

2018 Utah Legislative Update

Published: Wednesday, 14 March 2018 11:47

Written by: Terry Haven



The 2018 Legislative Session is over. Voices for Utah Children worked tirelessly to advocate for Utah's children and families, and we had some great wins and some painful losses. Nonetheless, Utah children and families are in a better place now than they were in January.

Health

WIN: HB12 Family Planning Services Amendments (Rep. Ward)

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- This legislation was championed by a number of Voices allies (YWCA, Utah Women's Coalition, ACLU, and Planned Parenthood) to provide family planning services to low-income individuals through Medicaid

WIN: HB325 Primary Care Network Amendments (Rep. Eliason)

- This bill will direct the Department of Health to get a waiver to expand current PCN services for adults receiving coverage from the state.

DEFEATED: SB48 Medicaid Waiting Period Amendments (Sen. Christensen)

- This legislation would have re-imposed a five-year waiting period on legal immigrant children before they could enroll in health coverage. ***Our advocacy work helped ensure this bill never got heard***

DEFEATED: SB 172 Medicaid Waiver (Sen. Hemmert)

- This bill would have done away with Medicaid's children's health benefit and EPSDT. This would have caused 2,600 parents and former foster youth to lose their health coverage. Voices defeated it in the House Health and Human Services Committee and again in the House Revenue and Taxation Committee.

LOSS: Keeping Kids Covered – 12-month continuous eligibility on Medicaid

- Rep. Ward appropriation requested wasn't prioritized high enough to receive funding this year.

LOSS: Dental hygiene check-ups for kids in public education settings

- Dental Code for use by dental professionals providing hygiene check-ups for kids in public education settings - did not get prioritized high enough to be funded for this year - but we've strengthened our relationship with a huge association of highly motivated dental hygienists!

LOSS: HB472 Medicaid Expansion Revisions (Rep. Spendlove)

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- HB472 seeks a waiver, that is highly unlikely Utah will receive from the Trump Administration. This waiver would provide Medicaid benefits to eligible individuals below 95% of the federal poverty level.

The Utah Decides Ballot Initiative is now our last hope to get Medicaid expansion done in 2018.

Early Childhood

LOSS - HB319 Early Care and Learning Coordination Amendments (Rep. Chavez-Houck)

- A priority bill to form an Early Childhood Commission for better governance and coordination among agencies offering services to Utah's youngest kids (0 to 5).

WIN - HB380 Utah School Readiness Initiative Amendments – (Rep. Last)

- With a close collaboration with United Way of Salt Lake, this bill will continue the school readiness program, Pay-for-Success. Since 2014 this has provided thousands of at-risk kids in Salt Lake county with high-quality pre-school.

WIN - SCR11 Concurrent Resolution on Awareness and Treatment of Maternal Depression and Anxiety (Sen. Zehnder)

- With the efforts of the Maternal Mental Health Coalition, this resolution energized and inspired story-sharing and education on maternal mental health.

WIN: SB161 Nurse Home Visiting Pay-for-Success Program (Sen. Escamilla)

- This legislation will fully fund the Nurse Family Partnership by putting it forward as a Pay-for-Success Program.

Juvenile Justice

WIN: HR1 House Resolution Urging Restorative Justice in Utah's Education

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System – (Rep. Sandra Hollins)

- Resolution to encourage the use of restorative justice practices in Utah schools

NOT A WIN BUT NOT A LOSS: HB132 Juvenile Justice Modifications (Rep. Snow)

- Updates to last year's big juvenile justice reform effort - we fought hard with our allies (ACLU, Libertas Institute, YWCA, Racially Just Utah) to keep the changes to a minimum. This bill gives school a limited amount of time to update their programs to comply with HB239 from 2017.

WIN: SB198 – Public School Disciplinary Action Amendments (Sen. Anderegg)

- This legislation requires the Board of Education to produce an annual report looking at law enforcement and disciplinary action in schools. This data will be helpful as we work to reduce racial disparities in school discipline and work to build a system that produces better outcomes for all kids.

Tax and Budget

NOT QUITE A WIN BUT OH SO CLOSE: HB57 Utah Intergenerational Poverty Work and Self-sufficiency Tax Credit (Rep. Westwood/Sen. Vickers)

- This bill would have created a \$6 million Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for 25,000 working families identified as being in the Intergenerational Poverty (IGP) cohort by the state Department of Workforce Services. These families, which pay tens of millions of dollars in state and local taxes every year, would have been able to keep more of what they earn with a tax credit averaging \$240 (and up to \$600 maximum). This legislation received unanimous support in both House and Senate committees, passed the House, and received a 22-4 vote on 2nd reading in the Senate. But on the final day of the session, leadership decided to leave it out of the final tax package.

NOT QUITE A WIN BUT COULD HAVE BEEN A LOSS --SCHOOL FUNDING

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- The most notable fiscal outcome of the 2018 Legislative Session was a deal between legislative leadership and education funding advocates. The compromise deal included two big choices:
 - Investing up to about \$350 million in new education funding dollars – which should move Utah up one position in the national rankings for per-pupil K-12 funding, from 50th place to 49th if it is fully implemented.
 - Shifting who pays these new dollars in a way that unfortunately more negatively impacts poor and middle class families. The Our Schools Now initiative proposal that was set aside in favor of this compromise would have raised over \$700 million mostly from an income tax increase paid by the top 20% of Utahns (those who earn over \$115,000). The compromise shifted these funds to come from more regressive gas and property tax increases.

LOSS: HB 148: House Bill 148 Tax Revisions- Sales Tax on Food (Rep. Quinn)

- Sought to eliminate the state sales tax on grocery food items (currently 1.75%) and make up for the \$88 million in lost revenue by slightly increasing the general state sales tax rate from 4.7 to 4.92%. One underappreciated benefit of this tax change would have been to shift 20% of the \$88 million, or \$17.6 million, off of state residents and onto tourists and out-of-state residents who purchase Utah exports. The bill passed the House but was killed by the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee.

WIN: Two Significant Intergenerational Poverty (IGP) bills

- HB 326 Intergenerational Poverty Initiative (Rep. Redd) establishes a one-time \$1 million grant program for local IGP initiatives.
- SB 162 Intergenerational Poverty Matching – Education Savings Plan (Sen. Vickers) establishes a \$100,000 matching grant program for IGP families that invest in a Utah Educational Savings Plan for their children's post-secondary education.

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