

February 28, 2022, Issue 8

HR688 makes Feb. 23 Ahmaud Arbery Day in Georgia

HEALTHCARE

HB1013, Speaker Ralston's 74-page Mental Health Parity Act, passed out of committee unanimously. The Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation developed recommended solutions to funding, workforce, access and insurance issues that hamper mental health and substance abuse services in Georgia. This bill would implement their recommendations. Among other things, the measure:

- seeks parity in pay for mental health providers compared to other healthcare providers,
- strengthens workforce development initiatives aimed at addressing a shortage of mental-health workers,
- helps police departments forced to serve as first responders to calls involving people suffering from mental illness or substance abuse.

Calls, texts and chats to Georgia's mental health crisis hotline have increased 24% since the pandemic began; mental health screenings have soared by 426%; drug overdose deaths increased by 36% between April 2020 and last April 2021.

HB1351 would remove prescription drug benefit administration from Medicaid Managed Care Organizations and put it back into Medicaid fee-for-service where most drugs are reimbursed at the National Average Drug Acquisition Cost plus a fair dispensing fee. Pharmaceutical reps testifying in favor of the bill were quite clear that more and more independent pharmacies are closing in communities where their clientele is primarily

Medicaid Managed Care because over 50% of medications are reimbursed below the level of the pharmacy's cost. The bill passed unanimously and goes to Rules.

HB1145 would make families of public safety officers who died after contracting COVID-19 eligible to receive money from the state's indemnification fund.

HB1400 would settle a seven-year-old dispute about licensing for medical marijuana production and sales. The bill increases the number of state licenses from six to 22.
Registered patients have been allowed to use medical marijuana oil for seven years but there is no legal way for them to buy it in Georgia.

HB1192 to make HIV-positive Georgians eligible for Medicaid coverage, conditional on their income and a federal waiver passed with bipartisan support.

SB514 passed out of committee. It allows parents to opt out of a mask mandate from their children's school. A second bill would bar state and local agencies from asking for proof of vaccination status.