

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

September 20, 2021

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FEDERAL

Congress

Both the Senate and the House will be in session this week.

House Energy & Commerce (E&C) Committee will host an [oversight committee hearing](#) on Wednesday, September 22 at 9:30am (CST) dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on children. Because this is an oversight committee, there is no specific legislation the committee will be considering, but it is a prime opportunity to inform Congress of the perfect storm pediatric providers are facing with the Delta strain of COVID-19 impacting children, coupled with an early spike in other respiratory illnesses, a growing crisis in mental health and a serious staffing shortage across the nation. Recommendations will be made by the testifiers to ascertain public policy efforts that exist today that need to be considered, likely in the Reconciliation bill, e.g. a robust increase to Children's Hospital Graduate Medical Education (CHGME) funding to increase the pediatric pipeline and an investment in pediatric mental health infrastructure, to name a few. Those asked to testify before the committee are-

Lee Savio Beers, M.D., F.A.A.P.
President
American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Arthur Evans Jr., Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer
American Psychological Association (APA)

Margaret G. Rush, M.D.
President
Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt

Kelly Danielpour
Founder of VaxTeen

Tracy Beth Høeg, M.D., Ph.D.
Epidemiologist and Public Health Expert
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Research Associate
University of California, Davis

Speaking of the Reconciliation package, named the *Build Back Better Act*, the House committee markups are complete and the House Budget Committee is expected (maybe this week) to build one large bill for the House to consider. The process of Reconciliation is executed to achieve simple majority passage on a package, requiring party lines to stick together to pass/combat the advancement. Over the last week, we have begun to hear potential cracks in the Democrats unity, specifically related to how to pay for the nearly \$4 billion package. The major provisions related to children's health are:

- A permanent extension of funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Mandating that all states provide 12-month continuous eligibility to children under Medicaid
- Extensive investments in maternal health

An even more pressing deadline in Congress is related to the budget. Congress must pass a comprehensive budget (or short-term patch called a continuing resolution or CR) by Sept. 30 to avoid a government shutdown. Over the course of the next 10 days, we will likely see the House craft a CR to extend current spending limits through the first week of December (rumored to be Dec. 3) until a more robust package with new spending limits can be negotiated. You may see attempts to add the debt ceiling increase to a CR, but attempts to do so will be highly volatile. Congress has a few more weeks before they need to address raising the debt-ceiling to avoid defaulting on payments.

STATE

Nebraska Legislature

The Nebraska Legislature is officially a nonpartisan Unicameral but everyone is increasingly aware of the party lines during a contentious process known as redistricting. With the U.S. Census data from 2020, a special Redistricting Committee of 9 state senators led by Chairwoman Lou Ann Linehan (R-Dist. 39, Elkhorn) are required to equally draw districts based on where the people now reside in this state. There has been a known pull from rural to urban, which is challenged by the rural senators, but there is also a highly contested Congressional District 2 (CD2) in Omaha that has the 32 Republicans and 17 Democrats in the Legislature in a stand still.

After countless hours in public hearings, the Legislature held a debate Friday centered on CD2 and the question of whether counties such as Douglas and Sarpy should be split. The plan that was filibustered would have sent portions of northwestern Douglas County into the 1st District, represented by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of Lincoln, while matching most of Omaha with Sarpy County and rural Saunders County in the 2nd District, represented by Rep. Don Bacon. The alternative Democratic plan would have further split Sarpy County while keeping all of Douglas County in the 2nd District.

So it is back to the drawing board and a delayed start on Monday so senators can find compromise and begin debate on another proposed map. They must conclude their special session by Sept. 30, but they will likely need to offer their proposal to the Governor by Sept. 24 to allow time for a veto override vote.

As this process plays on, critical work is being done to prepare for next year's legislative session which begins Jan. 4, 2022. Last week, Dr. Mel St. Germain and Dr. Ann Anderson-Berry testified before the Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee on:

- [LR221](#), Senator Vargas- Interim study to examine maternal and infant mortality and morbidity; and
- [LR142](#), Senator Cavanaugh- Interim study to determine whether legislation should be enacted to provide for additional supports and further address the issue of maternal depression in Nebraska.

Focusing on the family, specifically the mother's needs, will have a last impact on the children in Nebraska. Children's offered our expertise on how to adopt best practices to ensure screening is an essential tool that all providers are using together.

The following day, Mike Vance testified before the HHS Committee on [LR143](#), Senator Stinner's interim study to examine the mental and behavioral health needs of Nebraskans, assess the shortages of providers, and determine what is needed to ensure an adequate behavioral health service delivery system. Children's is committed to addressing the crisis in children, teens and adolescents are facing today with mental health. Mike offered insight to Children's full scale solution to focusing on prevention all the way through crisis situations, asking for an investment in children to make a difference for our state.

You can livestream the public hearings and live debate at www.nebraskalegislature.gov.

Executive Branch

On Monday, September 20, Governor Pete Ricketts (R-NE) announced the state will renew the statewide hospital capacity COVID-19 dashboard- updating the data Monday through Friday, county-by-county. The renewal was considered by Dr. Anthonie and the Governor as Nebraska hit their 10 percent threshold of COVID-19 capacity in hospitals.

(Sources: CHA, E&C Committee, Congress.gov, Nebraska Legislature, World Herald, Peetz & Co.)