

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE
GATES PORTAL

House Finishes Little Budget and Senate Works on Bills



by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA

The legislature will be in session Monday-Wednesday this week marking Wednesday, February 4th as the eleventh day of the 40-day session. The session is in only three days to give the Senate an opportunity to complete the little budget since the House had time during the budget week break.

Budget Update

All the House subcommittees met Tuesday morning January 27th in 5-10 minute increments passing out their pieces of the [Amended FY 2015](#). Any changes were based on a formula adjustment or a few cuts to the Governor's recommendations delaying some spending to the big budget. The full House Appropriations Committee then passed what the subcommittees had recommended on Wednesday and the full House passed the Amended Budget 171-0 on Thursday. The House tracking document can be found [here](#).

The only substantial budget direction was for the Department of Community Health to study the Governor's recommendation to take away health coverage from school cafeteria workers and bus drivers. The House language states:

Submit a study to the Governor and General Assembly by June 30, 2015 that examines why SHBP's costs are higher than other comparable government employee health plans and describe a variety of options for reducing costs without further diminishing the value of health benefits received by members. The General Assembly also finds that non-certificated school employees are an essential part of the education

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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

delivery system and directs that any such report include an examination of options to provide health benefits to these workers.

The Senate appropriations subcommittees are scheduled to work on the Amended FY15 budget Monday-Wednesday of this coming week. You can see the schedule [here](#). The Senate Human Development Subcommittee is scheduled for 4pm on Monday. Senator Renee Unterman (R-Buford) has retained her chairmanship of the committee. It is anticipated the Senate will finish its work on the little budget by the end of the week.

Legislation Round-up

Most committee meetings last week were organizational in nature to set the rules of the committee and meeting schedules. The Senate did move quickly on a few bills while the House completed its work on the little budget.

Senate Bills On the Move

The Senate Health and Human Services Committee (Senate HHS) chaired by Senator Renee Unterman started Monday passing out the Autism Insurance Bill quickly. The bill sailed through the committee with full support from all members present, then on to rules with a vote on the Senate Floor Thursday morning by a vote of 53-0. The two Senators not voting were excused that day. Senator Steve Henson (D-Tucker) and Senator Rick Jeffares (R-McDonough) have both voted to support the autism insurance bill last year. Early and full support of the Senate for the ***Autism Spectrum Disorder Insurance Coverage*** ([SB 1](#)) sets up an interesting dynamic early in the session for a showdown at some point with the House Leadership.

Senator Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta) introduced [SB 2](#) to help high school students seeking a vocational education in a technical college be awarded a high school diploma to assist with their educational achievements at a younger age. The bill has been sent to the Senate Education and Youth Committee.

Another bill moving quickly through Senate HHS was [SB 53](#) by newly elected Senator Greg Kirk (R-Americus). This bill 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. The LPCs and Sheriff's association support this bill in order to offer an alternative to transport in the back of a Sheriff's car to a mental health facility. The sunset extension is to collect more data, study the effectiveness of allowing other professionals to recommend involuntary commitment and create a statewide professional network of crisis intervention. There was discussion of the need for mental health professionals and the gaps in community treatment across the state.

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 has been

State Use 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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Charles Hall,
[*chall@asginfo.net*](mailto:chall@asginfo.net)

referred to the Senate Public Safety Committee.

A Senate Bill appeared in the Hopper Thursday that would establish the **Governor's Task Force on Blind and Visually Impaired Persons** 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](#)) is sponsored by Senator Lester Jackson (D-Savannah) but has not been assigned to a committee.

House Bills of Interest

Last week a bill to **eliminate the Georgia High School Graduation Test** was introduced by Rep. Brooks Coleman (R-Duluth) who also chairs the House Education Committee. [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 has been sent to the House Education Committee for consideration.

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 has been sent to the House Industry and Labor Committee that is not very favorable to this type of mandate.

Wouldn't it be nice if the state was required to pay all its vendors on time or pay a penalty? Well, Rep. Al Williams (D-Midway) and a few other democratic House members agree and have put forth 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. It will be interesting to see if it moves at all this session.

Transportation funding has quickly become 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). All revenue bills must originate in the House. Those with various interest in transportation infrastructure, local governments and transit professionals all have their take on what this bill will or will not accomplish. 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 real concern this bill creates for the rest of us is how it will impact horse trading of other bills toward the final days of the session.

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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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