

Under the Gold Dome

District 149 Legislative Update – Weeks 9 & 10 — 2018



2019 FY Budget

Last week we completed our constitutional requirement of passing a balanced budget through the passage of House Bill 684, the Fiscal Year 2019 (FY 2019) budget. The 2019 FY budget will be a guideline for state spending during our next fiscal year which will begin July 1, 2018. Following House Appropriations Committee recommendations, we have directed spending to address issues important to our citizens and state. Below you will find a highlight of 2019 budget allocation.

Rural Measures

Our efforts to address critical issues in our rural communities continues as we have allocated funds towards initiatives that will assist and improve conditions for those living outside of metro areas. Much of this rural funding is focused on boosting economic development and ensuring access to quality healthcare. Funding will be allocated in the following ways:

- Department of Agriculture's Georgia Grown marketing program
- Downtown development attorney to help Georgia's small towns secure redevelopment grants
- Funding to secure a Deputy commissioner of rural Georgia
- Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovations
- Two rural surgical fellowships at St. Joseph's/Candler Hospital
- Statewide residency recruitment fair for rural medical facilities
- Insurance premium assistance for physicians who practice in underserved counties with one or less physicians
- 10 regional Emergency Medical Services (EMS) training positions to train EMS personnel in rural Georgia
- Rural Health Systems Innovation Center
- Funding for soft skills training and character education development for rural lowest performing schools
- Mobile audiology clinic to provide audiological care to children in rural Georgia
- Birth-to-five literacy and numeracy in rural Georgia

Education

In recent years, over half the budget has been put towards improving education in our state. As Georgia continues to grow, it is of critical importance that our students are job ready or prepared to pursue higher education goals. This trend continues as we have proposed that 55.9% of total state spending goes towards improving our educational systems:

- \$119.5 million for K-12 enrollment growth and training
- \$361.7 million for the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) to support 117,957 retired and 218,193 active TRS members.
- Two Advanced Placement exams, one STEM exam and one non-STEM exam, for low-income students

- Funding for the Chief Turnaround Officer program to help Georgia's schools in most need of assistance
- \$1.6 million for a student mental health awareness training program, including response and intervention training, for students in preschool through 12th grade
- \$111 million for the University System of Georgia enrollment growth and increased square footage
- \$5.5 million for the Technical College System of Georgia enrollment growth and increased square footage
- \$27.1 million for the Dual Enrollment program
- \$2.7 million for 1,177 additional HOPE and Zell Miller private scholarships
- \$65.3 million for 27,832 more HOPE and Zell Miller public scholarships
- \$8 million for school security grants to improve security in Georgia's schools

Healthcare

Quality healthcare for all has always been of concern and we are working towards improving those conditions through the 2019 budget. This year's budget also considers our state's need for additional mental healthcare programs.

- \$16.9 million provider rate increase for nursing homes
- \$962,022 for increased background checks for long-term care facility owners and employees.
- \$568,057 towards the Marcus Autism Center to cover the cost of treating autistic children with the greatest needs.
- \$2 million to the Department of Public Health to address our states high rate of maternal mortality
- Funding for child and adolescent crisis services, including four new respite homes
- 13 new Georgia APEX Program grants to expand mental health services to students in 100 more schools
- Telemedicine equipment and services
- High-fidelity wraparound services training that will impact up to 3,000 young Georgians.
- Funding to expand the Georgia Crisis Access Line's operating hours and to create a mobile application to provide mental health crisis services.
- \$2.2 million for Department of Human Services care coordinator positions to improve mental health outcomes for foster care children.

Miscellaneous

The 2019 budget also includes funding areas which are designed to meet various needs of our state.

- Funding to clear hurricane debris and remove sunken vessels along the Georgia coastline
- \$15.1 million for growth towards out-of-home care
- \$15.2 million in additional funding to increase foster care per diem rates for relative and child placement agency foster care providers
- Funding for Georgia's highly successful accountability courts
- Nine additional assistant district attorney positions and nine assistant public defenders to support juvenile courts across the state
- Statewide transportation infrastructure construction, maintenance and improvements

FAST Act

In addition to passing our version of the 2019 FY budget, we also worked to pass legislation in support of Georgia small businesses through Senate Bill 2. This bill, also known the FAST Act, works towards: Fairness, Accountability, Simplification and Transparency - Empowering Our Small Businesses to Succeed.

SB 2 works to increase accountability, expedite local government permitting and reduce regulatory burdens on small businesses. Under the bill, an appointed working group would develop best practices and standards for certifying counties and municipalities as “Ready for Partnership Georgia” by establishing a process to review, renew and revoke certifications. The certification will be based on the following:

- County / municipality licensing and permitting fees
- Time required by the local government to process license and permit applications
- Consolidation of forms and documents to avoid repetitive information requests

We believe that SB 2 will further strengthen our state’s business-friendly reputation while relieving our small businesses of repetitive burdensome regulatory requirements.

Short Line Rail Credits for Rural Georgia

Did you know that Georgia’s freight rail network provides \$2.4 billion in direct economic impact to our state? For this reason, we overwhelmingly adopted House Resolution 1225 to benefit our 29 Class III short line rails, which stretch over 1,000 miles across Georgia. HR 1225 urges Congress to assist short lines through passage of the Building Rail Access for Customers and the Economy (BRACE) Act. This act would make the federal Railroad Track Maintenance Tax Credit, which expired in 2016, permanent. The credit would be used for rail improvements, allowing short line and regional rail lines to claim 50 cents for every \$1 spent, up to \$3,500, per mile on track improvements. The BRACE Act would greatly benefit our rural revitalization efforts as this investment will improve infrastructure, provide jobs and promote growth in rural communities.

State Accreditation Study Committee

Last week we also adopted House Resolution 1162 for the benefit of Georgia’s schools, teachers and students. HR 1162 would establish the House Study Committee on the Establishment of a State Accreditation Process to explore if the formation of such would be of benefit to Georgia’s public schools and school systems. Currently, there is no state entity responsible for accrediting Georgia’s public schools or local school systems. As a result, many of these schools and school systems seek accreditation through private organizations. The five-member study committee would explore the following:

- Resources and structure needed for a state accreditation organization
- Exploration of foreseeable issues with existing private accreditation agencies
- Analyzation of ways to align accreditation review with charter renewal for charter systems and contract renewal for strategic waivers school systems
- Establishment of a state process to annually review system charters and contracts
- Potential consequences of losing state accreditation
- Establishment of a school board review commission

Study Committee recommendations for proposed legislation would be filed in the committee report, due by Dec. 1, 2018, to allow for further review by the General Assembly.

Election News

Last week also brought “qualifying week” for those whom plan to run for state office during the 2018 election cycle. After much thought, prayer and discussion with family, friends and district citizens, I am pleased to announce that I will be seeking re-election to continue my service as your representative! It has been such an honor to work on your behalf and I sincerely thank you for the support and encouragement you have sent over the years. I look forward to what the future brings for our state and district.

Week 10

Healthcare Measures

The Health Act

Last week we passed Senate Bill 357, also known as the Health Act. If signed into law, SB 357, will establish the Health Coordination and Innovation Council. The 18-member council, made up of academic, industry leaders and government experts, will be responsible for streamlining and coordinating all components of our state's health care systems. They will work to coordinate major functions of our health systems, while developing strategies to stabilize costs and improve access to quality care. The bill also establishes an advisory board that would provide guidance to the council. The council's responsibilities include:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of previously enacted and ongoing health programs
- Determining how to best develop new approaches and promote innovation
- Effectiveness of existing resources, expertise and improvement opportunities.

We are confident this bill is a major step forward in addressing the health care-related challenges our state faces.

Autism Support

Children with autism will now have additional access to vital treatments and therapies, thanks to the unanimous passage of Senate Bill 118. SB 118 increases the age of coverage for autism treatments from six-years-old to 20-years-old. The bill also increases the coverage limit from \$30,000 to \$35,000 annually. Further, SB 118 requires insurers to provide coverage for applied behavior analysis, which is a necessary medical treatment for autism. If signed into law, SB 118 would take effect on Jan. 1, 2019.

Elder Abuse Prevention

Sadly, elder abuse in our state has been on the rise in recent years. In an effort to address this issue, we passed Senate Bill 406. This bill would create the Georgia Long-term Care Background Check Program, requiring elder care providers in personal care homes or other assisted living facilities to undergo a comprehensive, fingerprint-based criminal background check. Care facility owners, applicants, and employees of personal care services will be subject background check requirements, taking effect Oct. 1, 2019. Further, the bill implements a central caregiver registry so that those looking to hire a personal caregiver could access information on eligible and ineligible applicants.

Rural Hospital Assistance

In an effort to assist our struggling rural hospitals, we passed House Resolution 1376. HR 1376 urges the newly developed House Rural Development Council (RDC) to gain input from state hospitals regarding their financial condition. The resolution also encourages the RDC receive recommendations from the hospital industry on any legislative or regulatory changes that could assist in sustaining our state's health care systems. While many of Georgia's hospitals are very profitable, others, especially those in rural areas, are at risk. We are hopeful the recommended provisions in this measure will provide the council with information needed to turnaround and financially stabilize our state's rural hospitals.

Agriculture Education Act

We continue support of Georgia's largest industry, agriculture, through the passage of Senate Bill 330, also known as the Georgia Agricultural Education Act. Georgia's agricultural education program for grades 6-12, will now be developed by the Dept. of Education and industry experts to adhere to the nationally recognized three-component model of school-based agricultural education. The three-component model consists of the following:

- Daily classroom and lab instruction
- Hands-on, experimental learning through a supervised agricultural experience program
- Leadership and learning opportunities through participation in agricultural education programs, such as the Future Farmers of America (FFA)

Further, the bill authorizes the establishment of an elementary agricultural pilot program to determine whether a statewide implementation of such would be of benefit to Georgia students.

Military Measures

This session we have passed a number of bills to benefit our state's military, including Senate Bill 395, which passed unanimously last week. This bill establishes the 18-member Georgia Joint Defense Commission, responsible for advising the governor and the General Assembly on state and national military issues. The commission will be responsible for the following:

- Recommending policies to support the long-term sustainability and development of Georgia's active and civilian military;
- Developing programs to enhance communities' relationships with military installations
- Preparing a task force for potential base realignment or military installation closures in the state
- Submitting an annual report to the governor and the Georgia General Assembly on the state of Georgia's military installations in preparation for possible BRAC closures

Further, this bill establishes the Defense Community Economic Development Grant Program which will assist military communities with projects, events and activities promoting our military installations.

The second pro-military measure passing the House last week was Senate Bill 82. This bill allows members of the Georgia National Guard or reserves, located in Georgia, to be classified as legal residents under the eligibility requirements for HOPE scholarship and grant programs. This expansion would only apply to those stationed in Georgia or who list Georgia as their permanent home. Currently, only active-duty military service members, their spouses and children are eligible to receive Georgia's HOPE scholarships and grants.

Brunch Bill

Monday, March 12, also brought final passage to Senate Bill 17, also known as the "Brunch Bill." This legislation would allow local governments to authorize alcoholic beverage sales beginning at 11 a.m. on Sundays, if approved by voters through a local referendum. SB 17 applies only to establishments who show half of their annual gross sales are made from food or overnight room rentals. If SB 17 becomes law, it is expected to increase sales by \$100 million and generate approximately \$11 million in additional state and local tax revenue.

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