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Committees Hear from Department Heads; Amended FY18 Budget Moves Through House

The House began work on the Amended FY18 budget last Monday, and appropriations subcommittees heard from department heads on Gov. Nathan Deal's budget recommendations. The process is moving quickly. The House's version is expected to be addressed by the full House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday, and it could be on the House floor for a vote as early as Thursday.

Few other bills have reached the House or Senate floor because a lot of work is taking place at the committee level.

Two committees held informational meetings this week:

House and Senate Education Committees

The committees heard updates on various state initiatives during a joint meeting last Thursday. State School Superintendent Richard Woods reported on the recent approval of the state's plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and discussed successes of the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) pathways—including, agriculture, food and natural resources, arts, AV/technology and communications, finance, and hospitality and tourism. Woods also highlighted Georgia's [\\$61.5 million Striving Readers grant](#) to improve reading and literacy outcomes for children. The funds will be distributed to districts through sub-grants.

Georgia's new Chief Turnaround Officer, Dr. Eric Thomas, also addressed the committees. This position was created by [HB 338](#), which Deal passed and signed last year. In Nov. 2019, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement released a [list of 104 schools](#) on the turnaround eligible schools list. In December, Thomas revealed the 11 [schools](#) he selected to work with first, including schools in Bibb, Clay, Dooly, Dougherty, and Randolph counties.

Dr. Steve Dolinger and Dr. Dana Rickman with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education also made a presentation to the committees.

House Juvenile Justice Committee

The committee, chaired by Rep. Mandi Ballinger (23rd), heard from the Child Fatality Review Commission and interim Division of Family and Children Services Director Ginger Pryor on Thursday. Voices for Georgia's Children also presented their recently released [report](#) analyzing Georgia's child and adolescent behavioral health workforce.

Schedule

Legislators were in session on Monday through Thursday last week and will be in session on Monday through Thursday this week.

Legislators previously passed an [adjournment resolution](#) setting the legislative calendar for the rest of the 2018 session. Crossover Day, the last day that bills can pass out of their originating chambers to continue moving through the legislative process, is expected to be Wednesday, Feb. 28. Sine Die, the final day of the session, is scheduled for Thursday, March 29. Legislators can change the schedule by passing another adjournment resolution.

Georgia Family Connection's State Peer-to-Peer Action Committee is scheduled to host a reception for legislators on Thursday, Feb. 15.

Legislation

The following bills related to children and families have been introduced this session.



HEALTHY CHILDREN

HB 743 (Rep. David Clark, 98th) requires the Georgia Department of Education to develop and provide guidelines and other relevant materials to inform students participating in interscholastic athletic activities about the nature and warning signs of sudden cardiac arrest.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Education Committee.



CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

HB 713 (Rep. Joyce Chandler, 105th) revises the eligibility requirement for the HOPE Scholarship so that students who are home-schooled or have graduated from a non-eligible high school and score in the 91st percentile or higher on the ACT or SAT are eligible for the scholarship. Currently, those students must score in the 93rd percentile to be eligible.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Higher Education Committee.

HB 722 (Rep. David Casas, 107th) expands the list of postsecondary institutions in which students can enroll for Georgia's Move on When Ready (dual-enrollment) program.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Higher Education Committee.

HB 740 (Rep. Randy Nix, 69th) requires local school systems to conduct vision, hearing, and speech assessments prior to expelling or suspending a student in kindergarten through third grade for five or more consecutive or cumulative days during a school year. The bill provides exceptions for students who possess weapons, drugs, or other dangerous instruments, or whose behavior endangers the physical safety of others.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Education Committee.



STABLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES

HB 668 (Rep. Betty Price, 48th) allows a petition for guardianship to be filed for a proposed ward who is 17 years old if the petitioner has a good faith reason to believe that the child will need a guardian upon turning 18.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Committee and was expected to be discussed in a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Trey Kelley (Dist. 16) on Jan. 29.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES

HB 673 (Rep. John Carson, 46th) requires drivers to use hands-free technology with wireless communication devices while operating a motor vehicle.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee, which was expected to hold a hearing on the bill on Jan. 29.

HB 732 (Rep. Deborah Silcox, 52nd) expands the scope of the law that criminalizes sex trafficking to include the act of patronizing an individual for sexually explicit conduct. **SB 335** (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) is a companion bill that has been introduced in the Senate.

Status of HB 732: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee.

Status of SB 335: The bill is assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HB 746 (Rep. Scott Holcomb, 81st) prescribes uniform statewide policies and procedures related to law enforcement's contact with sexual assault victims.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee.

SB 337 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) updates current law related to the admissibility of a child's out-of-court statements describing sexual contact or physical abuse, specifying that the code section applies to any motion made, or hearing or trial commenced, on or after the effective date of the subsection.

Status: The bill is assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee.