

# Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Week 8 — 2017



Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, we returned to Capitol Hill for week eight of the legislative session, which ended Friday with Crossover Day. Any legislation that did not pass out of its respective chamber by Friday's deadline, will likely not have time to make it through the process and therefore will not be reconsidered until next session. We passed numerous bills this week in hopes that we can continue positive reform efforts and progress in the Peach State.

## Medical Cannabis Oil Expansion

One bill passing overwhelmingly was House Bill 65, dealing with the expansion of Medical Cannabis Oil. HB 65 expands our current medical cannabis law by adding eight more medical conditions to those whom would be allowed to apply for the THC oil registry. The additional conditions are as follows: Tourette's syndrome; autism spectrum disorder; Epidermolysis Bullosa; Alzheimer's disease; HIV; AIDS; peripheral neuropathy; and those who are in a hospice program. Other provisions of the bill are as follows:

- Patients may possess cannabis oil with a maximum of 5 percent THC and a maximum amount of 20 fluid ounces.
- Registration requirement with the Georgia Department of Public Health after physician recommendation.
- Exemption from prosecution in Georgia for possession of medical cannabis oil that has been legally obtained in another state and meets the state requirements.
- Reciprocity regarding medical cannabis registration cards of other states, as long as the medicine in such a person's possession complies with Georgia's laws.

Upon passing the 2015 law for allowance of medical cannabis oil, we soon heard from patients that shared concerns of prosecution for bringing the medicine into Georgia from other states. While this is an ongoing conversation that I am sure we will continue to have in the future, we do believe the expansion and prosecution exemption is a step in the right direction. This bill is now under review in the Senate. The House is also considering the Senate version of the bill which lowers the THC amount from 5% to 3% and only expands the bill to Autism Spectrum disorder.

## Rural Healthcare Access

As rural healthcare continues to be a major concern, last week we passed legislation which will provide incentive to healthcare practitioners' willing to serve in less populated areas of the state. House Bill 427 would expand the current service cancelable loan program for physicians and practitioners in underserved areas. A service cancelable loan allows fees to be forgiven if an individual fulfills the service obligation requirements of the loan. HB 427 expands this program by making service cancelable loans available to dentists, physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses willing to serve rural areas. We are hopeful that this type of incentive will address the shortage of physicians and other health care practitioners in less populated areas currently lacking access to quality care.

## **Education Reform**

Education reform continues with the passage House Bill 338. HB 338 seeks to improve our lowest performing public schools by creating a support and assistance system that would fall under the State Board of Education's (SBOE) intervention power. The bill provides the creation of a new level of governance to oversee schools receiving unacceptable ratings. The "turnaround system" would be led by a Chief Turnaround Officer (CTO) who would be appointed by the SBOE and would be a Department of Education employee. The chosen CTO would be required to have minimum of 10 years of experience in K-12 education and experience in a principal position or higher in a public-school system for at least three years. Different from past proposals, this legislation allows for school systems to enter into a contract with the SBOE to receive help. Upon identification of struggling school systems, the CTO would extend the intervention contract offer to struggling schools. Should the school choose to enter the contract, it removes them from the SBOE's current intervention process, and if the school refuses the contract, the school would remain in the current intervention process. If the school agrees to the contract, the CTO would manage and oversee turnaround schools, recommending experienced individuals who have a track record of improving failing schools. Further, the CTO would assist in creating initiatives to address community conditions, including poverty, wellness, transportation and adult educational opportunities. The bill also expands the SBOE's ability to remove local boards of education and creates a Joint Study Committee on the Establishment of a State Accreditation Process which will be tasked to explore the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a state public school and school system accreditation process.

## **Kinship Care**

With over 100,000 children in kinship care, we continue our efforts to improve temporary guardianship conditions through the passage of House Bill 330 and House Bill 331. HB 330 would require the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) to provide relatives or family friends who have taken on the guardianship of a child, with contact information for a regional DFCS case worker who is knowledgeable in kinship care and assistance programs available. House Bill 331, known as the Caregiver Educational Consent Act, would authorize a kinship caregiver to give legal consent for educational services, medical services relating to academic enrollment, curricular and extracurricular participation. The bill also creates the Kinship Caregiver's Affidavit, a form that would be valid for one year designating the caregiver as a school's point of contact for the child regarding attendance, discipline and educational progress, but would not affect the rights of the child's parent or legal guardian. Current Georgia law provides that Kinship caregivers must obtain a signature from the child's parent, which is not always possible under certain circumstances. There are over 100,000 children in Georgia in kinship care, and this legislation would provide support to these families across the state by simplifying processes and providing caregivers with necessary resources to help them raise a child.

The last day of session, Day 40, is set for March 30<sup>th</sup>. Over the next few weeks, we will begin consideration of the many Senate bills that are now in the House chamber. As we move into the final stretch of the 2017 legislative session, please reach out to me with concerns or questions! It is a privilege and honor to serve as your voice on Capitol Hill and I thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility. I will return with weekly updates for the remainder of session. May God bless each and every one of you and may God to continue to bless the great state of Georgia!