

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



Senate Moves on FY 2017 Budget

by Dawn A. Randolph, MPA
March 8, 2016

Session Schedule this week

The legislature will meet for four days this week and with Wednesday a very busy committee day. As you recall last Monday, Feb 29th was crossover day and Wednesday was a very light day as they sorted out what bills made it to the other side. They were in recess Thursday and Friday. There is not much to report on bill activity but the Senate has finalized their recommendations for the FY 2017 budget.

This week is candidate qualifying for all U.S. House of Representative seats, Senator Johnny Isakson's US Senate seat, and all the State House and Senate seats. There have already been several major retirement announcements. Here is the current list of those who have announced they will not seek reelection for the offices they currently occupy.

Senators

Mike Crane (R-Newnan)
Bill Jackson (R-Appling)
Tommie Williams (R-Lyons)

Representatives

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Special
Announcements



**Thursday,
March 24
State Use
Council
Meeting**

10 AM
Sloppy Floyd Bldg
West Tower
18th floor, ATL

Stephen Allison (R-Blairsville)
Mike Dudgeon (R-Johns Creek)
Margaret Kaiser (D-Atlanta)
Ron Mabra (D-Fayetteville)
B. J. Pak (R-Lilburn)
Matt Ramsey (R-Peachtree City)
Barbara Sims (R-Augusta)

Budget Update

The FY 2017 big budget was presented by Senator Jack Hill (R-Reidsville) to the Senate Appropriations Committee Monday morning. The Senate subcommittees did not meet in open to work on the budget and there were no public budget hearings. The budget recommendations and changes were extremely light. Unfortunately the Senate did not put in any extra funds for GVRA or other services for people with disabilities. The Senate has agreed to a majority of changes made to the Human Services budget areas by the House with only a few thousand in adds. It seems the House and Senate has no appetite to increase funding for programs across the board.

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.

Thank you all for making calls to support more funding for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Once the session is over it is time again to get those candidates to your programs and continue to cultivate champions. We anticipate there will again be a lot of new faces and new leaders emerging. The work you have done is like tending a garden. Keep planting those seeds, tending to the weeds and we will again enjoy the fruits of our labors. You make a HUGE impact in the lives of the people you serve and the community.

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**

Thursday, March 24 Working Wonders Luncheon

Noon
Sloppy Floyd Bldg
West Tower
Empire Room, ATL

Friday, April 29 GATES Board Meeting

10 AM
Nobis Works,
Marietta

Friday, June 10 GATES Annual Meeting

10 AM
Anderson
Conference Center,
Goodwill Middle
GA, Macon

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 the House by a vote of 161-0 on Feb 23, 2016. It has been assigned to the Senate Finance Committee and has a very good chance to pass this session.

On the MOVE

Representative Tom Kirby (R-Loganville) and several others on both sides of the aisle supported [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 did not receive consideration in the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee and has died for the year. **DEAD**

A bill, introduced by Representative Spencer Frye (D-Athens), [HB 809](#) to exempt housing for people with physical disability from the ad valorem tax did not receive consideration by the House Ways and Means Committee before Crossover Day and is therefore dead for the year. **DEAD**

It often takes several attempts for a bill to get through the process. A bill that has been vetted many times in the past made it through the House in just one month. Rep. Bubber Epps (R-Dry Branch) with several other Representatives introduced [HB 924](#) on February 4th and it quickly proceeded through committee for a full vote by the House on Crossover Day, Feb 29th, passing 159-13. This bill will give a state sales and use tax exemption to certain sales by qualified job training organizations. Although not specifically stated in the bill it is intended for the Goodwills in the state. The bill has been assigned to the Senate Finance Committee. **On the MOVE**

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](#) received a due pass from the House Ways and Means Committee last week and a 164-0 vote by the full House. It now awaits consideration in the Senate Finance Committee. **On the MOVE**

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

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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 did not receive consideration by the House Special Rules Committee and as a Joint Study committee it can not proceed further. The bill's sponsor may decide to rewrite this as a House Study Committee.

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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



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