



## Senate District 15 – Session Update – 2018

Monday, January 29, brought the beginning of a productive fourth week in the Senate chamber. Committee and subcommittee hearings were in full swing as we considered various bills. We also took Senate floor action on issues regarding adoption proceedings, Medicaid fraud, veterans affairs and animal cruelty.

### Senate Action

#### **Veterans Employment Credit Expanded**

If passed into law, Senate Bill 129 would allow former active duty military service members, who began service in January of 1990, to receive retirement credit toward the Employee Retirement System (ERS). Qualification eligibility requires that veterans must show proof of service, have had membership in the ERS for two years and pay equal to the cost of creditable service.

#### **Adoption Law**

To further update adoption proceedings, we passed Senate Bill 131. SB 131 would allow for a stay of an adoption while an order terminating parental rights is pending. In addition, SB 131 would allow a juvenile to waive his or her right to an attorney, if the waiver it is made knowingly, voluntarily and on the record.

#### **Medicaid Fraudulent Penalties Increase**

Senate Bill 321 addresses fraud within our state's Medicaid program. Currently the minimum penalty fee for Medicaid fraud is set at \$5,500. SB 321 would increase the minimum penalty to \$11,181 to match the current federal standard.

#### **Animal Cruelty Charges**

Senate Bill 257 dealing with animal cruelty, would require approved Department of Agriculture veterinarians to advise and consult with law enforcement in cases of suspected animal cruelty prior to charges being filed. Animals addressed under this bill are goats, sheep, pigs and cattle.

#### **Expanding Access to the ERS**

Senate Bill 101 would allow individuals participating in the Georgia Defined Contribution Plan to buy into the Employee's Retirement System (ERS). The bill specifies criteria for interested individuals and expands employee choice when purchasing his or her plan.

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### **Capitol Hill Happenings** **Telehealth Day at the Capitol**

The Senate recognized Tuesday, January 3 as Telehealth Day at the state Capitol. The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth is a non-profit organization that works to increase access to primary care and reduce costs in rural and underserved communities throughout the state. Georgia's telehealth network has more than 550 sites statewide.

### **Recognizing Community Health Centers Day**

Thursday, February 1, we passed Senate Resolution 655, in recognition of our state's Community Health Centers. Sadly, there are more than 200 medically underserved communities across Georgia. These federally qualified health centers assist in providing high-quality primary and preventive care to more than 600,000 Georgians. Further, community health centers add nearly \$300 million annually to Georgia's economy.

### **Funding Broadband in Rural Areas**

Senate Resolution 502 urges the United States Congress to develop and fund policies and resources to bring high-speed broadband access to rural Georgia and rural America. High-speed broadband service is critical to development across many industries including education, telehealth and agriculture.

### **Human Trafficking**

Last week we recognized the GBI for their Commitment to Combating Human Trafficking through Senate Resolution 588. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit (CEACC) was specifically recognized for their work in detecting, investigating and assisting in stopping human trafficking. GBI also provides internet safety education across the state regarding this ongoing issue.

As we make our way through session, I will continue to update you on major developments. Thank you for your support, allowing me the opportunity to work for you. It is humbling to know that you have entrusted me with the responsibility to protect and serve our district. If you need anything at all, please feel free to contact my Capitol office anytime.