healthcare proposal to be considered in the last decade, and, if enacted, it will provide access to healthcare for every child in Maryland.

HB 754 proposes to expand eligibility for the Children's Health Insurance Program, giving families without insurance the ability to buy into the program, and expanding Medicaid eligibility from 42% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 116% of FPL.

Recognizing small businesses often bear costs to cover their employees, the bill proposes \$140 million in subsidies to help employers with fewer than 50 workers provide coverage to their employees.

The bill would assess a surcharge to higher-income individuals who do not procure health insurance. The surcharge would apply to those earning over 400% of FPL, approximately \$83,000 / year for a family of four. Any revenue from the surcharge would be dedicated to expanding state healthcare programs.

The \$600 million needed to fund these programs would come primarily through leveraging federal Medicaid dollars and increasing the tobacco tax by \$1.00 per pack.

### **Quick Facts on the Uninsured in Maryland**

Nearly 800,000 uninsured or underinsured Marylanders, an increase of nearly 200,000 over the last 4 years.

From 2000 to 2005, number of Marylanders with employment-based and private coverage decreased.

ER visits increased 23% since 2000 – four points higher than the national average. ER visits increased 55% since 1990 – while six acute care centers closed.

The largest number of ER visits were by uninsured patients, and approximately 1/3 of visits were not medical emergencies.

According to the Maryland Health Care Commission, as of 2006: 90% of the uninsured are in working families, 140,000 are children, 1/3 work for businesses with fewer than 10 employees, and young adults (19 – 29) run the highest risk of being uninsured.

Uncompensated care costs the state approximately \$800 million each year. The Maryland Hospital Association estimates the overall impact to physicians, hospitals and insured Marylanders is \$2.4 billion each year.

Each family with healthcare pays an additional \$1,000 per year on insurance premiums to cover the costs generated by uncompensated care.

### **What Does HB 754 Do?**

Provides access to healthcare to every child in the state.

Expands Medicaid coverage to 70,000 working adults.

Provides \$140 million in subsidies to help businesses with fewer than 50 employees to provide healthcare.

Provides \$10 million for tobacco cessation programs.

Provides \$30 million for substance abuse programs.

Requires insurance providers to allow dependents up to age 25 to remain on their parents' insurance policies.

### **HB 133: Oyster Restoration**

*Hearing: Wednesday, 2/14 at 1:00p.m. in ENV*

Recognizing that the Chesapeake Bay's native oyster population played – and could again play – a crucial role in protecting the estuary's health, HB 133 proposes incremental steps towards oyster restoration in the Bay.

An administration proposal, the bill would authorize the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to lease parts of the Chesapeake Bay's floor for oyster restoration. The bill specifies any oyster restoration projects shall be limited to the species known as *Crassostrea virginica*, the Bay's native oyster.

The bill would also create a Task Force on Oyster Restoration, which would create a plan to minimize the impact of oyster disease in the Bay and its tributaries, maximize the ecological effect of natural oyster bars, promote oyster aquaculture, and increase the native oyster population in the Bay. This task force would include state lawmakers, scientists, state agencies, and other interested parties, and would issue a report no later than December 1, 2007.

### **HB 136: BRAC Subcabinet**

*Hearing: Thursday, 2/15 at 1:00p.m. in ECM*

Maryland is expected to gain more than 45,000 federal and private-sector jobs as part of the military base closing and re-alignment process. The Department of Business and Economic Development projects Harford County, home to Aberdeen Proving Ground, will gain 12,712 jobs, and Anne Arundel County, home to Fort Meade, will gain 10,049. Thousands of other jobs will be scattered around the state.

An administration proposal, HB 136 would establish a subcabinet to coordinate and oversee development of BRAC-related initiatives in the areas of workforce development, K – 12 and higher education, business development, community infrastructure and growth, environmental stewardship, workforce housing, and transportation. The subcabinet would be chaired by the Lieutenant Governor and include state agency heads.

### **Other Administration Bills to be Heard this Week**

*HB 55 – HSCRC User Fees*

*HB 56 – HSCRC User Fee Assessments*

*Wednesday, 2/14 at 1:00p.m. in HGO*

*HB 132 – Maryland Healthcare Access Act of 2007*

*Friday, 2/16 at 1:00p.m. in HGO*

*HB 138 – Task Force on Healthcare Access & Reimbursement*

*Tuesday, 2/13 at 1:00p.m. in HGO*

### **HB 135: Life Sciences Advisory Board**

*Hearing: Thursday, 2/15 at 1:00p.m. in ECM*

With the location of world-class research facilities in the region, including federal laboratories and major research universities, Maryland has distinct advantages for bioscience and biotech companies. According to DBED, Maryland has the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> largest cluster of bioscience companies, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest per capita in the nation. An estimated 360 private bioscience firms are located in Maryland, employing about 23,200 people. 24% are located in the Baltimore region, 16% in Frederick, and 60% in Montgomery County.

HB 135, an administration bill, would create a Life Sciences Advisory Board to develop a comprehensive statewide strategic plan for life sciences; promote life science research, development, commercialization and manufacturing in the state; promote collaboration and coordination among life science organizations; develop a strategy to attract private-sector investment and job creation; and make recommendations to address critical needs in the life sciences.

### **RECENT CABINET APPOINTMENTS**

#### **Aging**

Gloriah Lawlah

#### **Agriculture**

Roger Richardson

#### **Business & Economic Development**

David Edgerley

#### **General Services**

Alvin Collins

#### **Juvenile Services**

Donald DeVore

If you have questions about bills coming up this week, please do not hesitate to call on your whip:

#### **Appropriations Whips**

Delegates Bill Bronrott & Keith Haynes

#### **Economic Matters Whips**

Delegates Sally Jameson & Michael Vaughn

#### **Environmental Matters Whips**

Delegates Marvin Holmes & Doyle Niemann

#### **Health & Government Operations Whips**

Delegates Sue Kullen & Shirley Nathan-Pulliam

#### **Judiciary Whips**

Delegates Susan Lee & Victor Ramirez

#### **Ways & Means Whips**

Delegates Anne Kaiser & Justin Ross