

## News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



# THE GATES PORTAL

## Session 2012: Fast and Furious



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

We begin this week on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 2012 legislative session. What is most amazing is we have a calendar ([HR 1238](#)) through March 12<sup>th</sup>, scheduled to be the 31<sup>st</sup> day. At this pace, faster than we have seen in nearly a decade, the session could be finished before April. Both the House and Senate will be back on the floor by 1pm on Monday and work through Thursday. Only taking a Friday break this week.

The House completed the Amended FY 2012 Budget on Friday passing it out and onto the Senate with very few changes. All the 2% cuts to agencies and contracts were maintained. While the budget has a small 1% increase in revenue over the original amount most of it is dedicated to the mid-year education and Medicaid adjustments for enrollment. The Senate has been holding committee meetings simultaneously on the Amended Budget and we can expect a conference committee by mid February. The House will begin working on the full FY 2013 Budget this next week. Budget documents can be found at the [House Budget and Research Office](#) and the [Senate Budget and Evaluation Office](#). Just look for link to the Budget Documents.

The fastest movement has been [HB 831](#) sponsored by Rep. Tom McCall (R-Elberton) to move the Division of Rehabilitation Services from the Department of Labor (DOL) to the Department of Human Services (DHS). The bill was introduced Tuesday, Jan 31<sup>st</sup> and assigned to the House Human Relations & Aging Committee. It was given a public hearing late Thursday afternoon. Rep. McCall along with Commissioner Reese of the GA Department of Human Resources presented the bill explaining the legislation and the goal by DHS of

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### Special Announcements



**ARMS Meeting**  
April 20, 2012  
Location: Tommy Nobis Center  
1480 Bells Ferry Rd  
Marietta, GA

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maximizing resources and bringing a synergy of the other programs managed by DHS to focus on employment and aggregate needs for all support services. DOL Commissioner Mark Butler presented in opposition to the move emphasizing his commitment to employment for people with disabilities by him and his team as well as providing people equal treatment in all employment goals. DOL staff and individuals with disabilities also testified against moving VR into DHS. One area of concern by committee members was the loss of \$62 million in VR funding without pulling down all available federal dollars. Unfortunately no one made a commitment in whatever location VR resides to maximize state funding to fully draw down federal dollars. The Committee tabled the bill.

The GATES Board discussed [HB831](#) in great detail at their Board meeting on Friday, February 3. The external discussions surrounding this legislation have become very emotionally charged. GATES has not taken a position on this legislation. Per the Board discussion on Friday, GATES objective is to have Voc Rehab where it can best serve and provide the most resources for Georgians with Disabilities. GATES will continue to monitor the debate and be a part of the process as it moves forward.

**HB 831 is scheduled for another public hearing on Monday, February 6<sup>th</sup> at 4pm in Room 515 LOB.**

Additional pieces of legislation of interest at this time moving through the process include the following. A bill sponsored by Rep. Ed Setzler (R-Acworth) would require legislative approval of all provider rates and funding formulas for services under the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities ([HB 787](#)). The bill has been assigned to the House Appropriations Committee.

There are several pieces of legislation requiring drug testing for individuals seeking benefits from TANF, to Medicaid to Unemployment. The first bill to get a hearing will be [SB 292](#) sponsored by Senator Albers (R-Roswell) that would require TANF and Medicaid recipients to be drug tested. Several national studies have proven that drug testing of individuals is more costly to administer and creates more barriers to services when families are already under stress from their current economic circumstances.

Look for more legislation of this type to pop-up as we move quickly through the 2012 session.

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## GATES

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