



# LEGISLATIVE *Update*

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## SEANC Stands Up for Autistic Children

In a recent House Insurance Committee meeting, SEANC lobbyists spoke in favor of HB 498, the “Mandate Autism Health Insurance Coverage” bill, which would require the State Health Plan and some other health insurance plans to provide coverage for autism spectrum disorders.

The bill passed the N.C. House with an overwhelming 105 votes in its favor, but unfortunately has not been heard in the Senate – primarily because State Treasurer Janet Cowell opposes it, according to statements and conversations between SEANC lobbyists and State Health Plan officials.

Cowell’s opposition and the bill’s failure could hurt military bases in North Carolina during the next Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round. Because current North Carolina law fails to provide health insurance coverage for Applied Behavior Analysis therapy (ABA), the U.S. Marine Corps has issued a directive allowing military families needing ABA therapy for their autistic children to decline orders to North Carolina.

Since South Carolina and Virginia have large military facilities and have legislation for ABA, North Carolina could be at a major competitive disadvantage in claiming to be “military friendly” during the next round of BRAC base closures, thus jeopardizing military, civil service and military contract jobs. Currently 32 other states provide ABA coverage for autistic children.

Costs to the State Health Plan to provide this benefit were included in the House budget and range from .036 to .2 percent of total claims which would equal approximately 16 cents per month per member, a drop in the bucket for a \$2.7 billion plan. SEANC strongly urges Cowell and the State Health Plan Board of Trustees to support this bill.

### SEANC Members Lobby Senators for Children’s Smiles

This week about 25 Department of Health and Human Services’ dental hygienists took time off from work to meet with N.C. Senators in an effort to educate lawmakers about the valuable preventative dental services that they provide statewide to students in high risk areas.

Governor McCrory’s and the N.C. House’s budgets contain funding for the dental hygienists who travel around the state providing dental sealants, fluoride mouthrinse and dental screenings to children.

The Senate budget proposal cuts the DHHS Oral Health section, a move that would stop preventative dental services and the dental hygienists that provide them. Instead, Senators propose to transfer \$1.6 million or about



Nancy Ferguson Brown of Morganton urging Sen. Warren Daniel (R-Burke) to support preventative dental services provided by the DHHS Oral Health Section dental hygienists in the budget at the N.C. General Assembly.

\$40,000 per county to local health departments to hire clinical dental hygienists—who drill and fill cavities, but do not provide preventative services.

Currently less than half of N.C. counties have local dental clinics meaning that 51 counties would not even be eligible for this funding. [Check out this map to see if your county would have dental services should Oral Health be cut.](#) The net result is that the 39 dental hygienists who travel the state to provide services would lose their jobs, high risk children will lose preventative dental care, and half the state would be without oral health services. In these tough economic times, many parents desperately need preventative dental services for their children provided by a public service so that they can afford to put food on the table.

SEANC will continue to press lawmakers to maintain funding for the DHHS Oral Health Section and preventative dental services as the House and Senate negotiate the differences between their two budgets.

### **SEANC Continues to Urge Senators to Keep Politics Out of Public Service**

SEANC General Counsel Tom Harris and Legislative Director Ardis Watkins continued to meet N.C. Senators concerning the State Personnel Act rewrite bill, HB 834. We expect this bill to move next week. SEANC is hopeful that the bill's harmful provisions will ultimately be removed.

### **General Assembly May Not Complete Budget by July 1**

Word is that the state budget may not be ready by the July 1 deadline—the start of the new fiscal year. If that's the case, a continuing resolution will be necessary to keep state government operating. The budget holdup is due to tax bills which have not been completed and the final tax bill will determine how much revenue is available for the budget.

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*The SEANC Legislative Update is published when the N.C. General Assembly is in session by SEANC's Legislative Affairs Department. For more information, contact Legislative Affairs Director Ardis Watkins at [awatkins@seanc.org](mailto:awatkins@seanc.org).*