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Highlights of the Week

The Joint Budget Committee worked tirelessly this week to wrap up figure setting for remaining state departments. Important priorities such as funding for K-12 education, health care and human services provider rate increases, funding for corrections, and the Hospital Provider Fee were considered and debated. The JBC decided to increase funding for K-12 education by 2.8%, which is 2% less than requested by the Governor. The JBC endorsed a staff recommendation that argued a lower increase would be more sustainable and offer the opportunity for stability for school districts over the next few years. The JBC also agreed to partially fund CDE's educator effectiveness request and approved \$38 million for early literacy and the READ Act. On Monday, JBC staff recommended that that state share of continuous eligibility for children on Medicaid should be paid for by the Hospital Provider Fee rather than the General Fund. This would result in a \$80 million reduction in bonus payments to hospitals. Staff was split on whether this change could be done through the Long Bill or if a stand-alone bill was needed.

The recommendation failed on a 3-3 vote, with members suggesting that it could be revisited after the revenue forecast if additional savings in state general fund are needed. The JBC did vote for a .5% across the board provider rate increase and a .5% targeted increase for providers selected by the JBC. The total cost of the provider rate increases total \$32 million. On Thursday, the Capital Development Committee joined the JBC to hear figure setting recommendations for Capital Construction. The JBC disagreed with the CDC priority list of projects, so the item was tabled and both committees will meet next week to hash out a compromise. The JBC ended the week by hearing staff and OSPB comebacks, though they reserved votes on the the department comebacks until next week so that they had time to review the requests over the weekend. Next Wednesday, the JBC will hear the March 2015 Revenue Forecast and staff have indicated the committee will need to finalize the FY 2015-16 Budget by that evening in order to hit their planned date for introduction on Monday, March 23rd.

While the JBC was at work setting the budget, the other 94 legislators were busy in committee and on the floor. On Friday, both the House and the Senate engaged in honoring Colorado's emergency first responders with a resolution. First responders from throughout the state joined the House and Senate on the floor for special recognition. The full House passed HB 1221 on Monday, which will allow parents to take up to 18 hours of unpaid leave per academic year for school activities such as parent-teacher conferences and extracurricular events. The House debated for more than an hour about the need for the bill and whether the privilege would be abused. In the end, the bill passed 34-30 with one Republican joining Democrats in support of the bill. It will next go to the Senate where it is likely to face stiff opposition. The House State, Veterans and Military Affairs committee considered HB 1161 and HB 1171, which would have allowed businesses to discriminate based on their religious beliefs. The legislation was modeled after the Federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Both bills were killed in committee with bipartisan opposition to each.

SB 071, the pharmaceutical industry compromise bill on biosimilars, passed the House floor on Tuesday with only one no vote. The bill is headed to the Governor's desk for signature. The House Business Committee unanimously approved HB 1246 to authorize crowdfunding in Colorado. The bill allows non-accredited individuals to invest a maximum of \$5,000 in start-ups.

Next week.....

Life under the gold dome is expected to heat up next week. In addition to the JBC finalizing the budget and the presentation of the March Revenue forecast, the much anticipated construction defects reform legislation - SB 177 - will be heard in the Senate Business Committee, both on Wednesday, March 18th. The Public Health Care and Human Services Committee is scheduled to hear the controversial SB 077, known as the "Parents Bill of Rights," on Tuesday.

Bills of the Week

WORK Act This week, HB 1276 - the Skilled Worker Outreach, Recruitment, and Key Training Act, was introduced. The bipartisan bill sponsored by Representative Williams, Representative Pabon, Senator Cooke, and Senator Heath was assigned to the House Business Affairs and Labor Committee. HB 1276 establishes a matching grant program in the Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) to award matching grants to entities and organizations that offer skilled worker training programs to assist in their outreach, recruiting, and training efforts. The program will be administered by CDLE and a 11 member grant review committee who will review and make recommendations to CDLE, OEDIT, and CDHE who will jointly determine the recipients and grant amounts. This legislation is part of the Workforce Development Package.

Reduce Student Contact with Law Enforcement HB 1240 by Representative Fields passed the House Floor on a voice vote. The bill directs school districts and law enforcement agencies that operate in school districts to enter into MOUs about when school resource officers or other members of law enforcement are required to intervene in school conflicts. The aim of the bill is to keep more students out of the juvenile justice system and break the school to prison pipeline. The House will take a final vote on the bill Monday.

Easing Regulatory Burdens for Advance Practice Nurses SB 197 by Senators Crowder, Jahn and Representative Willett and Fields was heard in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Thursday. The bill changes a variety of requirements for advanced practice registered nurses including decreasing training hours to obtain prescriptive authority, allowing experienced APRNs to serve as mentors to APRNs-in-training, and enabling remote collaboration between an APRN and his or her prescriptive authority mentor. The committee hearing lasted several hours. The Department of Regulatory Agencies, nurses associations, and the Colorado Hospital Association supported the bill, but physicians, the Colorado Medical Society, and the Colorado Psychiatric Society opposed it. The legislation did pass its first committee on a 3-2 vote with Senator Aguilar and Senator Humenik voting no. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee also passed HB 1182 on Thursday. The bill expands the scope of practice for certified nurse aides. The bill had unanimous support.

Medicaid Teen Pregnancy and Drop Out Prevention Pilot Program The Senate Finance Committee killed a Republican sponsored bill to expand the Medicaid Teen Pregnancy and Drop Out Prevention Pilot Program. HB 1079 by Representatives Coram, Danielson and Senator Roberts would have allowed General Fund to be used to pay for 10% of the existing program costs. Currently, the program is 90% federally funded and 10% locally funded. Not all communities have been able to fund the resources to pay for the local share. The program was piloted in Delta, Mesa and Montrose counties. It used highly-ranked, evidence-based and age-appropriate counseling programs to assist Medicaid eligible at-risk teens in making responsible, reproductive health choices, while preventing unintended pregnancies. In 2013, program providers reported that over the previous three years, only 1 of the 140 teen participants reported a pregnancy.

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