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Integrating State Policy with Local Solutions

Jan. 9, 2018

2018 Legislative Session Convened Monday; State-of-the-State Address Scheduled for Thursday

The 2018 session of the Georgia General Assembly began on Jan. 8. As the second year of a two-year session, bills that were introduced but not passed in 2017 carry over and are eligible for action this year.

Gov. Nathan Deal will deliver his State-of-the-State address on Thursday, Jan. 11, at 11 a.m. during a joint session of the General Assembly. Deal is expected to outline his priorities for his last legislative session as governor and provide the first glimpse of his recommendations for the Amended FY18 and FY19 budgets. You can [watch the speech](#) live online.

House and Senate Leadership

There were two changes to the [House](#) and [Senate](#) leadership for the 2018 legislative session:

- Sen. Butch Miller (R-Dist. 49, Gainesville) is the new Senate president pro tempore.
- Rep. Robert Trammell (D-Dist. 132, Luthersville) is the new House minority leader.

Legislative Study Committees

After the 2017 session, legislative study committees examined issues related to Georgia's children and families.

Civics Education

HR 634 created the House Study Committee on Civics Education in Georgia. The committee, chaired by Rep. Christian Coomer (Dist. 14), has not yet released a report if one was made.

Distracted Driving

[HR 282](#) created the House Study Committee on Distracted Driving. The committee, chaired by Rep. John Carson (Dist. 46), has not yet released a report if one was made.

Rural Development

[HR 389](#) created a 15-member House Rural Development Council, co-chaired by Rep. Terry England (Dist. 116) and Rep. Jay Powell (Dist. 171). The council held a series of meetings throughout the state and studied challenges faced by Georgia's rural areas, including loss of population, lack of access to health care, diminished quality of educational opportunities, and scarcity of employment opportunities.

The council will continue its work throughout 2018, but an [initial report](#) includes several recommendations that require legislative action to take effect.

Recommendations from the report include:

- **Expanding the workforce** through tax incentives to individuals and families—especially professionals and high-wage earners—to encourage them to move to rural areas. The proposed “Rural Relocate and Reside” program would be available to individuals who move to counties that have experienced less than 5-percent population growth over five years.
- **Increasing access to broadband internet** by incentivizing providers and prioritizing funding to underserved communities, since about 16 percent of Georgians lack broadband access.
- **Supporting economic development** in rural communities by establishing a Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovations with the Board of Regents to help develop businesses and local leadership.
- **Improving rural education systems** by creating the necessary conditions to help retain local students during and after postsecondary training and to meet the needs of local industries.
- **Stabilizing rural health systems** by addressing pharmaceutical, billing, and health care workforce issues as well as establishing a Rural Center for Health Care Innovation and Sustainability to promote best practices in rural health care facilities.

School Nutrition

[HR 57](#) created a 15-member House Study Committee on Elementary and Secondary School Nutrition Programs. The committee, chaired by Rep. Amy Carter (Dist. 175), met four times after the close of the 2017 session. A report—if one was made—was due by Dec. 1, but has not yet been released.

Schedule

Legislators are scheduled to be in session this week through Jan. 11, and then they will reconvene on Thursday, Jan. 18. House and Senate budget hearings are expected to take place next week.