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Georgia Legislature Adjourns 2008 Session; Medicaid Rates, CMO Oversight To Increase; But Obesity Bill Fails on Last Night; Children's Mental Health Study Committee Also Established

Last Friday at midnight the Georgia General Assembly adjourned its 2008 session. As usual, the session contained both “wins” and disappointments for pediatricians. In a broader view, the session was highlighted by public feuding between legislative leaders and this did result in the failure of the session to pass funding for trauma care, something all had vowed to do in January. Regarding the Chapter agenda, we were pleased that Medicaid reimbursement was increased—for the first time in 6 years. Effective July 1, Medicaid rates will move to 80% of the 2007 Medicare rate, which will result in an increase for most common codes. We also passed bills to create Study committees in the House and Senate on Children's Mental Health, that we hope will be an opportunity to address this growing problem. Unfortunately, a modest bill on childhood obesity was defeated on the House floor on the last day of the session amid resistance from schools and political in-fighting. Here is a quick summary of the bills we followed and their ending status. For a complete list, visit our website at www.gaaap.org.

FY 2009 Budget: Medicaid reimbursement: Moves to 80% of 2007 Medicare rates; Healthchecks up 2.5% (NOTE: reimbursement for many newborn codes was kept stable to avoid dramatic decreases.) (Rate change effective 7-1-08).

Bills followed:

Anti-bullying, SB 461: passed Senate but failed in House.

Children's Mental Health, create study committees: passed.

Childhood obesity, SB 506: Failed on House floor.

High deductible health plans with HSAs, HB 977: passed

Lead levels, HB 1043, changes standard from 20 to 15 mcg: Passed

Medicaid CMO oversight: HB 1234: passed.

Newborn hearing screening, require & follow-up: Failed

Medicaid, definition of “medical necessity” for Tx revised, SB 507: passed.

Parent protection act, HB 901, 24 hours leave per year: failed.

Prompt-pay, HB 109: failed in Senate.

Therapeutic substitution, permitting pharmacists to substitute same class drugs without physician consent: Failed.

Trauma care, several bills to address this: all failed.

Thanks to members of the Legislative Committee and to all of you who contacted your legislators during the session to let them know about our issues. As this is an election year we encourage you to support legislators who support pediatric issues.

William R. Sexson, MD

Chair, Committee on Legislative Affairs