

AAP-California, District IX Advocacy Update

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Despite a severe state budget deficit in California this year, AAP-CA was successful in preventing significant cuts to children's health care programs. Proposals to require copays for children under Medicaid, to create waiting lists for the SCHIP program (Healthy Families in California), and to roll special needs children into mandatory managed care programs, all failed to achieve passage. In addition to the budget, each year the AAP-CA works on hundreds of bills—2005 was no exception. The first year of the 2005-06 legislative session in California ended September 9. Bills that passed both houses of the Legislature had until October 9 to be acted on by Governor Schwarzenegger. Those bills that did not clear specific committee hurdles "died." Others are "two-year" bills, having passed required stages, but not yet all the way through the process.

Our success on both budget and bill items was, in large part, due to active participation by our pediatrician members, including residents, as well as to AAP-CA's role as a leader in broad coalitions that advocate for children at the state level.

Top priority bills for the AAP-CA 2005-06:

AB 1735: PROTECTION OF PHYSICIAN REIMBURSEMENT UNDER MEDI-CAL

The AAP-CA joined with CMA and other specialty societies three years ago to sue the state to prevent a 5% cut to Medi-Cal physician reimbursement rates that was enacted under then-Governor Gray Davis. With the support of National AAP (who filed an amicus brief) we were successful in enjoining the fee-for-service cuts for three years, protecting significant dollars in physician reimbursement over that time. However, recently an appeals court judge in California ruled that neither providers nor patients have a right to sue the state over Medicaid rates. This raises a much larger issue; discussions are ongoing about whether to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court or not. But for California, it created the immediate concern that the 5% rate cut might go into effect, even retroactively, and that further cuts, including 10% proposed by Governor Schwarzenegger that were withdrawn when we won the original injunction, might be forthcoming.

Fortunately, we were successful in working with CMA to negotiate with the Governor and legislative leadership to pass SB 1735, a

bill that prohibits retroactive and immediate cuts. Further, linked to that we have an agreement with the Governor that he will not pursue cuts next year, giving us additional time to work through our longer-term legislative and legal strategy. This is a huge win for pediatricians, and the children we serve, as it will help prevent further erosion of Medi-Cal access.

AB 576 (WOLK) IMMUNIZATION REGISTRY

AAP-CA is cosponsor of AB 576 (Wolk), a bill to establish a state-level hub for California's nine regional immunization registries. This would permit pediatricians to confirm a child's immunization status via the web, facilitating easy reminder/recall and reducing missed opportunities for immunizations, as well as costly overimmunizations. Funding (approximately \$10 million annually) that was stripped from this two-year bill, has been reinserted. We will continue to advocate strongly for it next year.

AB 1179 (YEE): VIOLENT VIDEO GAME RESTRICTIONS

AAP-CA was instrumental in securing enactment of AB 1179 (Yee), a bill to prohibit the sale of ultraviolet video games (rated "M" for mature) to children under 16 years of age. As a cosponsor of the bill, AAP-CA provided testimony and press conference support last session when the bill failed passage, and again this session where we were successful.

The evidence that violent games harm children is now overwhelming, so it was heartening that the Legislature and the Governor stood up for kids, despite extreme opposition from the game manufacturers' lobby.

SB 12 (ESCUTIA) :

SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS

The Governor also signed AAP-CA supported SB 12 (Escutia), landmark obesity prevention legislation that sets nutritional standards for foods sold in California's K-12 schools. The

new standards include restricting foods sold to no more than 35% calories fat, 10% calories saturated fat and 35% sugar by weight. AAP-CA has been an active partner with the state in obesity prevention efforts, including District Chair Burton Willis' role as a featured speaker at the Governor's Obesity Prevention Summit in September. SB 12 is one important piece of a statewide, comprehensive strategy to help children who are, or are at risk for, overweight or obesity.

OTHER

There are countless other bills of interest that cannot be addressed due to space limitations. AAP-CA supported SB 116 (Dutton), which makes permanent the statute regarding safe surrender of infants; AB 178 (Koretz), the California Cigarette Fire Safety and Firefighter Protection Act; and SB 377 (Ortiz), which facilitates availability of dental services to pregnant Medi-Cal beneficiaries. These three bills were all signed into law.

AAP-CA was also successful in working with an author (Koretz) to stop a bill that would have mandated administration of a specific depression screen of postpartum mothers by pediatricians in their offices at well-child visits during the first year. Instead, we are working to increase pediatrician education and knowledge about this important issue. AAP-CA also supported AB 849 (Leno), which would have assured equality of civil marriage in California, thus permitting children in all families, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation, access to the rights and privileges civil marriage accords. Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed this bill.

October 25th there will be a complete AAP-CA "year in review" of legislation for 2005 on our website at www.aap-ca.org. If you are interested in becoming involved in our advocacy efforts, please contact us at aapcalifornia@aol.com or 510-559-8383.

California Earns "A" for Efforts to Combat Childhood Obesity

California is the only state in the nation to be awarded an "A" grade in the second annual U.S. Obesity Report Card. The state earned the "A" for its efforts to combat obesity in children. It also received a "B" for its overall efforts against obesity. California had received "C" grades in both categories last year.

Grades were based on legislation recently introduced and/or passed in eight areas: nutrition standards; vending machine usage; body mass index measured in schools; recess and physical education; obesity programs and education; obesity research; obesity treatment in health insurance; and obesity commissions.

CMA urges physicians to get involved with local efforts to combat childhood obesity. For more information on what you can do to make a difference in the health of your community, contact the CMA Foundation. The foundation provides training and support for physicians so that they can educate and empower their communities to confront this health care challenge.

For more information visit: <http://www.calphys.org/html/bb883.asp>

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