

American Academy of Pediatrics



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March 19, 2009

The Honorable Casey Cagle
Lieutenant Governor, State of Georgia
240 State Capitol
Atlanta, Ga. 30334

Dear Lt. Governor Cagle:

It was so very nice to meet you on the two occasions we have done so, with Dr. Martin Smith last year and on our recent Legislative Day at the Capitol in early February. I'm looking forward to getting the picture we took in the Senate Chamber and you were so gracious to do so.

I write today to ask for your help with the Department of Community Health (DCH) FY 2010 budget which will soon be considered by the Senate. I know that you are committed to civic and financial responsibility and I can assure you that the pediatricians of the state share those values with you. As your brother-in-law can most certainly tell you, those of us who choose pediatrics for our medical career, versus some other specialty field, did so because we have a special feeling for children and enjoy taking care of the them and seeing them mature into healthy, productive adults.

We were very dismayed by the Governor's revised budget recommendations for the DCH budget in which he proposed cuts of 10% for hospitals and 6% for physicians and other professional providers. In fact, given the present facts and our recent reimbursement history in Medicaid, we were stunned by this proposal. Physicians who care for Medicaid and Peachcare patients—and bear in mind that nearly 70% of Medicaid patients are children—have had not had an increase in reimbursement in 8 years. (Hospital rates have been frozen for 6 years.) Moreover, Georgia is slated to receive an additional nearly \$700M dollars in federal stimulus money. To ask our pediatricians to endure a 6% cut under these circumstances is most unfair, and unwise as sound fiscal policy.

We are very much appreciative of the House action that would restore these cuts and retain the federal Medicaid stimulus funds in the DCH budget. We ask you to support this approach as the most reasonable way to deal with this matter.

For if we continue to drive physicians out of the Medicaid system by slashing reimbursement, then access to care for all citizens will be impacted. As physicians choose to see fewer and fewer Medicaid/Peachcare patients, these patients will most assuredly go to emergency rooms to get their routine primary care, which is the most expensive place to deliver it. It has the additional negative of even curtailing sometimes the ER's ability to fully respond to true emergencies because of the huge amount of routine care they are forced to deliver: all because these patients have no "medical home", that is a primary care doctor as their regular source of care.

Add to this the fact that last year's Medicaid rate increase of 2.5% , which would have been the first in 8 years as I mentioned, was already deferred this year because of the poor economy. It was to be contained in the FY 2010 budget but now has been eliminated altogether.

Most physician offices are small businesses like any other and cannot remain viable and available to serve their communities fully if Medicaid reimbursement is not at least adequate. In a recent survey of our members, 40% said they would consider stop seeing Medicaid patients or limiting the number of patients in their practice. We know this will happen. And when a pediatrician cuts services or moves out of a community in rural Georgia because the practice isn't viable anymore, then care for *all* the people of that area is lost, not just care for a few.

In summary, the Georgia Chapter asks you to support the House action on the DCH budget and not to cut providers rates yet again. It is unnecessary in the face of the additional federal help, unfair by any review of our Medicaid payment history, and unwise as sound fiscal policy to the state's taxpayers, who will ultimately shoulder a larger burden. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Avril P. Beckford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Avril P. Beckford, MD, FAAP
President

