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Integrating State Policy with Local Solutions

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## Chief Justice's Address Emphasizes Early Learning and Strong Families to Reduce Crime and Incarceration

The House and Senate—and their respective committees—worked through a high volume of bills last week in preparation for Crossover Day on Wednesday, Feb. 28. Crossover Day marks the final day legislation can move from one chamber to the other to be eligible to continue through the legislative process this session; however, language from bills that don't cross can still be added into bills that do cross. A few events made the already hectic week before Crossover Day even busier.

### Tax Bill

Gov. Nathan Deal, along with House and Senate leadership, held a [press conference](#) on Feb. 20 to announce updates to [HB 918](#) (Rep. Chuck Efstrotation, 104th). The bill now addresses the state tax code and state revenue projections in response to federal tax reform legislation passed by Congress late last year.

### Gun Bills

More than 1,500 proponents of stricter gun laws held a rally at the State Capitol on Feb. 21. Many attendees spoke directly with lawmakers afterward.

Two gun-related bills were introduced earlier during this legislative session:

- [HB 651](#) (Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, 82nd) outlaws the possession and use of a bump-fire stock, an attachment that allows a semi-automatic weapon to fire faster. The bill is assigned to the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee and hasn't been scheduled for a hearing.
- [SB 454](#) (Sen. Jennifer Jordan, 6th) is a similar bill in the Senate that's assigned to the Senate Public Safety Committee. That bill also hasn't had a hearing.

## State of the Judiciary Address

Supreme Court of Georgia Chief Justice P. Harris Hines delivered his final [State of the Judiciary address](#) on Feb. 22 to a joint session of the House and Senate. “Any time we can safely reunite fathers, mothers, and their children, we are helping to strengthen families, our communities, and our state. This is noble work indeed,” said Hines, who touched on several issues directly related to children and families.

Hines acknowledged upcoming changes in state leadership, including his own retirement later this year. He highlighted positive changes that have occurred within the judicial system over the last several years, as well as potential changes he believes will help keep Georgia moving in the right direction, including:

- Encouraging the creation of a statewide business court as recommended by the Court Reform Council to handle complex financial cases in light of Georgia’s business growth;
- Highlighting the success of criminal justice reform, including reductions to both prison commitment and crime rates, as well as the success of accountability courts—such as drug, mental health, parental, and veterans’ courts—of which every judicial circuit in Georgia now has at least one;
- Underscoring the success of juvenile justice reform, including a 36-percent reduction of youth who are confined in Georgia;
- Thanking the legislature for approving significant investments in Georgia’s child welfare system and asking for its help to address the increase in foster children and the shortage of foster families because “children who do not grow up in loving families are the ones who often wind up in our courts;”
- Encouraging lawmakers to “look favorably upon early learning initiatives” and to help bring communities together to ensure that when a child enters a classroom “he or she is well fed, well clothed, well rested, and ready to learn;” and
- Emphasizing the need for reforms to how bail is set, as recommended by the Council on Criminal Justice Reform, as “people cannot be kept in jail because of poverty alone.”

## Schedule

Legislators were in session Tuesday through Friday last week and are scheduled to be in session Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday this week. Crossover Day will be Wednesday, Feb. 28.

The General Assembly previously passed an [adjournment resolution](#) setting the legislative calendar for the rest of the 2018 session. Sine Die, the final day of the session, is scheduled for Thursday, March 29. Legislators can change the schedule by passing another adjournment resolution.

## Legislation

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



## HEALTHY CHILDREN

**HB 764** (Rep. David Clark, 98th) adds post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain to the list of diagnoses allowed to be treated with THC oil.

**Status:** A subcommittee passed the bill and forwarded it to the full House Judiciary Non-Civil 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 House Education Committee passed the bill, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**HB 983** (Rep. Betty Price, 48th) amends written Division of Family and Children Services' protocol that outlines procedures to be used in child abuse cases to require a medical review and evaluation upon a third allegation of child abuse.

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



## CHILDREN SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

**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 House passed the bill on Feb. 22, and it is now assigned to the Senate Education and Youth Committee.

**HB 926** (Rep. Beth Beskin, 54th) requires each local school system to provide Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) annual statistics and data on students' health and physical education. The State Board of Education is also required to complete a report on student health and physical education and publish the report on the GaDOE website.

**Status:** The House Education Committee discussed the bill. Chairman Brooks Coleman stated his intention to create a study committee on the issue, but no further action was taken.

**HB 928** (Rep. Rick Williams, 145th) extends HOPE Scholarship eligibility from seven years to 15 years from a student's graduation from high school or equivalent. An exception is also provided for military service years, which do not count toward the 15-year period.

**Status:** The House Higher Education Committee passed the bill on Feb. 21, and it is assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**HB 932** (Rep. Tommy Benton, 31st) raises the age of mandatory school attendance from 16 to 17 years.

**Status:** The bill was discussed in subcommittee and forwarded to the full Education Committee. It was noted that a fiscal note on a similar bill from last year determined that the cost of raising the mandatory school age to 17 would cost schools \$18.8 million.

**HB 955** (Rep. Spencer Frye, 118th) stipulates that the HOPE grant will cover a student's full cost of tuition.  
**Status:** The bill is assigned to the House Appropriations Committee.

**HB 963** (Rep. Buzz Brockway, 102nd) amends current law related to focused programs of study so that the State Workforce Development Board, in consultation with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Technical College System of Georgia, will develop an annual list of high-wage and high-demand industry credentials and state licenses. The bill also requires GaDOE to distribute the information annually to all Georgia middle and high schools.

**Status:** The House Education Committee passed the bill on Feb. 23, and it is now assigned to the House Rules 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 Senate passed the bill on Feb. 15, and it is now assigned to the House Education Committee.

**SB 405** (Sen. Fran Millar, 40th) provides for grants of \$1,500 per semester to low-income students enrolled in a University System of Georgia institution. The students must meet one of three criteria: earned SAT scores of at least 480 on reading and 530 on math; passed an end-of-pathway assessment under the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act; or completed a work-based learning experience.

**Status:** The Senate passed the bill on Feb. 23, and it is now assigned to the House Higher Education Committee.

**SR 761** (Sen. Fran Millar, 40th) creates the Senate Study Committee on Dyslexia. Two related resolutions—**HR 1017** (Rep. John Corbett, 174th) and **SR 714** (Sen. Jennifer Jordan, 6th)—urge schools, local educational agencies, and the Georgia Department of Education to address the educational impact of dyslexia.

**Status of HR 1017:** The House Education Committee passed the resolution on Feb. 15, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

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

**Status of SR 761:** The Senate Health and Human Services Committee passed the resolution, and it is now assigned to the Senate Rules Committee.



## STABLE, SELF-SUFFICIENT, PRODUCTIVE FAMILIES

**HB 927** (Rep. Chad Nimmer, 178th) requires the Division of Family and Children Services to provide certain information to a caregiver, foster parent, pre-adoptive parent, or relative no later than 30 days after placement of a child. This information includes the child's most recent physical and dental exams; any available information on the child's known medical conditions and medications; and recommendations from the child's most recent developmental assessment, trauma assessment, and psychological evaluation.

**Status:** The House Juvenile Justice Committee passed the bill on Feb. 21, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**HB 982** (Rep. Chad Nimmer, 178th) allows a court to excuse the Division of Family and Children Services from continuing its “diligent search” for relatives or fictive kin after six months, if the child is living with a foster parent in a stable home environment.

**Status:** The House Juvenile Justice Committee passed the bill on Feb. 23, and 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. A subcommittee chaired by Rep. Bert Reeves (Dist. 34) passed the bill, and it was scheduled for discussion in the full committee on Feb. 26.

**HB 672** (Rep. Erica Thomas, 39th) permits the use of speed detection devices by law enforcement personnel employed to patrol public schools only when sheriffs or local governing authorities approve of such devices and apply to the Department of Public Safety for a permit to use the devices.

**Status:** The House Motor Vehicles Committee passed a substitute version of the bill on Feb. 6, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

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

**Status:** The House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee passed a substitute version of the bill on Feb. 22, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**HB 769** (Rep. Rick Jasperse, 11th) implements recommendations from the House Rural Development Council relating to health care, including establishing micro-hospitals, which would have between two to seven beds and provide 24-hour services in counties with fewer than 50,000 residents, as well as a Rural Center for Health Care Innovation and Sustainability within the Department of Community Health’s State Office of Rural Health.

**Status:** The House passed the bill on Feb. 21, and it is now assigned to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

**HB 920** (Rep. Katie Dempsey, 13th) creates a limited exception to the confidentiality of adoption records, allowing the Division of Family and Children Services to share with the Office of the Child Advocate information concerning an adopted child when the child dies, suffers a near fatality, or is an alleged victim of child abuse or neglect.

**Status:** The House Judiciary Committee passed the bill on Feb. 23, and it is now assigned to the House Rules Committee.

**HB 958** (Rep. Dave Belton, 112th) requires the Department of Community Health to develop signs to be posted at certain medical facilities to indicate locations where a newborn child may be left and the mother can avoid criminal prosecution.

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

**HB 966** (Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, 82nd) limits the use of restraints on a child in court.

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

**HB 972** (Rep. Wendell Willard, 51st) allows the Division of Family and Children Services to offer extended care youth services to foster youth between the ages of 18 – 21 and amends current law to require a transition plan be completed for every foster child in the 90-day period prior to him or her turning 18.

**Status:** The bill is assigned to the House Juvenile Justice Committee, which heard the bill once on Feb. 23 and was scheduled to hear it again on Feb. 26.

**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 Senate passed the bill on Feb. 23, and it is not yet assigned to a House committee.

**SB 470** (Sen. Josh McKoon, 29th) requires the commissioner of public safety to assign at least one member of the Georgia State Patrol to every public school, subject to the appropriation of required funds.

**Status:** The bill is assigned to the Senate Public Safety Committee.

**SB 476** (Sen. William Ligon, 3rd) provides superior court with exclusive original jurisdiction over the trial of a child aged 13 - 17 who is charged with aggravated assault with a firearm.

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