

## News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



### Big Budget Begins in the House



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

The legislature will be in session Tuesday-Friday this week marking Friday, February 20th as the nineteenth day of the 40-day session. The House will hold a public hearing on the FY 2016 budget on Tuesday, February 17th from 2-4pm in room 415 of the Legislative Office Building across from the Capitol. On Monday, February 9th both the House and Senate adopted [SR 167](#) to set the calendar until the end of the session as April 2nd. After this week they will work most weeks Monday-Thursday but have scheduled March 10, 12, 16-17, 30 and 31 as days "off" with cross over day likely to be March 20th. This is the first time in 20 years I can recall they established an end date so early and only posted two adjournment resolutions. Let us hope they can stick to the schedule with no acts of nature or unforeseen policy emergencies to delay them.

***ACTION NEEDED:*** The House is scheduled to hold a [PUBLIC HEARING](#) on the full FY 2016 budget Tuesday, February 17, 2015 in Room 415 of the Legislative Office Building from 2-4pm. If you are not able to attend you can call one of the committee members this week to encourage them to add \$900,000 to the GVRA budget to pull down the match of \$3,600,000 for \$4,500,000 total in services to 1,400 new people with disabilities across Georgia. The members of the committee are (Just click on their name to get either an email address or phone number to their office):

#### Human Resources

- [Demnev Katie M](#) (R-Rome) Chairman of Subcommittee

#### In This Issue

[Big Budget Begins in the House](#)

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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***

- [Epps, Bubber](#) (R-Dry Branch) Vice-Chairman of Subcommittee
- [Benton, Tommy](#) (R-Jefferson)
- [Brockway, Buzz](#) (R-Lawrenceville)
- [Harden, Buddy](#) (R-Cordele)
- [Henson, Michele](#) (D-Stone Mountain)
- [Howard, Henry "Wayne"](#) (D-Augusta)
- [Morris, Greg](#) (R-Vidalia)
- [Oliver, Mary Margaret](#) (D-Decatur)
- [Taylor, Tom](#) (R-Dunwoody)

### **Budget Update**

Executive Director Greg Schmiege presented the GVRA FY 2016 Budget recommendations by the Governor to the House Human Resources Appropriations Subcommittee on Thursday, February 12th. While he was directed to concentrate on the changes recommended by the Governor he was able to explain how the VR 110 funding was structured and the critical need to fully fund the agency. Representative Tommy Benton (R-Jefferson) who is new to the committee asked several key questions around how to work with other agencies to obtain matching funds and the amount it would take in state dollars to fully match the federal 110 appropriations for Georgia. Director Schmiege provided a handout to the committee to show the matching funds as well as provide a few examples of how GVRA was working with BHDD, Department of Corrections and Technical Colleges to explore partnerships to matching fund potential.

### **Legislation Round-up**

There were not a lot of committee meetings last week to consider bills and only one new bill of interest introduced in the House.

### **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 (72 hour monitoring) by a **Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)** to evaluate and recommend involuntary commitment for a person in mental health or substance abuse crisis to a longer term inpatient status. After the traditional initiation ritual where Senators give a newly elected member a bit of trouble when they first take the Well to present their bill it passed the Senate Floor by a vote of 51-4. Because of the need to extend the sunset clause before March 2015 the bill was assigned to the House

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

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*THE PORTAL is a regular publication of GATES. If you have staff or others associated with your organization that you would like to receive THE PORTAL, please send their email address to: Charles Hall, [chall@asqinfo.net](mailto:chall@asqinfo.net)*

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Health and Human Services Committee the next day. The bill is scheduled by the committee for consideration on Wednesday, February 18th at 3pm in Room 406 LOB.

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) has been assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

### **House Bills**

Rep. Brooks Coleman (R-Duluth) who chairs the House Education Committee is sponsoring a bill to **eliminate the Georgia High School 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. On Monday, Feb 9th the House Education Committee passed out the bill by committee substitute. The bill passed the House Floor by a vote of 172-0 on Thursday, Feb 12th and moves on to the Senate.

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.

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 last week in the status of this bill.

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 last week with several changes made. The new version still shifts \$520 million from local governments, which the city governments

and school boards oppose, while the County Commissioners seem to now support the revised bill. The bill could be voted out of the Transportation Committee this week and on the House floor.

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 bill is in the House Health and Human Services Committee.

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 has been assigned to the House Energy, Utilities & Telecommunications Committee.

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 parents of a student eligibility for the scholarship. The bill has been assigned to the House Education committee.

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.

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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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