

# March of Dimes

April 2003

## Advocacy Update *from the Office of Government Affairs*



### USPS Says No Postal Rate Increase Until 2006

On April 2, the U.S. Senate approved the “Postal Civil Service Retirement System Funding Reform Act of 2003” (S. 380) and an identical bill was approved by the House of Representatives on April 3. The measure is now awaiting the President’s signature.

S. 380 establishes a new payment schedule for contributions to the United States Postal Service (USPS) retirement fund, resulting in a projected savings of \$2.9 billion in FY03 and \$2.6 billion in FY04. The Postmaster General and CEO, John Potter, has testified that these savings will allow the Postal Service to cancel the 10% rate increase con-

templated for 2004 and will generate savings sufficient to delay the next postal rate increase until 2006. The last time the postal service increased rates for non-profits, 2001, the increase added approximately \$625,000 to direct mail costs—and totaled even more when other mailing costs are taken into account.

### Prematurity Campaign Partners at Work

On March 31, Dr. Marina L. Weiss, March of Dimes Sr. Vice President of Public Policy & Government Affairs, spoke as part of a panel at the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Annual Legislative Workshop. Dr. Weiss joined Dr. Duane

Alexander, Director of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes for Health and Kate Winkler, Appropriations Associate in the Office of Representative Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.). Panel members discussed federal funding of women’s health research. Dr. Weiss described the Prematurity Campaign, highlighting the Campaign’s advocacy strategy and activities. She emphasized the need for an increase in federal funding of \$50 million over the next 5 years to support NICHD’s research related to prematurity. ACOG members then visited their Senators and Members of Congress to lobby on behalf of several issues, including the funding increase for NICHD.



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## National Birth Defects Prevention Study

For more than six years, scientists at the ten regional Centers for Birth Defects Research and Prevention have collaborated on the National Birth Defects Prevention Study. Sufficient cases and controls have been collected to create a large database for use by other researchers.

The ten Centers are located in Arkansas, California, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas and Utah are funded by the National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However, un-

less Congress approves additional federal funding, CDC support of the centers in New Jersey and New York will end September 1, 2003.

All regional Centers are participating in the National Birth Defects Prevention Study, one of the largest case-control studies of birth defects ever conducted. The study involves the following activities:

- Identifying infants with major birth defects (each Center conducts at least 400 interviews per year);
- Interviewing mothers about their medical history, environmental exposures, and lifestyle;
- Collecting cheek swabs

from infants and parents to study gene-environment interactions; and,

- Establishing a specimen bank to store biologic samples for future study.

This study will provide the nation a continuing source of information on potential causes of birth defects and will serve as a means for identifying new substances in the environment that are harmful to developing babies.

The March of Dimes continues to lead the advocacy effort

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## Virginia Extends Sales Tax Exemption for Non-Profits

On February 22, Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner (D) signed into law a bill that grandfathers all current non-profit sales tax exemptions and creates an explicit list of criteria for organizations renewing exemptions. The Virginia March of Dimes led the advocacy effort to obtain this change in law which protects the Foundation's sales tax exemption until July 1, 2004 at which point the state Tax Department will automatically extend the exemption until 2008 when all health charity exemptions will be reviewed by the Tax Department.

The Chapter began working on this issue in 2001 when the legislature revised the sales tax ex-

emption process for non-profit organizations by instituting an annual application requirement. Simultaneously the General Assembly called for a review of the state tax code, creating an opportunity for the March of Dimes and other non-profit organizations to establish a committee of advocates interested in working together to protect and improve non-profit tax exemptions. Recommendations from the committee were turned into a bill introduced in the 2003 legislative session. The March of Dimes lobbied the Assembly and Senate Finance Committees, focusing on the advantages of establishing a system that grants multi-year exemption periods.

### Public Affairs Training Calls

Throughout the year the Office of Government Affairs hosts Public Affairs training calls. These professional development opportunities are available to Chapter public affairs staff and other interested individuals. The next training call is scheduled for May 8 and will focus on creating and maintaining "advocacy networks."

## New PeriStats Feature

The March of Dimes PeriStats interactive data web site offers a new mapping feature that can be used as a resource for March of Dimes public affairs activities. Maps of the states and counties can be created to display local statistics including the percentage of uninsured women and children, the number of preterm births and other PeriStats data. Two types of maps are available: maps that compare the chosen indicator across all states (or counties within a state) and maps that measure how well states (or counties) are performing against the relevant Healthy People 2010 Objective. The maps are ex-

cellent visual tools and can be copied and pasted into other documents such as Microsoft Power Point and Word.

How can the PeriStats mapping feature be used to support advocacy activities?

- County data displayed on a map can strengthen talking points by showing individual state legislators the health status of constituents in their district as compared to the rest of the state.

- Maps provide up-to-date and compelling visuals that can be used in testimony, fact sheets, and

other documents used to communicate with groups of decision-makers.

Please let your Regional Director of Public Affairs and the Office of Government Affairs staff know how you are using this new resource and whether you find it helpful. PeriStats is available at [www.marchofdimes.com/peristats](http://www.marchofdimes.com/peristats). Instructions for the mapping feature appear in a box on the opening page.

## Utah Exempts Non-Profits in Do-Not-Call Bill

On March 21, Utah Gov. Michael Leavitt (R) signed the Telephone and Facsimile Solicitation Act into law, with an exemption for charities obtained through effective advocacy by the Utah Chapter. The legislation originally introduced in the state Senate included guidelines for establishing and maintaining a state do-not-call registry and applied those guidelines to all organizations including charities. Had the Chapter not obtained an exemption for non-profit organizations, the law would have imposed a fine on charities such as March of Dimes if they or their contractors called individuals whose names were on the registry.

In addition, the Foundation would have had to pay an annual fee to help support the registry.

Chapter public affairs volunteers and staff met with the bill sponsor and obtained a commitment to amend the bill and thereby exempt non-profits from its restrictions. Through meetings with other key members of the committee the Chapter expanded the number of legislators supporting the exemption. The Chapter then worked with Members of the Senate committee of jurisdiction to obtain approval for the exemption saving the March of Dimes and other non-profit organizations significant fund raising costs.

### Senate Approves CARE Act

After a two year effort, on April 9, the U.S. Senate approved the "Charity Aid, Recovery, and Empowerment Act," (CARE Act) by a vote of 95-5. The CARE Act includes several important tax provisions designed to stimulate new charitable giving.

The next step is for a similar bill to be introduced and considered by the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Office of Government Affairs is working closely with the White House and several March of Dimes Chapters to obtain congressional approval of this important legislation.

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to ensure that these Centers have resources they need to support birth defects related research. For FY04, the March of Dimes is recommending that Congress increase the annual funding for the regional Centers from \$6.3 million to \$16.3 million per year.

**From the March of Dimes Data Book  
for Policy Makers...**

What percent of hospital stays for preterm and low birthweight infants were financed by Medicaid in 2000?

What percent of infant and child hospital stays due to birth defects did Medicaid cover in 2000?

This fact—and more—is found in the 2003 Data Book.

The *Advocacy Update* delivers legislative news about March of Dimes issues on a monthly basis.

Editor:  
Christina F. Manero

If you have questions or comments about the *Advocacy Update*, contact:

**March of Dimes  
Birth Defects Foundation  
Office of Government Affairs  
1146 19th Street, N.W.  
6th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Telephone: (202) 659-1800  
Fax: (202) 296-2964**

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*Office of Government Affairs*  
1146 19th Street, N.W., 6th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20036