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## Quinn signs bill to fund child care

Lawmakers 'very close' on Medicaid pact, Feigenholtz says

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By Alissa Groeninger, Chicago Tribune reporter

SPRINGFIELD — Cuts to child care services for low-income families will be averted under legislation Gov. Pat Quinn signed only hours after the Senate approved it Friday.

But even as Quinn and lawmakers fill a hole in the budget year that's nearly done, they remain under pressure to make major cuts in health care for the poor and possibly raise the cigarette tax to balance a spending plan they need to [pass](#) soon.

Quinn had threatened cuts when the state ran low on money to support the more than 40,000 Illinois child care locations through June 30, the end of the current budget year. Later, the governor he said he would shift \$73 million from untapped health care [funds](#) if legislators went along.

On Friday, the Senate voted 46-0 for the bill the House already had passed. The measure also authorized more money to [pay](#) down approximately \$300 million in overdue bills once federal matching funds come in the door, said Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, the House sponsor.

The move came as Quinn and lawmakers are trying to come together on a solution to help close what the governor pegs as a \$2.7 billion shortfall in health care for the poor in the new budget.

Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, said lawmakers are "very close to a final agreement" on that all-important Medicaid piece of the equation that the rest of the budget hinges on. She said hospitals, nursing homes, pharmacies, doctors and other health care groups are expected to see rate cuts of "around 3 percent," potentially less for so-called safety-net hospitals that deal with large numbers of the state's most vulnerable residents. The plan also will lay the groundwork for long-term rate reform for hospitals and nursing homes, Feigenholtz said.

The state is moving toward reining in the number of people eligible for Medicaid and making changes that range from limiting the number of prescriptions that can be filled to requiring more proof from applicants that they belong in the healthcare program.

Feigenholtz and Sen. Donne Trotter, a Chicago Democrat and budget expert, said they are prepared to back a \$1-a-pack increase on smokes to avert deep cuts in [education](#) and other social services. But Republican support is less certain.

Also Friday, Senate Democrats outlined a framework for an overall budget that they said would cut nearly every area of state spending except for money for elementary [schools](#). Sen. John Sullivan, D-Rushville, said they want to pay off another \$1.3 billion in backlogged bills by dipping into special purpose funds that range from fees associated with landfills to optometry.

But Republican Sen. Matt Murphy of Palatine said money swept from other funds is a fake way to balance the budget. Murphy said such an approach could lead to a permanent tax increase instead of the temporary income-tax hike Democrats approved in January 2011.

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