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Feb. 6, 2018

House and Senate Agree on Amended Adoption Reform Bill; Senate Begins Budget Work

[HB 159](#), the comprehensive adoption reform legislation filed in 2017, was on the move again last week. Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) presented an amended version of the bill on the House floor on Thursday. The House unanimously passed an amended version of the bill, which addressed some concerns expressed by Gov. Nathan Deal.

The Senate passed a version of HB 159 earlier this session that included language from [HB 359](#) (Rep. Barry Fleming, 121st). HB 359, which allows a parent to temporarily delegate caregiving authority to an individual through power of attorney, was vetoed by Deal last year.

After the House passed HB 159, it was immediately transmitted to the Senate for agreement. The Senate discussed the compromise proposal last week, and passed the House's version of the bill on Feb. 5.

Technical Education

Rep. Terry England (Dist. 116) introduced [HB 778](#) last week, which transfers the administration of the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program from the Georgia Department of Education to the Technical College System of Georgia. The bill was a recommendation in last year's [final report](#) of the [House Rural Development Council](#).

The House Budget and Research Office prepared a [memo](#) addressing the rationale behind the CTAE move proposed by the bill. It is now assigned to the House Higher Education Committee.

Budget

The House Appropriations Committee passed their version of the [Amended FY18 budget](#) last Wednesday, and the full House is expected to pass that budget soon. Senate Appropriations subcommittees were scheduled to meet on Monday and Tuesday to begin work on the Senate version of the Amended FY18 budget.

Highlights of the House's minimal changes to Deal's budget recommendations include:

Department of Community Health

An additional \$75,000 to identify a postsecondary institution within the state as an appropriate location for the Rural Center for Health Care Innovation and Sustainability, as recommended by the House Rural Development Council

Department of Education

An additional \$500,000 to purchase 200 school buses statewide (increasing Deal's budget of \$15 million for 194 buses)

Department of Human Services

An additional \$550,000 for a new Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) building in Ben Hill County

Governor's Office of Student Achievement

- An additional \$408,115 for one non-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) AP exam for low-income students
- An additional \$400,000 to provide start-up funds to establish a leadership academy for principals

Technical College System of Georgia

An additional \$1 million (\$2 million total) for four mobile welding laboratories for HOPE Career Grant on-site welding training around the state

Most of the House's additions were funded by adjusting budgets within multiple departments and agencies for new positions that were based on start dates that occurred later than anticipated.

Schedule

Legislators were in session Monday through Thursday last week and are scheduled to be in session Monday through Thursday again this week.

The General Assembly 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.



HB 655 (Rep. Rick Williams, 145th) requires every public school to post a sign containing the toll-free number operated by DFCS for reporting child abuse or neglect.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Education Committee, and a discussion was scheduled for Feb. 5.

SB 118 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th), Ava's Law, increases the age for health insurance coverage for individuals with autism spectrum disorder from 6 to 12. (The original bill provided coverage up to age 21.) The bill also includes an annual cap of \$30,000 for health insurance costs.

Status: The bill was introduced in 2017 and assigned to the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee. The committee passed an amended version of the bill on Feb. 1, and it is now assigned to the Senate Rules 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 Education Committee, and a discussion was scheduled for Feb. 5.

HB 763 (Rep. Randy Nix, 69th) expands the duties of the school attendance protocol committee to include school climate. The committee will review and make recommendations for policies relating to school climate for the purpose of promoting positive gains in student achievement scores and student and teacher morale while decreasing student suspensions, dropouts, and other negative aspects of the school environment.

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

SB 362 (Sen. Lindsey Tippins, 37th) provides for the establishment of an innovative assessment pilot program in up to 10 school systems. The bill seeks to provide real-time feedback on student performance during the school year when problems can still be addressed.

Status: The bill is assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee. During a recent hearing, supportive testimony was provided by representatives from the Georgia Department of Education, Gwinnett County Schools, and the Georgia Education Coalition.



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. It was passed by a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Trey Kelley (Dist. 16), and a full committee discussion is scheduled for Feb. 6.

SB 131 (Sen. Blake Tillery, 19th) requires adoption proceedings to be stayed while a termination of parental rights appeal is pending.

Status: The bill was introduced in 2017 and assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The Senate recently passed the bill on Jan. 30, and it is now assigned to the House Juvenile Justice Committee.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES

HB 605 (Rep. Jason Spencer, 180th), the Hidden Predator Act of 2018, allows plaintiffs of any age to file a civil action for injuries resulting from childhood sexual abuse for a period of two years—from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2020.

Status: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee and was scheduled to be heard by a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) on Feb. 5.

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 held a hearing on Jan. 29. Representatives from the Georgia State Patrol and the Governor's Office of Highway Safety spoke in favor of the bill, as well as three mothers who each had a child killed in a distracted driving collision. The bill was scheduled to be heard by a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) on Feb. 5.

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 was introduced in the Senate.

Status of HB 732: The bill is assigned to the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee and was scheduled to be heard by a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) on Feb. 5.

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

HB 762 (Rep. Wes Cantrell, 22nd) provides for age-appropriate sex abuse and assault awareness and prevention education in grades K – 9.

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

SB 375 (Sen. William Ligon, 3rd) creates the "Keep Faith in Adoption and Foster Care Act," which allows a child-placing agency to decline to accept a referral for foster care or adoption services under a contract with the state based on the child-placing agency's sincerely held religious beliefs, and bars the state from taking adverse action against the agency.

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