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Senate and House Agree on Restored Family Connection Funds; Adoption Bill Amended

The full bodies of the General Assembly considered relatively few bills last week, but committees worked hard to process legislation for the House and Senate to consider and vote on before Sine Die—the final day.

Adoption Reform

The Senate Judiciary Committee passed a substitute version of [HB 159](#) (Rep. Bert Reeves, 34th), a comprehensive revision of Georgia’s adoption code, on March 16. The House passed the bill on Feb. 24.

New language added by the Senate committee allows state-funded private agencies to refuse to place children with same-sex parents. The amendment was adopted over opposition by Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Director Bobby Cagle, who testified that the provision would jeopardize the division’s access to critical federal funds. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution [reported](#) that Gov. Nathan Deal also opposes the change.

The substitute version of HB 159 is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not to send it to the Senate floor for a vote.

Low-Performing Schools

The Senate Education and Youth Committee continued work on [HB 338](#) (Rep. Kevin Tanner, 9th) that addresses low-performing schools. At a committee meeting last Wednesday, Chairman Lindsey Tippins (Dist. 37) stated that a substitute version of the bill with additional changes would be available on Monday.

Budget

The Senate voted on its version of the FY18 budget on March 15. A joint House-Senate conference committee, which began work on March 17, was appointed to agree on a final version of the budget.

The Senate made no changes to the House's version of the budget regarding Georgia Family Connection's appropriation. If that part of the budget remains untouched by the conference committee—and if the governor signs it—each Family Connection Collaborative's appropriation will increase from \$47,000 to \$48,500 in FY18.

Highlights of changes made by the Senate to the FY18 budget include:

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)

- The House eliminated a one-time \$10,000 appropriation for Rockdale Cares, and the Senate restored those funds in its version.
- The House eliminated a one-time \$300,000 appropriation for instrument development associated with the juvenile code rewrite. The Senate restored those funds in its version.

Department of Community Affairs (DCA)

The governor's budget eliminated a one-time \$25,000 appropriation for the Second Harvest of South Georgia food bank. The House restored that appropriation, and the Senate took it back out in its version.

Department of Community Health (DCH)

- The House added \$500,000 for start-up grants for two Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in Cook and Lincoln counties. The Senate increased the funding to \$750,000 for three FQHCs in Cook, Seminole, and Lowndes counties.
- The House added \$250,000 for the Center for Rural Health Support and Study at Augusta University. The Senate removed the funding and added language instructing the DCH to conduct an analysis of technical assistance available at public and private medical colleges and universities to determine an appropriate location and structure of a center of excellence for rural health, and to support it if funds are appropriated in FY19.
- The governor included funds for a 5-percent reimbursement rate increase for select dental codes, and the House agreed. The Senate increased those funds to include a 10-percent reimbursement rate increase for select dental codes.
- The Senate added \$595,653 in state funds (\$1.88 million total) for a \$500 add-on payment for newborn delivery in rural counties with a population less than 35,000.

Department of Corrections (DOC)

The governor added \$162,922 to increase funds for merit-based pay adjustments, employee recruitment, or retention initiatives for Department of Juvenile Justice medical personnel effective July 1, 2017, and the House agreed. The Senate deleted those funds.

Department of Education (GaDOE)

- The Senate included \$15,000 for Dougherty County to plan and develop a project with AmeriCorps that supports elementary-level reading and math programs.
- The governor included \$1.27 million for personnel for Positive Behavior and Intervention Support (PBIS) specialists to convert part-time staff to full-time staff. The Senate eliminated those proposed funds, instructed the GaDOE to use \$1.16 million in existing funds for that purpose, and added \$99,950 for part-time PBIS specialists at each Regional Education Service Agency.
- The House transferred \$1.47 million from the GaDOE's testing program to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement and directed the GaDOE to utilize \$1.23 million in existing innovation grant funds to provide one AP STEM exam for every student taking an AP STEM class. The Senate deleted the funds for this line item.
- The House directed the GaDOE to utilize \$1.5 million in existing innovation grant funds for a competitive program that would provide certified school counselor-graduation specialists for the lowest-performing high schools in the state, giving priority to those schools on the chronically failing schools list. The Senate agreed but reduced the amount of existing funds to be utilized to \$1.2 million.

Department of Human Services (DHS)

- The House added \$1.5 million for a \$5-per-hour increase for the DFCS Special Assistant Attorneys General. The Senate reduced those funds to \$300,000 to provide for a \$1-per-hour increase.
- The Senate added \$3.08 million for the Families First COACHES program.

Department of Public Health (DPH)

- The Senate added \$100,000 to evaluate and recommend a program to reduce maternal mortality using outcomes-based research due Dec. 1, 2017, recognizing that Georgia currently ranks 50th in maternal deaths in the United States.
- The House added \$1.39 million to complete the phase-in of the new general grant-in-aid formula to hold harmless all counties. The Senate eliminated those funds.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI)

The Senate added \$287,500 for the family violence program within the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to support the 46 state-certified domestic violence shelters.

Juvenile Courts

The governor's budget included \$1.5 million for 15 additional assistant district attorneys (ADAs) to support juvenile courts statewide. The House deleted that funding, and the Senate restored \$798,894 for eight new ADAs in its version of the budget.

Public Defender Council of Georgia

The House added \$782,564 for 10 additional juvenile public defenders, and the Senate reduced those funds to \$547,794 for seven juvenile public defenders.

Schedule

The General Assembly met Monday through Thursday last week, completing 35 of 40 legislative days. They are scheduled to be in session Monday, Wednesday, and Friday this week.

The House and Senate previously adopted an [adjournment resolution](#) that sets the calendar for the remainder of the 2017 session, with the final legislative day scheduled for Thursday, March 30.

Legislation

The following bills related to children and families were passed out of their original chambers by Crossover Day and acted upon this week.



HB 198 (Rep. Katie Dempsey, 13th) requires that information about influenza and the influenza vaccine will be included in resources regarding immunizations, infectious disease, or other school health issues that are provided to parents of students in grades 6-12 by local boards of education.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 16. The Senate Education and Youth Committee passed it on March 14, and the full Senate was expected to vote on the bill on March 20.

HB 241 (Rep. Lee Hawkins, 27th) adds Krabbe disease to the list of metabolic and genetic conditions for which newborns may be screened. Krabbe disease is a rare, often fatal, degenerative disorder that affects the myelin sheath of the nervous system. Under the bill, screening for Krabbe disease will be conducted separately at the option of—and paid for by—the parents.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 24, and the Senate Health and Human Services Committee passed it on March 16. The bill is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 246 (Rep. Wes Cantrell, 22nd) repeals the sunset provision on an annual fitness assessment program approved and funded by the State Board of Education for students in grades 1-12.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 23, and the Senate Education and Youth Committee passed it on March 15. It is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 273 (Rep. Demetrius Douglas, 78th) requires each local board of education to schedule a daily recess for students in grades K-5, beginning in the 2017-18 school year, provided that recess will not be required on any day when a student has had physical education or structured activity time. Local boards shall establish written policies to ensure that recess is a safe experience for students, that recess is scheduled so that it provides a break during academic learning, and that it is not withheld as punishment.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 3. It is now assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee, which was expected to discuss a substitute version on March 20.

SB 206 (Sen. P.K. Martin, 9th) requires health insurance plans to cover one hearing aid per impaired ear, not to exceed \$3,000 per hearing aid, for individuals under age 19.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on March 3. The House Insurance Committee passed a substitute version of the bill, which states that insurers are exempt from providing this benefit if an actuarial analysis—to be completed no more frequently than one time per year—determines that the costs associated with this coverage exceed 1 percent of the premium's charge over the experience period by the insurer. The law will also not apply to policies offered by an employer with 10 or fewer employees. The full House was scheduled to vote on the bill on March 20.



CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

HB 114 (Rep. Robert Dickey, 140th) prohibits local school systems from excluding students in dual-credit courses (the Move-on-When-Ready program) from valedictorian or salutatorian determinations. This shall not apply to a high-school student who moves into the local school system after his or her sophomore year and has not taken any courses on-site at the participating high school.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1, and the Senate Education and Youth Committee passed it on March 15. It is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 237 (Rep. Brooks Coleman, 97th) authorizes the Public Education Innovation Fund Foundation to receive private donations used for public-school grants for the implementation of academic and organizational innovations to improve student achievement.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 24. It is now assigned to the Senate Finance Committee, which discussed the bill on March 6 but did not vote on it. The committee was scheduled to hear the bill again on March 20.

HB 338 (Rep. Kevin Tanner, 9th) provides a comprehensive intervention strategy for chronically underperforming schools and offers an alternative to the Opportunity School District plan that Georgia voters didn't approve in Nov. 2016.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 1. It is assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee, which held hearings on the bill on March 6 and 10 and was scheduled to discuss a substitute version on March 20.

HR 354 (Rep. Dar'shun Kendrick, 93rd), urges the GaDOE, in consultation with the DBHDD, to develop and provide a list of training materials on mental-health issues to local school systems.

Status: The resolution was assigned to the House Education Committee, which passed it on March 16. It is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

SB 152 (Sen. Emanuel Jones, 10th) amends mandatory student attendance policy by precluding students from being suspended or expelled without being assigned to an alternative education program and by setting a two-semester maximum for assignments to alternative programs. The bill provides an exception to the two-semester maximum for serious offenses, which include physical assault or battery of school personnel or students, bullying, and unlawful use or possession of illegal drugs or alcohol.

Status: The Senate passed a substitute version of the bill on March 1, clarifying that the new policy will apply to all students except those guilty of serious offenses. The bill is now assigned to the House

Education Committee. The Subcommittee on Education Administration and Planning discussed the bill on March 15, but indicated that more work is needed due to concerns about the definition of “serious offenses.”

SB 211 (Sen. Lindsey Tippins, 37th) requires the State Board of Education to adopt research-based student assessment programs that are selected after consulting with local school systems, and to conduct a comparability study to determine whether nationally recognized academic assessments, such as the SAT and ACT, are in alignment with state content standards in grades 9-12. The bill also directs the State Board of Education’s existing assessment workgroup to pursue maximum flexibility for state and local assessments under federal law. Reports are due to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State School Superintendent, and House and Senate Education Committee chairs by Friday, Sept. 1.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on March 3. The House Education Early Learning and K-12 Education Subcommittee passed the bill on March 14, and it now moves back into the full House Education Committee.



STABLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES

HB 159 (Rep. Bert Reeves, 34th), a comprehensive revision of Georgia’s adoption code, lowers the age one can access the adoption reunion registry from 21 to 18, eases foreign adoption procedures, and permits nonresidents to grant adoption of his or her child.

Status: The House Judiciary Committee passed the bill on Feb. 16, and the full House passed it on Feb. 24. The Senate Judiciary Committee passed a substitute version of the bill on March 16 that includes language allowing private agencies receiving state funds to refuse to place children with same-sex parents. The amendment was adopted over opposition by the DFCS Director, who testified that the provision would jeopardize the division’s access to federal funds. HB 159 is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 359 (Rep. Barry Fleming, 121st) allows a parent to delegate caregiving authority for their child to an individual who resides in Georgia and is a relative or fictive kin for one year or less by executing a power of attorney.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 3, and the Senate passed it on March 15. HB 359 now goes to the governor, who may sign it, veto it, or allow the bill to become law without taking any action.

SB 3 (Sen. Lindsey Tippins, 37th), the Creating Opportunities Needed Now to Expand Credentialed Training (CONNECT) Act, directs the Technical College System of Georgia State Board, in consultation with industry representatives, to annually identify fields of study in industries that address a critical workforce need and are linked to occupations in the skilled-trade industry or an emerging technology. Under the bill, the State Board of Education must also include industry credentialing when developing policies and guidelines for awarding high-school credit.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 17. The Subcommittee on Innovation and the Workforce passed the bill on March 15, and it will now move back into the full House Education Committee.

SB 201 (Sen. Butch Miller, 49th) requires employers to allow employees who earn sick leave to use up to five days of accrued leave to care for immediate family members—including an employee’s child, spouse, grandchild, grandparent, or parent.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 27, and the House Industry and Labor Committee passed it on March 14. The full House was scheduled to vote on the bill on March 16, but the vote was postponed.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES

HB 37 (Rep. Earl Ehrhart, 36th) prohibits private postsecondary institutions in Georgia from adopting sanctuary policies for undocumented immigrant students and requires that state funding and state-administered federal funding be withheld from institutions in violation of the prohibition.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 22, and the Senate Judiciary Committee passed it on March 14. The bill is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 86 (Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, 82nd) expands the definition of sexual abuse to include acts involving trafficking a person for sexual servitude.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 22, and the Senate passed it on March 14. HB 86 now goes to the governor, who may sign it, veto it, or allow the bill to become law without taking any action.

HB 250 (Rep. Mandi Ballinger, 23rd) provides that an employee of an early care or education program who has received a satisfactory fingerprint and record check within the previous 24 months is exempt from an additional background check for purposes of providing care in a foster home.

Status: The House passed the bill on Feb. 21, and the Senate Special Judiciary Committee passed it on March 14. The bill is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

HB 280 (Rep. Mandi Ballinger, 23rd), known as the Campus Carry Bill, allows individuals ages 21 and older to carry guns on public university campuses, except for into dormitories, athletic events, and preschool or daycare centers.

Status: The House passed the bill on March 3, and the Senate Judiciary Committee passed it on March 16. The bill is now in the Senate Rules Committee, which will determine whether or not it will be sent to the Senate floor for a vote.

SB 4 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) establishes the Georgia Mental Health Treatment Task Force to examine the current mental-health landscape and effectiveness of mental-health services and programs.

Status: The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 7. The House Health and Human Services Committee passed the bill by substitute on March 15, but it was withdrawn and recommitted to the committee on March 16.