Edwardspushes women’s cancer screening program

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

State efforts to get a $3.5 million federal grant to underwrite cancer screening for poor women are back on track after Gov. Edwin Edwards intervened to guarantee $115,000 in budget support to the new program.

In breathing new life into the program, Edwards overrode a decision made by his Commissioner of Administration Raymond Laborde. Laborde had torpedoed the idea, saying he was not willing to commit the state to further reliance on federal Medicaid funds and launch a new program at a time of state budget crisis. But the vice chairman of the Louisiana Health Care Authority, Fran Bussie, appealed to Edwards.

“Gov. Edwards said he would find the money for the public health grant to do breast and cervical screening. It may be a reality now,” Bussie said.

Office of Public Health Assistant Secretary Larry Hebert said Edwards’ letter guaranteeing the state funding accompanied the application for federal funding.

Hebert said Edwards did not identify a source of funding.
Laborde said he does not know where he is going to find the money. “It’s a new program. There were no new programs funded this year,” Laborde said.

Earlier, Laborde said the departments of Health and Hospitals and Social Services were facing a potential $168 million shortfall in federal payments from one federal program.

If the grant application is approved, the state will get $3.5 million for a program that would provide breast and cervical cancer screening for poor women.

The grant application had been supported by the private medical sector and the Louisiana Health Care Authority.

The authority originally thought it could authorize the use of Medicaid funds to pay for mammography screening, thereby providing the state portion of the required matching funds.

However, DHH Undersecretary John Futrell said that, under state-approved Medicaid rules, mammography can be used only for diagnostic purposes.