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2017 Legislative Preview

The 2017 session of the Georgia General Assembly begins Monday, Jan. 9, and will be the first year of a new two-year session. Bills that were introduced during the 2016 session will not automatically roll over into the 2017 session to be acted upon, although legislators can reintroduce bills.

Hot topics expected during the 2017 session include health care, education, and allowing casino gambling in Georgia—which is being explored as a possible revenue source for the HOPE Scholarship.

With financial pressures on Georgia's rural and safety-net hospitals—and uncertainties surrounding the federal Affordable Care Act—legislators will be looking for solutions to rising costs and access to health care. Also, since voters did not approve Amendment 1 in November, which would have created an Opportunity School District, legislators are likely to look for alternatives to improve Georgia's failing schools. A reworking of the funding formula for K-12 education may be addressed this session as a result.

New Legislators and Leadership

All Georgia state House and Senate seats were up for election in 2016. There are 27 new representatives and four new senators. A fifth senate seat—Senate District 54—is vacant due to Charlie Bethel being appointed to the Georgia Court of Appeals and will be filled by a Jan. 10 special election run-off. Review a [complete list](#) of new legislators.

There are also a few changes in House and Senate leadership for the 2017 legislative session:

- Rep. Christian Coomer (R-Dist. 14, Cartersville) is the new House majority whip.
- Rep. Stacey Evans (D-Dist. 42, Smyrna) is the new House minority caucus chair.
- Sen. John F. Kennedy (R-Dist. 18, Macon) is the new Senate majority caucus chair.

Legislative Study Committees

Since the close of the 2016 session, several legislative study committees examined issues related to Georgia's children and families.

[HR 1093](#) created a five-member House Study Committee on [Mental Illness Initiative, Reform, Public Health, and Safety](#), chaired by Rep. Katie Dempsey (Dist. 13), that convened four times in the interim since the 2016 session. A report—if one was made—was due by Dec. 1 but has not yet been released.

Senate study committees that investigated issues related to children and families include:

- Hearing Aids for Children (created by [SR 1091](#), chaired by Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th),
- Higher Education Affordability (created by [SR 1001](#), chaired by Sen. Fran Millar, 40th), and
- Opioid Abuse (created by [SR 1165](#), chaired by Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th).

Legislation

Six bills related to children and families have been pre-filed for the 2017 session; however, these bills must be formally introduced after the session begins to become active legislation.



[HB 7](#) (Rep. Keisha Waites, 60th) mandates that only hands-free telephone calls may be made while one is operating a motor vehicle, except in certain identified emergency situations.

[HB 11](#) (Rep. Keisha Waites, 60th) requires the completion of firearms safety training by certain persons in order to be issued a carry license. The requirement does not apply to renewal licenses.

[HB 18](#) (Rep. Sandra Scott, 76th) prohibits smoking inside motor vehicles when a person under age 18 is present.

[HR 1](#) (Rep. Keisha Waites, 60th) proposes a constitutional amendment to dedicate existing fees and assessments to fund driver education and training courses for ninth- through 12th-graders in public schools.



CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

[HB 16](#) (Rep. Keisha Waites, 60th) requires local boards of education to collect data on instances of bullying and harassment and to provide the data to the Georgia Department of Education via an existing annual report on disciplinary and placement actions.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES

[HB 2](#) (Rep. Jason Spencer, 180th) extends by two additional years (until July 1, 2019) a current two-year window of opportunity for plaintiffs of any age to file civil actions related to childhood sexual abuse. Until the 2015 passage of HB 17, the Hidden Predator Act, adult victims covered by the law were unable to file civil action suits due to expired statutes of limitations.

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