

2015: The Arkansas Legislative Session

Some Acts/Bills to Note

[Act 296 \(HB 1365\)](#) extended the Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Abused and Neglected Children until 2017. The Task Force was originally scheduled to expire on June 30, 2015.

[Act 46 \(SB96\)](#) extended the Medicaid expansion known as the Private Option until 2016 and created a task force to study whether it would

be maintained beyond that date.

[Act 1286 \(HB 1037\)](#) created a pilot program for kindergarten through 12th grade agriculture schools. This pilot program is to focus on career readiness for agricultural businesses and jobs.

[Act 337 \(HB 1263\)](#) created a waiver program for small school districts that would have formerly been subject to forced consolidation.



Governor Hutchison announced on May 10th that he will call a special session (May 26th) to approve a bond to support an economic development project in southern Arkansas.

All in all, most of the legislative activity in Arkansas centered around finances and cutting tax rates.

2015: The Florida Legislative Session

With this lead in to the summary of Florida's 2015 legislative session, Roy Miller of the [The Children's Campaign](#) in Florida said it all on May 1st.

"Much like a jilted high school senior on prom night, the Florida public was left sitting at home when the Florida House of Representatives stayed true to their word and "didn't dance." Regardless that taxpayers have paid for the corsages, prom dresses, tuxes, limos and dinners, the House of Representatives adjourned their session three days early—an unprecedented move that effectively killed any outstanding legislation....As foretold by The Children's Campaign and virtually every media outlet, the contentious debate between the chambers about Medicaid expansion and Low Income Pool (LIP) funding imploded. A budget has not been passed and multiple important bills were left to die....The negotiations between the Florida House and Senate were torn

apart by a \$4 billion divide in health care funding. The Senate budget included \$2.8 billion for their version of Medicaid expansion, Florida Health Insurance Affordability Exchange (FHIX) and \$2.2 billion from the federal government for LIP which funnels money to hospitals for low-income patients and is set to expire on June 30th. *Source: No "Dancing" as Session Ends with an Implosion, www.iamforkids.org, 5/1/15.*

At this point, Governor Scott is considering calling a special session on June 1st to try to resolve the differences over the positions on health care funding and to pass operating budgets for state agencies.

Before the Legislature tackles the issue in June, Governor Scott met with HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell on May 6th to outline the need for a waiver to avoid the loss of LIP funding. *"Today, I met with HHS Secretary Burwell and requested that HHS reconsider LIP funding in Florida so the Legislature has the information they need to*

develop a budget.... The federal government should not just completely cut off a federal healthcare program for low income Floridians that has been working for years.... We want the HHS Secretary to approve our LIP waiver." *Source, [Press Release](#), Gov. Scott After Meeting with HHS, 5/6/15.*

There were some bright spots in the session as several bills concerning juvenile justice, human trafficking, child welfare and child death investigations made it through.

[SB 7006](#) and [HB 7017](#) would have addressed "the health and safety of early learning environments, bringing the state in compliance with federal requirements for funding....The Office of Early Learning would conduct a pilot project to study the impact of assessing the early literacy skills of certain VPK program participants, etc." *This is the second year that the bill has failed.*



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"A Voice for Southern Children"

How to Use Public Policy Notes

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- **Compares your state to other SECA states**—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- **Brings the national scene to your fingertips** and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you... You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

This monthly newsletter is produced by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director.

SECA strives to provide non-partisan and non-biased information

that is of interest to early childhood educators. Sign up at

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From Our States

TENNESSEE



The state of Tennessee has created KidsCentraltn.com, a website that offers information on child development for parents and a link that will assist parents in finding child/family services in that state.

FLORIDA

On a Tuesday in April, children and adults descended upon the Florida State Capitol to make the case for supporting services for children. According to the IAmForKids Campaign, "**Children's Day** provided beautiful photo ops: smiling kids straining to see the historic cap-

itol, booths of service providers, and vibrant children's handprints hanging inside from the rotunda.

Underlying Children's Week this year was a significant amount of tension between service organizations vying for what they believe is right for kids. Debates about group homes vs. foster families, afterschool standards vs. childcare licensing, and the rights of homosexuals to adopt vs. the beliefs of private adoption agencies widened the divide."

WEST VIRGINIA

With the release of a report in February by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, West Virginia and the nation celebrated a reduction in the number of children who live in poverty. The report, *Measuring Access to Opportunity*, uses a new index



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(the Supplemental Poverty Measure or SPM) for measuring the effect of safety net programs and tax policies on families.

With this new index, the national rate for children in poverty has declined to 18%. The rate in **West Virginia** declined from 30% to 13% and **only 3 of the SECA states rank in the top 7 for the highest poverty rate**. California comes in at #1, with **Florida** at #4, **Louisiana** at #5 and **Georgia** at #6.