

**FIRST CANDLE/SIDS ALLIANCE
MONTHLY PUBLIC POLICY REPORT
DECEMBER 2003**

Following a flurry of legislative activity in October and November, the first session of the 108th Congress came to a close on December 9th. Prior to adjourning, members passed a landmark Medicare reform bill that established a prescription drug benefit for seniors. Congress was unable, however, to complete work on an omnibus appropriations package that includes seven of the thirteen appropriations bills for fiscal year 2004.

The Medicare reform legislation, officially known as the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act¹, was signed into law by President Bush on December 8th. This highly contentious and controversial legislation does the following:

- Establishes a prescription drug benefit for Medicare beneficiaries beginning in 2006. In the interim, seniors will be offered a discount card for prescriptions that will provide a savings of approximately 10 - 15 percent.
- Eliminates a 4.5% cut in provider reimbursements in 2004 and an additional cut in 2005. Instead, physicians would receive a 1.5% increase in 2004 and 2005.
- Increases payments for outpatient services and hospital care.
- Establishes new benefits for preventive care services.
- Establishes tax deferred Health Savings Accounts for medical expenses.
- Speeds generic drugs to market by limiting the ability of pharmaceutical companies to block cheaper alternatives.
- Increases Part B premiums for beneficiaries making over \$80,000.

Because Congress was unable to complete action on the seven outstanding appropriations measures for FY04, all federal agencies and departments without an enacted funding bill (including the Department of Health and Human Services) are currently operating under a continuing resolution that level funds all programs through January 31st.

The House and Senate will reconvene for the second session of the 108th Congress on Tuesday, January 20th. Following a cloture vote on the omnibus appropriations bill in the Senate, members will assemble in the House chamber for President Bush's State of the Union address.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 2003:

- Monitored the Federal Register and the Congressional Record for items of interest to First Candle/SIDS Alliance.
- Continued working to ensure that First Candle/SIDS Alliance priorities are included in the final FY 2004 appropriations bills, including the incorporation of Stillbirth research into the legislative priorities for FY 2004 as part of the expanded mission of First Candle.
- Reported on the FY 2004 omnibus appropriations bill.
- Continued to correspond with Senate Fritz Hollings (D-SC) on the Death Scene Protocol Demonstration Projects at the CDC.
- Worked with First Candle/SIDS Alliance to reinvigorate the Public Policy Committee and set agenda for the coming year.
- Scheduled and attended meetings with key congressional offices regarding First Candle/SIDS Alliance priorities.
- Corresponded with Senator Edward Kennedy's (D-MA) office on S. 1833, a bill to improve the health of minority individuals.
- Continued preparation and planning for the First Candle Spring 2004 Day on the Hill, including correspondence with Senator Rick Santorum's office (R-PA).
- Began preparation for the FY 2005 appropriations process, including drafting letters requesting to testify before the Senate and House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittees during public witness testimony.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE COMING MONTHS:

- Continue to monitor and report on the legislative and funding priorities of First Candle/SIDS Alliance included in the FY 2004 appropriations bills.
- Continue to work with the offices of Senator Fritz Hollings (D-SC) and Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA), regarding First Candle/SIDS Alliance priorities.
- Schedule and prepare for key meetings including appropriate Hill staff and Federal officials.
- Continue working with the Public Policy Committee for greater community involvement, specifically setting agenda and logistics for Spring 2004 Day on the Hill.
- Continue to work with First Candle/SIDS Alliance on incorporating the expanded mission of research in the areas of stillbirth and miscarriage into its legislative priorities for FY 2004/2005.

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