

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE GATES PORTAL

Weather Does Not Delay Session



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA
February 25, 2015

Session highlights

The legislature will be in session Monday-Thursday this week marking Monday, March 2nd as the 24th day of the 40-day session. Last week the House completed the FY 2016 budget and the Senate began its work Friday by hearing from all the agency officials on the Governor's recommendations for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2015. Due to the unpredictable winter weather many committee meetings were cancelled and no new legislation of interest was introduced. A few bills were considered and the budget moved along.

Budget Update

The House heard loud and clear from GATES members the need for additional state funds in the FY 2016 Budget (HB 76) and placed \$900,000 investment to match federal 110 dollars for a total of \$4.5 million in the VR Division toward training and employment supports. Thank you all. Our advocacy is working and now we must concentrate on the Senate.

The Senate Human Development Subcommittee of Appropriations heard from agency officials Friday morning. Executive Director Greg Schmiege did a good job outlining the need for the additional \$900,000. Senator Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome) commented that the federal match was one

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Special
Announcements



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

**Working
Wonders
Recognition**

of the highest available of state-federal share programs. He asked Director Schmieg how much more was needed to fully pull down all funds allocated to Georgia. Schmieg explained with this investment we would be a little more than \$6 million toward our goal. The committee may take public comment next week but there will be a shorter notice of this opportunity than we had in the House.

Legislation Round-up

Senate Bills

The **Autism Spectrum Disorder Insurance Coverage (SB 1)** has been assigned to the House Insurance Committee where it has met with strong opposition in the past.

Senator Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta) bill [SB 2](#) helps **high school students seeking a vocational education in a technical college** to be awarded a high school diploma to assist with their educational achievements at a younger age. The Senate passed the bill February 3, 2015 by a vote of 56-0 and it is assigned to the House Education Committee.

Senator Greg Kirk (R-Americus) first bill [SB 53](#) just extends a sunset clause from last year's bill to grant authority to authorize a "1013" by a **Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)** to evaluate and recommended involuntary commitment for a person in mental health or substance abuse crisis to a longer term inpatient status. This bill passed the House 134-23 on February 25th. Because there is a sunset clause of March 15th granting this authority to LPCs the Governor is likely to sign the bill in early March.

Senator Donzella James (D-Atlanta) is sponsoring [SB 57](#) to required **motorized wheelchairs** and scooters that operate on public sidewalks and other roadways to be equipped with reflectors. This bill awaits consideration in the Senate Public Safety Committee.

The Governor's Task Force on Blind and Visually Impaired Persons is a bill to "investigate how state services and initiatives can be developed or improved for blind and visually impaired persons" and provide a report by November 1st each year to the Governor recommending specific legislation. The bill ([SB 66](#)) sponsored by Senator Lester Jackson (D-Savannah) was reviewed by the Senate Health and Human Services Committee (Senate HHS) on Thursday, February 19th. The committee asked Senator Jackson to make some changes to the bill to include the report going to the House and Senate Health and Human Services committee chairs and including any recommendations for policy changes. Due to the threat of severe winter weather the Senate HHS committee was cancelled, the bill could be considered this Tuesday.

House Bills

Rep. Brooks Coleman (R-Duluth) who chairs the House Education Committee is sponsoring a bill to **eliminate the Georgia High School**

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

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Graduation Test. [HB 91](#) has several key legislative co-sponsors such as House Appropriations Chairman Terry England (R-Auburn). It also provides for previous students who did not pass the graduation test to ask to be granted a high school diploma. It appears this bill could be very beneficial for students with learning and development disabilities. The bill passed the House Floor by a vote of 172-0 on Thursday, Feb 12th and has been assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee.

House members have attempted to create a version of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act by introducing bills to allow **employees to use sick leave to care for family members**. This year Rep. Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson) and several others in a bi-partisan effort have again put their support behind [HB 92](#). The bill awaits review by the House Industry and Labor Committee. No change in the status of this bill since introduced.

Rep. Al Williams (D-Midway) and a few other Democratic House members are sponsoring the **Georgia Fair Pay Act** in [HB 151](#). The bill would require state agencies to pay their vendors within 30 days or pay 12 percent per annum interest on the amount. The bill directs the state accounting office to establish rules and regulations to handle the various aspects of invoice payment and disputes. The bill has been referred to the House Governmental Affairs Committee. No change in the status of this bill since introduced.

Transportation is still the hot topic of the session with the House taking the lead by introducing the **Transportation Funding Act of 2015** ([HB 170](#)) by Rep. Jay Roberts (R-Ocilla). It appears right now to shift funding from local governments to the state to fund a billion dollar infrastructure improvement for roads, bridges and even transit while raising no new revenue. The bill received a review in the House Transportation Committee where several changes were made. Because of a fiscal analysis by Georgia State University indicating it will not raise the billion dollars needed in the first few years of implementation even the county commissioners have now pulled their support. The fate of this bill is uncertain at this time.

The **Home Care Patient Protection Act** ([HB 183](#)) is sponsored by Rep. David Knight (R-Griffin). The bill revises "the definition of private home care provider to include contractual arrangements with licensed independent contractors". It appears this bill is an attempt to monitor, investigate and regulate those homes under the supervision of a contracted entity. The House Health and Human Services Committee favorably passed the bill out February 24th and it awaits a vote by the full House.

Rep. Don Parsons (R-Marietta) is sponsoring [HB 201](#) to update the law governing the **"telephone system for the physically impaired"**. This law brings the current statute into the 21st Century by allowing wireless devices and applications to be added to the telecommunications services used for universal access by blind and other citizens with sensory impairments. The bill received a due pass by the House Energy, Utilities & Telecommunications Committee on February 25th. It now awaits consideration by the full House

There is a slight change proposed to the **Georgia Special Needs Scholarship** Act in [HB 209](#) sponsored by Rep. Wes Cantrell (R-Woodstock) to change the attendance requirement for eligible students from the prior school year to the prior semester and provide written notice to parent's of a student eligibility for the scholarship. The bill has been assigned to the House Education committee. No change in the status of this bill since introduced.

There seems to be a concern over the composition of the **State Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Dispensers**. Rep. Amy Carter (R-Valdosta) has introduced [HB 232](#) to change one of the members appointed to the Board that provide licenses for dispensing hearing aids and regulate to a non-industry member or professional. In addition there will be a requirement for a criminal background check and 20 hours of continuing education for renewal of a dispenser's license. The bill has been placed into the House Regulated Industries Committee for consideration. No change in the status of this bill since introduced.

Rep. Robert Dickey's (R-Musella) bill to replace the Governor's Office of Workforce Development with The Workforce Division under the Georgia Department of Economic Development and create the **State Workforce Development Board** with [HB 348](#) was voted due pass by the House Industry and Labor Committee on February 26th.

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Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports

100 Edgewood Avenue
Suite 975
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: 404-523-6674

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