

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



FY 2017 Budget passes House & Committees must move bills this week

by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA
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Session Schedule this week

The legislature will be in Monday-Friday this week working to get bills out of each chamber in order to have any chance to pass this session. Any bill that does not make it out of its chamber of origin either dies or must be amended onto another bill. Right now the House is light on scheduled committee meetings after Monday while the Senate has a very full week of committee meetings, primarily to hear from state agencies on their FY 2017 request.

We will need to take Action this week to let Senators on the Senate Human Development Subcommittee of Appropriations understand the need for fully funding GVRA. Details below.

Budget Update

The House and Senate resolved their differences on the Amended FY 2016 Appropriations Bill early in the week and sent the budget to the Governor's desk by midweek this finishing up their work on the

In This Issue

[FY 2017 Budget passes House & Committees must move bills](#)

Special
Announcements



amended budget. The Governor and his staff will be reviewing the amended budget but he does not need to sign it until 40 days after the session ends. However, he can only veto changes.

The House moved quickly through the FY 2017 big budget. Wednesday morning the House Subcommittees meet and quickly offered their recommended changes. Thursday morning the full House Appropriations Committee met to adopt those changes and then the full House voted out the FY 2017 budget Friday morning by a vote of 167-1. There was only one comment after Chairman Terry England (R-Auburn) presented the budget in only an hour to cover the changes in the bill. Rep. David Stover (R-Newnan) complained that the university system was getting too much money and although they said they would not raise tuition in the coming school year they could still raise other fees. The House actually cut a bond package of \$4.05 million to GA Tech proposed by the Governor.

The FY 2017 budget has now exceeded the budget prior to the recession and is now at \$23.7 billion in state funds. The majority of the \$2 billion increase comes from the new motor fuel tax and those new funds will go directly to highway construction projects. Revenue growth from income and sales tax is primarily going to fund education, Medicaid and pay increases for state employees.

Unfortunately most human services did not fair better coming through the House process. There were no new funds recommended for GVRA. There were no additional waiver slots for Unlock to support people with developmental disabilities in the community. There were no new funds for mental health.

The only programs receiving extra funding were the following:

- \$500,000 to enhance state-wide program capacity for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
- \$1,500,000 to raise the hourly reimbursement fee by \$5 for DFACS Special Assistant Attorney Generals (SAAGs)
- \$250,000 Meals on Wheels and senior center nutritional programs
- \$4.3 million to increase provider rates by 1.5% for Child Caring Institutions, Child Placing Institutions, foster parents and relatives for children requiring placement out of their homes
- \$159,000 to increase each county Family Connections allocation by \$1,000 per county
- Yes: Encourage the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to create third-party cooperative arrangements with the Technical College System of Georgia to maximize financial assistance for vocational rehabilitation clients. No funding identified

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Now on to the Senate and quickly. Even though the Senate has several more weeks to consider the big budget they will start Monday with subcommittee meetings to hear from agency officials on their requests. The Senate Human Development, Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Public Health Subcommittee, which is responsible for GVRA, is scheduled to hear from agency officials at 3pm on Tuesday, February 23rd in room 341. **At the moment there are no public hearings scheduled.**

ACTION: Since the House Human Resources Subcommittee did not recommend more funding for GVRA we need to take our request to the Senate. Please call members of the Senate Committee this week. You can connect to each member's webpage by clicking on their name below which will take you to their page to find their email or office phone number. **We are supporting an additional \$900,000 in state funds to close the gap further on fully funding GVRA.**

Senate Human Development & Public Health Subcommittee of Appropriations

[Chairwoman Renee Unterman](#) (R-Buford)

[Senator Burke Dean](#) (R-Bainbridge)

[Senator Chuck Hufstetler](#) (R-Rome)

[Senator Butch Miller](#) (R-Gainesville)

[Senator Horacena Tate](#) (R-Atlanta)

You can view the Governor's Budgets online [here](#). You can also follow budget tracking documents for the House [here](#) and the Senate [here](#). Tracking documents show the changes at each stage of the budget process.

Senate Bills

No Senate bills of interest under consideration or introduced at this time.

House Bills

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 13, 2015 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. It is now awaiting consideration by the Senate Committee. **NO CHANGE**

As a result of several House Study Committees and the strong advocacy of many in the disability community several key members of House leadership have signed on to support [HB 768](#). The Georgia ABLE legislation (Achieving a Better Life Experience) will allow families to create and contribute to tax-exempt accounts that can fund qualified expenses to support people with disabilities. The bill passed out of the

House Ways and Means Committee by substitute on February 17, 2016 and awaits assignment to the House Rules Calendar by February 29, 2016. It must pass out by the 30th day to the Senate to continue moving this year.

Representative Tom Kirby (R-Loganville) and several others on both sides of the aisle are supporting [HB 796](#) to enhance the rights and responsibilities for service animals. While the bill defines fines up to \$2,000 and up to 30 days in prison for those impeding the rights of individuals accompanied by a service animal it also cleans up language and broadens the rights from service and guide dogs to all service animals. The bill has been assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee and awaits consideration. **NO CHANGE**

A bill has been introduced to exempt housing for people with physical disability from the ad valorem tax. Representative Spencer Frye (D-Athens) introduced [HB 809](#) last week on January 25, 2016. The bill has been assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee. **NO CHANGE**

Representative Brett Harrell (R-Snellville) introduced a bill last week to allow profit corporations to benefit from a tax credit to help finance or own a home for persons with developmental disabilities. [HB 981](#) has been assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee.

Study Committees

Rep. Penny Houston has introduced [HR 979](#) to create a House Study Committee to examine programs that provide reading services to the blind and visually impaired. The Study Committee would be comprised of seven members; including four Representatives, The PSC Executive Director, The Director of the Board of Regents Public Library Service, and a representative of the Center for the Visually Impaired. **The House Special Rules Committee voted a due pass for the bill on February 17, 2016.** Since this is a House Study Committee it does not need to cross over by the 30th day to the Senate and can be voted on at a later time to take effect. If the Study Committee is approved it must publish its report by December 1, 2016.

Representative David Clark (R-Buford) is sponsoring [HR 1365](#) to create a Joint Study Committee on Veterans' Health and Employment Initiatives. It would meet to determine how to assist veterans to build career skills and maintain a healthy lifestyle. The bill has been assigned to the House Special Rules Committee. The bill would require passage this week and support from the Senate to pass this session.

[Back To Top](#)

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