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Integrating State Policy with Local Solutions

Feb. 13, 2018

## Senate Passes Autism Insurance Bill; Education Bills on the Move

Health care and education were hot topics at the Capitol last week, as the Senate passed a bill expanding health insurance coverage for autism treatment and several education bills saw action.

### Insurance Coverage for Autism

The Senate passed [SB 118](#) (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th), known as Ava's Law, on Feb. 8. While an earlier version of the bill expanded coverage up to age 21, the version passed by the Senate increases the age for health insurance coverage for individuals with autism spectrum disorder from 6 to 12 and establishes a yearly cap of \$30,000 for coverage of applied behavior analysis treatment.

On the Senate floor, Unterman emphasized the savings and improved outcomes that are possible when autism is caught early and treated for longer periods of time. She noted that 47 states have passed autism insurance reform and that Georgia currently has the lowest age limit for benefits at 6 years. SB 118 now moves to the House.

### Education

[HB 740](#) (Rep. Randy Nix, 69th) prohibits students in grades K – 3 from being suspended from school for more than five days without first entering the student into the [Response to Intervention](#) (RTI) program, a four-tier model for identifying and addressing students' academic and behavioral needs. The original version of the bill called for evaluating a student for hearing, speech, and language issues. Nix amended the bill to use the RTI process, which also considers other factors.

[HB 763](#) (Rep. Randy Nix, 69th) expands the duties of the School Attendance Protocol Committee to include school climate. The committee will review and recommend 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.

The House Education Committee passed HB 740 and HB 763 on Thursday. The bills are now in the House Rules Committee, which determines which bills are sent to the House floor for a vote.

[HB 778](#) (Rep. Terry England, 116th) was pulled by its sponsor. The bill would have moved the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to the Technical College System of Georgia. England said the bill was pulled due to anxiety about change and frustration with rumors, but noted that the issue will be revisited during House Rural Development Council meetings this summer.

## Budget

The House passed its version of the [Amended FY18 budget](#) on Feb. 6, and Senate Appropriations subcommittees met last week to begin work on the Senate version of that budget.

House Appropriations subcommittees also held meetings last week to work on the [FY19 budget](#). A Family Connection representative testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Resources to request that \$238,500 be added to the FY19 budget to restore Collaboratives' appropriation to \$50,000 per county. House subcommittees are expected to continue work on the FY19 budget this week.

## 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 the Division of Family and Children Services for reporting child abuse or neglect.

**Status:** The House passed the bill on Feb. 8. It is not yet assigned to a Senate committee.

**HB 743** (Rep. David Clark, 98th) requires the GaDOE 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 House Education Subcommittee on Academic Achievement passed the bill, moving it back into the full House Education Committee.

**HB 844** (Rep. Penny Houston, 170th) expands the membership of the Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons and creates a statewide coordinated longitudinal data management system for all children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Status:** The bill is assigned to the House Health and Human Services Committee.

**HB 852** (Rep. Michael Smith, 41st) allows for a student to remain enrolled in a public school through the end of the school year after the student moves to a different attendance zone.

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



## CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

**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 was passed by the House Education Committee and is now in the House Rules Committee.

**HR 1017** (Rep. John Corbett, 174th) and a companion resolution, **SR 714** (Sen. Jenn Jordan, 6th), urge schools, local educational agencies, and the GaDOE to address the educational impact of dyslexia.

**Status of HR 1017:** The resolution was referred to the Academic Achievement Subcommittee of the House Education Committee.

**Status of SR 714:** The Senate adopted the resolution on Feb. 7.

**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 Senate Education Committee passed the bill on Feb. 8, and it is now assigned to the Senate Rules Committee.



## STABLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES

**HB 668** (Rep. Betty Price, 48th) allows a petition for guardianship to be filed for a proposed ward that 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 House Judiciary Committee passed the bill on Feb. 7, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**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 the House Juvenile Justice Committee passed the bill on Feb. 8. It is now assigned to the House Rules 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 discussed by a subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) on Feb. 5. The bill was tabled at the time but is scheduled for a subcommittee hearing on Wednesday, Feb. 14.

**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. A subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) discussed a substitute version of the bill at length on Feb. 5, but the bill was tabled. Changes to the bill include clarifying the definition of a “hands-free” phone. The bill was scheduled to be discussed again in the subcommittee on Feb. 12.

**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 introduced in the Senate.

**Status of HB 732:** The Reeves Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee passed the bill, which is now back in the full House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee.

**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 House Education Subcommittee on Academic Achievement passed the bill, and it is now back in the full House Education Committee.

**HB 802** (Rep. Wendell Willard, 51st) revises sentencing and paroling options for defendants who commit crimes at less than 18 years of age. The bill eliminates the death penalty and life without parole for these defendants and instructs the court to consider mitigating factors or circumstances that the court deems relevant. The bill also provides for retroactive parole consideration for inmates serving sentences for crimes committed when he or she was under 18.

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

**HB 837** (Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, 82nd) provides for statewide uniformity in policies and procedures concerning law enforcement contact with victims of sexual assault.

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

**HB 868** (Rep. Kim Schofield, 60th) amends the Low THC Oil Patient Registry by adding the diagnosis of lupus as an eligible condition.

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

**SB 352** (Rep. Renee Unterman, 45th) establishes a Commission on Substance Abuse and Recovery.

**Status:** The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 7, and it is now assigned to the House Health and Human Services Committee.

**SB 357** (Sen. Dean Burke, 11th), "The Health Act," forms a Health Coordination and Innovation Council of the State of Georgia, establishes a Health System Innovation Center, and creates the position of director of health care policy and strategic planning who reports directly to the governor. The center is established by the bill as a research organization that will utilize Georgia's academic, public health policy, data, and workforce resources to develop new approaches for financing and delivering health care.

**Status:** The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 7, and it is now assigned to the House Health and Human Services Committee.