

News from GATES...

Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports



THE GATES PORTAL

Sine Die June 26th - Whirlwind 11 days

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Unmet Expectations



I don't think anyone could have predicted the frantic whirlwind that occurred during the last eleven voting days of the 2020 Georgia Legislative Session. The only constitutional requirement was to pass a balanced budget where projected revenues would be appropriated to state expenditures over state fiscal year 2021 beginning July 1st.

We expected them to cut the budget and go home, leaving legislation to next year so that everyone could be fully engaged in passing the budget. What we got was nearly eleven straight days of voting to pass bill after bill after bill. The budget was left entirely to senior leadership and staff. There were no hearings in which the public and those impacted by proposed cuts could go on record to express their concerns or ideas. There were only two conference committees near the end, basically saying we are working on the budget and waiting for the Governor to raise the revenue projections so we only have to cut 10%, which was down from 11% when they restarted which was down 14% from the Governor's first pass. There was no bi-partisan or bi-chamber conversations to raise revenue by increasing the tobacco tax or reducing/eliminating corporate tax deductions or credits. However, the Governor authorized to take \$250 million more from the reserves

In This Issue

[Sine Die June 26th - Whirlwind 11 days](#)

Special Announcements



GATES Annual Meeting

Friday,
July 24, 2020
10:00 AM
Virtual Meeting
More info to come.

for education and federal CARES dollars will back fill some health and education expenses.

Even state agencies were very in the dark about what was happening. They could not share their thoughts even if they knew. A few Commissioners, like BHDD and Public Health, went in asking for specific cuts to be restored. BHDD asked for cuts to be restored to peer services, crisis beds and core programs. Public Health asked for staff furloughs to be reconsidered so that they could continue to confront the crisis of COVID-19. GVRA staff, leaderless, gave a power point on each line cut but no guidance on what that would mean to services or a request to restore any cuts. You can watch the one and only Senate Appropriations subcommittee meeting on Human Development [here](#).

Budget Details

As we approached the final hours of Sine Die on Friday, June 26th the Appropriations Chairs in each chamber took the opportunity to briefly summarize the spending priorities, highlighted areas they were able to add money back (education) and pat themselves on the back for doing a great job. Every year I wait for the \$100 million problem that must be solved, but this year it was over \$2 billion and while cuts are slightly less deep they are still not proportional and will have lasting impact.

Because there were no budget hearings and really no safe way to meet in-person with legislators online advocacy was the key. I can honestly say the hundreds of phone calls around BHDD cuts helped to restore or reduce the cuts to several critical areas.

Appropriations is actually a bill and this year SFY 2021 is [HB 793](#). To understand the progress of the budget process a [tracking document](#) is produced to follow its progression from the Governor through each chamber and finally the conference committee. You will see four columns tracking each stage. Here is a summary of each section of interest with final results. (**CC** means language to explain the final decision by the Conference Committee.)

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities pages 26-33

Adult DD

Line 15.2.10 Intensive Family Support **CC** directed the department to review existing contracts to evaluate options.

\$1,000,000

Line 15.2.13 NOW and COMP waivers restored completed from House recommendation for 100 new waiver slots.

\$5,599,600

Line 12.2.21 Eliminate MOU with GVRA

Contact
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\$518,000 (Note GVRA will lose about \$2 million in 110 funding from this match.

Line 12.2.23 Waiver supplemental contractual services **CC** reduced **\$2,000,000**

Line 12.2.24 Reduce non-waiver program in community access group **\$4,676,804**

Line 12.2.25 Reduce non-waiver service in prevocational services **\$1,547,317**

Department of Community Health pages 39-46

GA Department of Human Resources pages 80-88

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency pages 86-88

Line 28.24.14 Reduce funds for planned reductions through provider management internal controls and providing in house PRE-ETS Services.

State funds cut **\$1,688,241** Total Funds cut **\$9,458,794**

Democracy at Risk and Awakening?

While everyone hopes that this is truly a once in 100 year pandemic and we will eventually restore in-person interaction by the 2021 legislation session the second Monday in January, there is deep concern that the public was completely cut out of public policy in the past two weeks. In addition to each chamber closing off the galleries to the public, eliminating pages, and removing any ability to reach a legislator during floor sessions and committee meetings in order to keep elected officials safe; there was limited advancements to help those who needed and wanted to be engaged if they could not risk being physically present. While every Senate committee and subcommittee was finally live cast there were strict rules to very early sign-up for comment or only to submit written comment. For the Senate Committees that often meant 24 hours in advance. Mostly bills were substituted at the last minute so you had no idea what you were even commenting on as bill after bill was gutted and repurposed.

I think the great success was the ability for us to mobilize the grassroots, the people impacted and concerned. In talking with legislators they were receiving more calls and emails than ever before. Online observation of committee meetings and floor proceedings sometimes hit 500 to 600 viewers when it was typical to see only 30-50 in the past. There were more organized marches and protests, definitely around civil rights, but also around healthcare and budget cuts. If people could not be inside, they were outside and online in numbers greater than I have ever seen. Legislators were also becoming savvy with texting and instant messaging, and I believe in the future social media will play a bigger part in reaching elected officials. I know I used it more than ever before. Time will tell if the pandemic has moved our democracy further behind the scenes or spurred greater openness and access.

Here is a wonderful recap by AJC reporters Greg Bluestein and James Salzer. It is worth grabbing a cup of coffee or a soda and taking a thirty minute break to list.

<https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/review-look-back-georgia-2020-legislative-session/82wIR8KDpzXILcr7fWz6zO/>

Finally, there was a lot of discussion of course about the impact of COVID-19 on health care and services in addition to the effect on the economy and employment. I was interviewed by the AJC at the start of the session and helped steer the reporter to data, information and others as she built her story - [Unemployed Georgians Scramble for health insurance in pandemic](#). I believe the press has also become highly motivated to cover stories so be sure to keep them in your outreach over the next six months. This can be crucial as we build support for CRP services to achieve employment for clients.

Final Bills Status for the 2019-2020 Legislative Session

Rep. Carl Gilliard (D-Garden City) proposed two bills to address the minimum wage in Georgia. The first bill, [HB 804](#), would prohibit employers from paying less than minimum wage to people with disabilities and [HB 805](#) would change the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25/hour. There are several exceptions in HB 804 in terms of employing people with disabilities; such as a person's disability offers many restrictions to employment or performance of the job. Both bills assigned to the House Industry and Labor Committee and **there was no activity on either bill so both bills have died for the year.**

Rep. Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville) sponsored a bill to prevent healthcare providers from discriminating against recipients of organ transplant who have a physical or mental disability. The bill, [HB 842](#), was voted due pass by the House Insurance Committee on Feb 20th and just passed the full House by a vote of 160-1 on Friday, Feb 28th. It is being called Gracie's Law and is being supported by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. **The bill passed the House by a vote of 160-0 on Feb 28th. It was assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, but no action was taken so it has died this year.**

Senator Gail Davenport (D-Jonesboro) introduced [SB 383](#) on Feb 18th and Rep. Carl Gilliard (D-Garden City) introduced [HB 963](#) on Feb 21st. Both bills would create a Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Both bills have been assigned to the Health & Human Services Committee in each Chamber. Both bills would create an agency with an Executive Director who would oversee and manage services, coordinate with other agencies and develop programs and plans. **Neither bill received a committee vote.**

Representative Calvin Smyre (D-Columbus) brought forth a bill on March 4th to create the Elder Financial Exploitation Task Force which would cover financial matters with elder citizens and adults with disabilities. This task force would be charged with assessing current services and resources and making recommendations which could include legislative action. [HB 1097](#) **was assigned to the House Human Relations & Aging Committee but did not receive a hearing before crossover day.**

In the House Rep. Hutchinson sponsored [HR 1282](#) to create a study committee to evaluate, simplify and eliminate duplication of regulations among mental health and social service providers. This study committee will be tasked with cost/benefit analysis to identify duplication and make recommendations. It was assigned to the House Special Rules Committee on Feb 27th. **The House did not consider the resolution so it will not happen this year.**

A bill in the Senate was introduced by Senator P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville) to define work based learning programs. [SB 447](#) defines cooperative education, employment skill development, internship, mentorship, school based enterprise, service-learning experience, work based learning, and youth apprentice to codify these types of learning experiences. **The bill passed the Senate on March 10th and was assigned to the House Education Committee on March 13th but never received a committee hearing.**

There has been a lot of discussion about the future of work globally and the path for youth. I believe any discussion will need to include young people with disabilities. Senator P.K. Martin builds on his bill (SB 447 summarized above) by creating a Joint Study Committee on Preparing Our Future Workforce with [SR 833](#). **The resolution passed the Senate on March 10th by a vote of 48-1 and was placed in the House Education Committee. The House did not consider before the end of the session.**

[Back to Top](#)

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