

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



**\*SAVE the DATE\***

# **GATES ANNUAL MEETING**

**Friday, June 12, 2015**

Anderson Conference Center - Macon, GA | **10 AM - 2:30 PM**

- More details to follow -

## 2015 - A Good Session



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

### ***Session Highlights***

It was a good session in terms of people with disabilities, families and transportation. I saw more bills to help people than I have in well over a decade from the autism insurance coverage for children under six to several study committees proposed to look into children's issues and work supports. While there were bad bills proposed they did not make it through the process this session and most were aimed at social issues. This is the first of a two year session, therefore any bills which did not make it this year are around to be considered next year.

### **Budget Update**

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[2015 - A Good Session](#)

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Special  
Announcements



**GATES**  
**Annual**  
**Meeting**

Friday,

The final vote on the Conference Committee report of the FY 2016 budget occurred late on Tuesday, March 31st. The GVRA funding for the VR program can be found on page 127 item 197.7 (link to the document [here](#)). **We all know it is not over until the Governor signs, please put a call in to Governor Deal's office to support the new VR money by calling 404-656-1776 or faxing a support letter to 404-657-7332.** The Governor has 40 days to review the budget. While he does have line item veto, with the strong revenue growth we are experiencing it does not appear he will strike much if anything from the budget.

Don't forget to thank you local legislator for their support on the budget when you see them around town back home.

Looking forward to planning for next year's budget, that is right, in May state agencies will begin preparing their recommendations for Amended FY 2016 and FY 2017. Recently released revenue figures show tax collections were up in March by 9 percent. This is after February revenue posted at 12.6% growth rate. Hopefully by the time June brings this fiscal year to a close Georgia's budget will be back on track giving the Governor encouragement to allow agencies to request new funds as they plan their budget recommendations. Fingers crossed.

#### **Legislation Round-up**

Note that those items in blue mark a final action by the legislature during this session. The Governor has 40 consecutive days to make a decision and either sign or veto a bill.

#### **Senate Bills**

In the end **Autism Spectrum Disorder Insurance Coverage** ([SB 1](#)) was combined with [HB 429](#) on the Senate side. The original bill addresses insurance coverage and treatment for terminal illness so a person is not restricted or denied coverage based on their terminal diagnosis. The amendment to add autism coverage to HB 429 will cover treatment for children up to age six, capping the total at \$30,000. This was a smart and honest way to get autism handled and not jeopardize a really good bill. [The Senate vote was 54-0 and the House 161-0, the bill awaits the Governor's signature.](#)

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 the House on March 24th by a vote of 165-0. The Senate agreed to changes made by the House the next day by a vote of 43-2. [This bill awaits approval by the Governor.](#)

#### **House Bills**

Rep. Brooks Coleman (R-Duluth) who chairs the House Education Committee is a bill to **eliminate the Georgia High School Graduation Test** ([HB 91](#)). It also provides for previous students who did not pass the graduation test to ask to be granted a high school diploma. It appears

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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 February 12th and the Senate on March 25th by a vote of 50-3. [The Governor signed the legislation Monday morning, March 30th.](#) It is estimated to impact about 9,000 people.

The ***Transportation Funding Act of 2015*** ([HB 170](#)) by Rep. Jay Roberts (R-Ocilla) received the most attention in the final week of the session. The Conference Committee worked hard to get elements of both House and Senate proposals into the final bill. On Tuesday, March 31st each Chamber voted on the final bill with a lot of objection by those who did not want to support a tax increase. [In the end the House vote was 129-41 and the Senate 42-12. The bill was sent to the Governor Monday, April 6th for his signature.](#)

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 passed the bill by a vote of 162-2 and the Senate by a vote of 51-3 on March 26th. [The House sent the bill to the Governor Monday, April 6th.](#)

Rep. Don Parsons (R-Marietta) bill [HB 201](#) to update the law governing the ***"telephone system for the physically impaired"*** passed the House on March 13th by a vote of 169-0. Although the bill received a vote on Crossover Day the Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee never gave it a hearing. [The bill is held over until next session.](#)

There was 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. [In the final week of the session the bill received approval by 50-0 in the Senate and 165-4 in the House and will be sent to the Governor.](#)

There seems to be a concern over the composition of the ***State Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Dispensers***. Rep. Amy Carter (R-Valdosta) bill [HB 232](#) changes 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 passed the House by 165-5 and the Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee favorable reported out March 26th. While the bill was placed on the Senate Rules Calendar for consideration Tuesday, March 31st they ran out of time and it was tabled. [However, in the final hours of Thursday, April 2nd the bill received a Senate vote and passed 51-1, it now goes to the Governor](#)

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](#) received House support by a vote of 160-7. The Senate passed out the bill March 24th by a vote of 47-1. [The House sent to the Governor on Monday, April 6th.](#)

### **Study Committees**

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) did not receive final consideration by the Senate Health and Human Services Committee and has failed for this session. Therefore, Senator Jackson prepared a Senate only study committee in [SR 459](#) and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee reported it favorably out on Thursday, March 27th. [The Lt. Governor will appoint Senators to the Committee and they will meet over the year.](#)

Last week Rep. Katie Dempsey (R-Rome) changed the resolution to a **House study committee on postsecondary education and employment options for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities** using the same number [HR 642](#). The bill requires a report by December 2015. The House passed the resolution on March 25th by a vote of 167-0. [The Speaker will appoint Representatives to the Committee and they will meet over the year.](#)

Those providers who serve people with developmental disabilities through the **COMP/NOW Medicaid waivers** will be interested in the proposed Study Committee [HR 767](#). Introduced late last week by Rep. Dustin Hightower (R-Carrollton) and supported by Rep. Katie Dempsey and several others, this would be a House Study committee to examine the provisions of these waivers and other services to people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. The House passed the resolution 164-0 on Tuesday, March 31st. [The Speaker will appoint Representatives to the Committee and they will meet over the year.](#)

On the Senate side one other study committee of interest is the **Senate Rate of Diagnosis for Children with ADHD and other related disorders**, [SR 594](#) offered by Senator Josh McKoon (R-Columbus). The Senate included this bill and seven other study committees in a combined vote on Tuesday, March 31st, they all passed by a vote of 51-3. [The Lt. Governor will appoint Senators to the Committee and they will meet over the year.](#)

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## Call for Information

*THE PORTAL* is a communication tool for GATES and GATES members. If you have stories about your organization, staff announcements, program descriptions, or other information you want to share with other GATES members, please send the info to Charles Hall, [chall@asginfo.net](mailto:chall@asginfo.net)



## GATES

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