

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE GATES PORTAL

Budget Break Week



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

The joint budget hearings were held on one day, Tuesday, January 20th. As scheduled only seven agency commissioners presented their agency's budget requests as recommended by the Governor. On the health side was an unexpected and quickly becoming an unpopular recommendation to cut all health benefits for school cafeteria workers and bus drivers to slash \$135 million deficit in the State Health Benefit Plan. Since this impacts every school district and around 11,500 people, House and Senate members are very concerned about how this will play out back home. Senator Jack Hill, Senate Appropriations Chairman (R-Reidsville), whose father also served in the State Senate and was the School Bus Drivers Association Director, will find a way to restore this cut. This just means they will spend time finding hidden money to ensure that part-time school employees retain full health coverage but probably not much time looking for creative funding for other programs.

For the first time the House subcommittees began meeting Wednesday morning January 21st to deliberate over the [Amended FY 2015](#). Since there were few changes purposed there was more policy talk then budget. Legislators wanted to know how the various programs were functioning. The House subcommittees held public hearings Wednesday and then heard from agency officials both Wednesday and Thursday. It is expected the House Appropriations committee will pass out the Amended FY 2015 by the end of this week and move it on to the Senate for consideration the first week of February - truly the fastest in two decades.

During the Joint Human Resources subcommittee hearings Executive Director Greg Schmieg gave his overview of the Amended FY 2015

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Special
Announcements



**GATES Board
of Directors
Meeting**

February 6, 2015

Location:

**Goodwill of
Middle GA -
Anderson
Conference
Center**

10:00 AM

State Use

budget that focused on further funding toward Warm Springs. While the transition to the new entity under the Board of Regents has gone well, they are still operating under a deficit due to a cut in federal payments and needed another nearly \$1.4 million. These funds are not reflected in the FY 2016 budget. He was asked by a new member of the committee, Rep. Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson) about \$71,809 transferred from Administration to Vocational Rehabilitation. Director Schmiege explained this money could be moved to pull down more of the federal match, however it was still very far from the full funding allocation to Georgia by the federal formula. Rep. Benton went on to ask what a fully funded GVRA would require. Director Schmiege explained the match formula and that \$8.5 million would be needed in additional state funding to match the \$32 million available to Georgia in federal vocational rehabilitation funding. This provides an exceptional opportunity when the [FY 2016](#) public hearings occur to talk about fully funding GVRA.

The Governor gave a very brief overview to the Joint Committee on Thursday January 22nd. He started his budget address by focusing on the Criminal Justice Reform accomplishments adding \$5 million to Drug, Mental Health and Accountability Courts in the FY 2016 budget. He stated it was critical to get those who are incarcerated the skills that employers truly need; therefore, recommending funds for GED preparation and completion, diesel mechanics, and welding vocational programs in state prisons. He also touched on K-12 education but the funds were only allocated to restore previous cuts and comply with enrollment.

The legislature will return for Monday, January 26th for the fifth day of the session and is scheduled to be in session until Thursday this week. Most committee meetings this week will be organizational in nature to set the rules of the committee and meeting schedules. The House Appropriations Subcommittees are set to meet early Tuesday morning to pass out their recommendations.

Legislation

There is currently only one bill of interest that has been assigned to committee but it will take another full week before most legislation can be taken up in their assigned committees.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Insurance Coverage [\(SB 1\)](#) by Senator Charlie Bethel (R-Dalton). This is the same bill as last year to provide specialized treatment for children under six up to \$35,000 per policyholder annually. The Senate is very committed to passing this bill yet the House leadership is still resistant due to the cost. The bill has been assigned to the *Senate Insurance and Labor Committee* chaired by Senator Bethel.

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Council
March 26, 2015
Location: Sloppy
Floyd Twin
Towers, Capitol
Square
10:00 AM

Working
Wonders
Recognition
Luncheon
March 26, 2015
Location: Empire
Room Sloppy
Floyd Twin
Towers
Noon

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