

CTA Quick Study

23 April 2009

CTA-Cosponsored Measure

Single-payer Healthcare Bill Clears Its First Legislative Hurdle

CTA and its allies in the education, labor, and business community won a major victory on April 15 when the Senate Health Committee approved CTA-sponsored SB 810, by Sen. Mark Leno (D-San Francisco). The measure would implement a comprehensive healthcare reform plan aimed at ensuring affordable coverage to all Californians.

With many provisions identical to an earlier universal healthcare measure – CTA-cosponsored SB 840 by then-Sen. Sheila Kuehl – SB 810 would create a California Healthcare System relying largely on the \$200 billion spent within the state annually on public and private healthcare programs.

SB 810 would provide a complete range of services – including medical, dental, and vision. Under terms of the bill, the state would act as the “single-payer” authority, negotiating for bulk purchases at reduced costs for medications and services.

The measure would create a new commissioner, whose job would include securing all needed regulatory or legislative changes necessary to redirect current federal, state, and local health care payments to the California Healthcare System. The new system would become responsible for underwriting all benefits and services.

The bill also creates a special commission responsible for developing a financing mechanism.

Despite a long list of supporters, the bill’s author faced withering cross-examination from several Republican members of the committee, who charged that the costs for the healthcare system would outstrip the available revenue.

But Sen. Leno and witnesses effectively rebutted the assertions, noting that the system would, among other things garner savings by allowing all residents to secure needed care at rates much lower than those of emergency and trauma centers. These expensive emergency facilities are now treating the uninsured.

SB 810 heads next to the Senate Appropriations Committee, which could hear the bill in several weeks.

CTA Members:

SB 810 is expected to move quickly through the legislature. Get in touch with your state Senator and Assembly Member and urge them to support this CTA-cosponsored bill that would both control healthcare costs and provide coverage to more than six million uninsured Californians, including more than one million children. Now's the time to work to build and strengthen local capacity to press your legislators and public boards -- including school boards -- to secure adoptions of resolutions in support of SB 810.

CTA-Sponsored Measure

Second Grade Test Ban Stalls, Gains Reconsideration

CTA and opponents of developmentally inappropriate testing that harms young children and jeopardizes their instructional time suffered a temporary setback in the Senate Education Committee on April 15 following a lengthy and acrimonious debate on the bill. CTA-sponsored SB 800, by Sen. Loni Hancock, fell one vote short of the five needed for passage, but the bill's author immediately gained the right to have the measure reconsidered following negotiations with opponents. SB 800 could come up again in two weeks.

Voting with CTA and for the bill were Senators Hancock (D), Carol Liu (co-author) (D), Alex Padilla (D), and Abel Maldonado (R).

Voting against CTA and against the measure were Committee Chair Sen. Gloria Romero (D) and Senators Elaine Alquist (D), Joe Simitian (D), Bob Huff (R), and Mark Wyland (R).

The CTA-sponsored bill would eliminate the second-grade California Standards Test requirement in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, effective July 10, 2010. The elimination of second-grade testing would save the state approximately \$2 million annually and free up time that could be devoted to instruction.

The measure would also bring the state into conformity with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which requires testing of students in third grade or above.

During the April 15 hearing in the Senate Education Committee, CTA representatives and other bill supporters -- including the California State PTA, United Teachers Los Angeles, Californians Together, and the San Diego Unified School District -- drove home the point that the current exam unnecessarily stresses youngsters of that age and does not provide valid and reliable information quickly or in a manner that teachers can use to help their Grade 2 students. Objections to the bill came from lawmakers who insisted that other assessment alternatives be substituted including a new statewide diagnostic test for second graders before eliminating the Grade 2 CST. Their rationale is that the state needs to have data on the reading proficiency levels of second graders in order to guide policy making decisions.

A telling moment came when Sen. Abel Maldonado recounted how his own son, Dino, was forced to take the lengthy multiple choice exam, which ultimately yielded little or no information to help his instruction. The senator talked about his son's stress and the clear fact that the exam -- including its length and nature -- was not appropriate for young children.

CTA Members:

Continue to write and call members of Senate Education to support the CTA-sponsored SB 800 (Hancock) when it is reconsidered by the committee within the next two weeks. Tell your stories about how the exam has impacted your classroom and your students. Use the list below for contact information for members of the Senate committee.

For more information, contact CTA GR Communications Consultant Len Feldman at lfeldman@cta.org.

Members of the Senate Education Committee

Gloria Romero – Chair Dem-24 (916) 651-4024

Bob Huff – Vice Chair Rep-29 (916) 651-4029

Elaine Alquist Dem-41 (916) 651-4013

Loni Hancock Dem-9 (916) 651-4009

Carol Liu Dem-21 (916) 651-4021

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Joe Simitian Dem-11 (916) 651-4011

Mark Wyland Rep-38 (916) 651-4038

Address your letters to Legislators:
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