

September 04, 2012 - Capitol Desk

Support Fades for Healthy Families

by David Gorn

The Legislature never had a chance to hear arguments in favor of reinstating the Healthy Families program. The last day of the legislative session came and went on Friday with no movement on the two bills that would have reversed the planned conversion of nearly 880,000 children from Healthy Families to Medi-Cal managed care plans.

A statement from the California Children's Health Coverage Coalition -- a collection of six children's advocacy groups in California -- said lawmakers missed a chance to restore a successful program and save money for California.

"[The coalition] considers the end of session developments as a huge loss for California children, a missed opportunity to secure the \$200 million in badly needed revenues from the Managed Care Organization (MCO) assessment and to delay or stop the pending transition of children from the Healthy Families Program to Medi-Cal," the statement said.

The coalition didn't endorse the two bills, but has been a longtime supporter of some of the legislation's goals.

The two bills before the Legislature last week were **SB 301** by Senate member Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord) and **AB 826** by Assembly member Sandré Swanson (D-Alameda). They would have restored the Healthy Families program and extended the managed care organization tax, worth about \$200 million to California.

The governor proposed different legislation to restore the MCO tax, **AB 1469** (Budget Committee), but that legislation also failed Friday.

The coalition lamented the loss of the tax and the program, but the statement also said all of the children's advocacy groups would work to ensure a smooth transition.

"We continue to have strong concerns about the stretched pediatric, dental and specialty care provider networks if the transition goes forward as planned in the budget," the statement said.

"Now that the legislative session has ended, we will continue to push for continuation of the MCO assessment and a delay of the Healthy Families program transition until we are assured every child will have the needed access to care. We will continue our work with the state to plan and prepare for a responsible transition."

The elimination of the Healthy Families program begins Jan. 1, 2013 with the first phase of the conversion -- moving approximately 415,000 children to Medi-Cal managed care plans during the first month. The balance of approximately 465,000 children will be moved into managed care over the following 12 months