PA House Human Services Committee Hears from Families on Impact of Budget Cuts

On March 29 the PA House of Representatives Human Services Committee held a special informational meeting at which members of families of individuals with intellectual disabilities to discuss the Governor’s proposed cuts in funding for human services. Numerous advocates for people with intellectual disabilities testified that the proposed spending cuts will result in fewer services, longer waiting lists, and a lower quality of life for their families. Prior to the opening of the informational meeting Representative Gene DiGirolamo (R-Bucks), chairman of the House Human Services Committee, and Representative Thomas Murt (R-Montgomery/Philadelphia) joined the Self Advocates and Family Alliance (SAFA) and eighteen (18) families at a press conference scheduled to raise awareness of the impacts of proposed state budget cuts. Representative Gene DiGirolamo said that he believes there is sufficient opposition from Republicans and Democrats to block the Governor’s proposed twenty percent (20%) cut to county human services and the consolidation of several programs into a proposed Human Services Development Fund block grant to be administered by the Department of Public Welfare. Both events were streamed live at www.GeneDiGirolamo.com. To see remarks by Representative DiGirolamo see http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=3685505261273. FMI: See http://www.pahousegop.com/NewsItem.aspx?NewsID=13995. For more information on testimony offered at the informational meeting, see http://www.witf.org/statehousesoundbites/house-panel-chair-vows-to-fight-cuts-to-dpw.

Statewide Petition to Stop Proposed Budget Cuts in IDA and BH Services

The Pennsylvania Behavioral Health (BH) and Intellectual Disability and Autism (ID/A) Coalitions are urging their members to view and sign a petition calling on the PA Legislature to stop budget cuts proposed by Governor Tom Corbett and to restore funding for Pennsylvania's behavioral health, intellectual disability, and autism services. The petition is available at http://www.thepetitionsite.com/654/600/747/protect-pennsylvanias-safety-net/. Governor Corbett’s proposed budget eliminates state funding ($842 million) designated for seven county human service programs, including community mental health and developmental program services, and establishes a block grant for human services that would reduce the current outlay to the counties by $168 million. The Coalitions are informing legislators that they must do all that is possible to stop the proposed cuts. FMI: Contact PARF at parfmail@parf.org.

2012 Annual Legislative Days in Harrisburg – May 2 and May 8

PARF members and other supporters of services to people with disabilities can make their voices about proposed budget cuts for human services heard by attending the 3rd Annual Brain Injury Rally in Harrisburg on Wednesday, May 2 at 10 a.m. in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building. In the following week supporters of people with intellectual disabilities can join in the PARF Legislative Day on Tuesday, May 8 at 10 a.m. in the Rotunda. Save the days for these rallies and legislative meetings. Details will be provided soon. FMI: Contact PARF at parfmail@parf.org.
PA Legislators See Challenge in Funding Human Services at Current Levels

On March 27 key members of the PA General Assembly involved in legislative action on the state budget updated the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) on the current status of budget considerations and described possible outcomes of the upcoming budget debates. PA Senate Appropriations Committee Majority Chairman Jake Corman (R-Centre) told CCAP that revenue will likely be available for appropriations that are above the amounts proposed by Governor Corbett. Senator Corman said if the current encouraging trends in the receipt of state revenues continue there will be some opportunity in June to do restorations. However, Senator Corman cautioned the county commissioners that the competition to obtain funding to restore any amount of the $170 million cut in human services funding currently received by the counties will be intense. In addition to the $170 million in proposed cuts to counties are $200 million proposed cuts in higher education programs and $100 million cuts proposed in basic education in addition to hundreds of millions in other health and human services spending reductions. PA Senate Minority Appropriations Committee Chairman Vince Hughes (D-Philadelphia) expressed his concerns that revenue underestimates may lead to unnecessary budget cuts. Hughes said that restoring the proposed cut is a top budget priority. PA House Minority Policy Committee Chairman Mike Sturla (D-Lancaster) was not optimistic about reversing the Governor’s proposal. Sturla opposes the cuts in county human services funding and other welfare spending cuts but said that he does not anticipate that funds will be reinstated during budget negotiations. He urged CCAP to strongly oppose the cuts. It is expected that legislators will wait until late in June before making final decisions on the FY 2012-13 Commonwealth budget. CCAP has called for implementing block grants as a pilot program and maintaining the current level of state funding for currently designated funding. CCAP also heard from the Governor’s Budget Office which maintains that the cuts are necessary because of insufficient revenues and says that the administration would work with CCAP on the Governor’s proposal. FMI: Contact PARF at parfmail@parf.org.

DPW Secretary Claims ACA to Impact PA Negatively

On March 23 Pennsylvania Secretary of Public Welfare Gary D. Alexander and U.S. Congressman Joseph Pitts held a news conference on the second anniversary of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) claiming that Pennsylvania will be impacted negatively by the health care reform law. PA DPW Secretary Alexander said that the cost of the ACA will have a dire effect on the Commonwealth’s ability to serve its most vulnerable citizens. Congressman Pitts said that the ACA requirements will grow government in a way that is detrimental to the economy. Secretary Alexander said that Pennsylvania outspends 48 other states on its Medicaid budget. Secretary Alexander also said that the implementation of the ACA will cause DPW’s future budget situations to be exponentially worse. He added that increasing enrollment and higher cost needs will leave Pennsylvania in a more critical budget situation than PA is currently experiencing. Secretary Alexander said that it is time for Washington to allow the states more flexibility to provide services. FMI: See www.dpw.state.pa.us or call 1-800-692-7462.
PA Training on Increasing Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

The Works for Me-PA Program in partnership with the Networks for Training and Development, Inc is presenting a free training session entitled “How Do I Connect with Employers.” Rob Hoffman will explore job development from a business perspective! Participants will learn key strategies that include speaking the language of the business community, approaching employers from an employer development perspective rather than a human services perspective, and building rewarding business relationships with employers to create win-win opportunities. This training opportunity will be offered in Doylestown on May 7, in Northumberland on May 9, and Pittsburgh on May 10. All sessions are to be held from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The training series is sponsored with support from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (CFDA #93.768). FMI: See the Networks’ website at http://www.networksfortraining.org for more information and to register or Contact the Networks' Registrar: Email: registrar@networksfortraining.org Phone: 610.935.6624. Fax: 610.935.6497. Toll-Free: 866.683.3651. FMI: Contact Julie Sozio, MHS (julies@networksfortraining.org), Networks for Training and Development, Inc. Training Coordinator, Phone 267.884.4244

PRA Annual Institute on April 5

Registration is still open for the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Association (PRA) Annual Institute on April 5. Register at http://parehab.org. PRA will be hosting its 2012 Professional Development Institute “Advancing Employment Strategies: The Changing Landscape” at Central Pennsylvania College, College Hill & Valley Roads, Summerdale, PA 17093. For location and directions see http://www.centralpenn.edu. The keynote address will be offered by Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Executive Director Stephen Suroviec. There will be four tracks of training subjects (Rehabilitation Ethics, Assistive Technologies, Employment Services, and General Topics). 5.75 CRC credits are offered. Registration Fee is $105 NRA/PRA Members; $125.00 Non-NRA/PRA Members; $40.00 students. Registration after deadline of Mach 23 and at the door is an additional $5.00. Fee includes breakfast, refreshments and luncheon.

BIAPA Announces Keynote Speakers for 2012 Annual Conference

The Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania (BIAPA) has announced the keynote speakers for its 2012 Annual Conference to be held June 25-26, 2012 at the Lancaster Marriott in Lancaster, PA. BIA PA has announced that Rick Parente will be the opening keynote speaker for the 2012 Conference. Parente will review current research on cognitive rehabilitation and the efficacy of training and newer treatments. Parente is Professor of Psychology at Towson University, Baltimore, MD and a licensed psychologist. Chris Kaag, the founder of the IM Able Foundation, will deliver a keynote presentation about his work with hand-cycles, racing chairs, adaptive skis and other advancements in technology. Kaag organized IM ABLE to help individuals with disabilities find the physical fitness modality that meets their needs. Pat Martino, national renowned jazz guitarist who had a severe brain aneurysm requiring neurosurgery, will address the Conference. Conference registration information will be available on April 5th. Details will be posted on the BIAPA website on April 5. FMI: For further information on Chris Kaag and IM ABLE see http://www.getupandmove.org/. For more information on Pat Martino see http://www.patmartino.com/. For BIAPA Conference details see www.biapa.org.
PA Senate Approves Resolution to Exempt PA from Individual Mandate in ACA

On March 28 the Pennsylvania Senate voted 29-19 to approve a measure to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution to exempt the state’s citizens from the individual mandate provision of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Senate Bill 10 would amend the state Constitution to prohibit Pennsylvanians from being required to obtain health insurance coverage or from being penalized for not doing so. In accord with the procedures for amending the state constitution SB 10 needs to be adopted by the PA General Assembly in two consecutive legislative sessions and then be approved by majority vote in a statewide referendum. FMI: See www.legis.state.pa.us and enter SB10. See also www.pasenategop.com.

PA House Approves Expansion of Role of Physician Assistant

On March 27 The Pennsylvania House of Representatives approved legislation by a vote of 195-1 to amend the Medical Practice Act of 1985 provisions on physician assistants and to expand the role of physician assistants. House Bill 1832 (HB 1832) is now in the state Senate. HB1832 amends the Medical Practice Act of 1985 by authorizing physician assistants to order athletic trainer referrals, as well as sign and approve physicals for daycare staff, foster care staff, and municipal and state police officers. HB 1833 makes the same changes to the Osteopathic Medical Practice Act of 1978, allowing more referrals from physician assistants. See www.legis.state.pa.us and enter HB 1832.

Joan Erney to serve as SAMHSA Director of Policy, Planning and Innovation

U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has announced that Joan Erney, J.D., has been selected to serve as the SAMSHA Director of the Office of Policy, Planning and Innovation (OPPI). Erney is currently the chief business development and public policy officer for Community Care, a not-for-profit behavioral health managed care organization headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prior to her current position, Erney was the deputy secretary for the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) for Pennsylvania for over seven (7) years. Prior to her appointment as Deputy Secretary of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, she served as the director of the OMHSAS Bureau of Operations and Quality Management, which oversees the HealthChoices program statewide. Erney helped found the Community Behavioral Healthcare Network of PA and later served as its Chief Executive Officer. Ms. Erney also spent many years as a Senior Policy Specialist at the Pennsylvania Community Providers Association. Ms. Erney has an undergraduate degree from Penn State and a law degree from Widener University School of Law. She has over 25 years of experience in the behavioral health field from direct service to state service. Ms. Erney is an ardent supporter and advocate for community-based services and community systems. FMI: See www.samhsa.gov.
U.S. Supreme Court Poses Questions on Affordable Care Act

On March 26 the U.S. Supreme Court began hearing arguments on the constitutionality of provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). In three days of questioning through March 28 the justices asked about key provisions of the ACA: the mandate that everyone must have insurance, and the expansion of Medicaid. The Court is faced with various options, ranging from upholding the entire law to overturning it completely. A decision on the cases concerning the ACA is expected to be announced near the end of the current term in the last week of June. On March 30 Supreme Court justices were to meet and it was expected that at the meeting the chief justice would lay out the case and inform the others how he will vote, and that each justice would in turn by seniority offer their own view of the case. FMI: For a review of the Court’s questions and the hearings see www.kff.org and http://healthreform.kff.org/. See also http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0312/74456_Page2.html#ixzz1qhEEG3Aj and http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/29/us-usa-court-roberts-idUSBRE82S1EE20120329.

U.S. House Approves Ryan Budget Plan

On March 29 the U.S. House of Representatives approved by a vote of 228-191 a $3.5 trillion budget plan proposed by Representative Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin). All Republican representatives voted in favor of the plan while all Democrats and ten (10) Republicans opposed it. The U.S. Senate is expected to reject the plan which would cut spending by $5.3 trillion over the next decade through cuts in entitlements and agency spending. The Ryan plan proposes cutting tax rates and revamping Medicare, Medicaid and Medicare both would be significantly cut and/or restructured. Funding for discretionary programs such as housing, education, employment, & transportation would also be cut. The Medicaid program would be cut by $810 billion over 10 years (a 33% cut) and converted to a block grant. All individuals dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid would be placed solely in the Medicare program. Medicare would become a premium-support program that would provide vouchers to purchase private insurance or the traditional Medicare program starting in FY 2023 for new beneficiaries. The Medicare guarantee would be ended. Non-Defense discretionary programs would be cut by $800 billion below the amount of the automatic spending cuts from the Budget Control Act (a near 9% cut). Social Security reforms would be considered under an expedited Congressional process as opposed to the normal process. Under the Ryan plan the health care reform law would be repealed. FMI: See www.house.gov and http://budget.house.gov/fy2012budget/.

Brain Injury Act of 2012 Introduced

On March 21 U.S. Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ-8) introduced H.R.4238, the Brain Injury Act of 2012. The bill is sponsored by Representative Todd Russell Platts (PA-19) and Representative Russ Carnahan (MO-3). The bill was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. The bill amends the Public Health Service Act to reauthorize certain programs for individuals with traumatic brain injury. It amends sections on prevention of traumatic brain injury, national program for traumatic brain injury surveillance and registries, study on traumatic brain injury, authorization of appropriations, trauma care, state grants for projects regarding traumatic brain injury, the national plan, state grants for protection and advocacy services, and interagency for trauma research. FMI: See www.house.gov.
Health Care Innovation Challenge Awards Announcement Delayed

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Innovation Center has reported that the center has received three thousand (3,000) proposal applications for the Health Care Innovation Challenge initiative. CMS said that final determinations of awards will not be made by March 30, 2012 as originally stated in the funding opportunity announcement. CMS says that the anticipated award date for this opportunity will be delayed by several weeks. MS says that no determination will be made regarding a second round of funding until the first round of awardees have been announced. FMI: Please contact the CMS Innovation Center at InnovationChallenge@cms.hhs.gov

CMS Community-Based Care Transitions Program

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently announced the second group of Community-based Care Transitions Program (CCTP) partner organizations. The goals of the CCTP are to improve transitions of beneficiaries from the inpatient hospital setting to other care settings, to improve quality of care, to reduce readmissions for high risk beneficiaries, and to document measurable savings to the Medicare program. The Pennsylvania partners include: Delaware County Office of Services for the Aging; North Philadelphia Safety Net Partnership (includes a partnership between the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, the Einstein Medical Center, and Temple University Hospital); and Western Pennsylvania Community Care Transition Program. As part of a two-year agreement with the CMS Innovation Center, the organizations will be paid a flat fee to help coordinate care for Medicare patients at high-risk for readmission after a hospital stay. The demonstration program was authorized by the Affordable Care Act. The program will provide $500 million over five years for care transition services. http://innovation.cms.gov/initiatives/Partnership-for-Patients/CCTP/index.html.

Rate of Autism Diagnoses in Children Increases

On March 29 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study indicating that the number of children identified as having an autism spectrum disorder in the United States is soaring. CDC said that an estimated one out of every 88 8-year-olds had an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in 2008, the most recent year with data available. A surveillance summary in the CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report notes that increase is a relative increase of 23% from a previous analysis of data from the same network for 2006, when the estimated prevalence was one out of 111 children, and a 73% relative increase from 2002. CDC officials said increased detection is clearly a major factor driving up the rates. CDC research is being conducted to see if genetics or environmental factors play a role. The CDC says that autism is a complex condition and there remain many unanswered questions. The study highlighted major differences in the rates of autism among states. The authors said that likely reflects how aggressively schools and health care providers diagnose the condition, not underlying disparities in the prevalence of the condition. FMI: www.cdc.gov and http://www.cdc.gov/Features/CountingAutism/.