



CONNECTED to Public Policy

Connecting Communities to State Policy in Action News Bulletin—March 3, 2009

Highlights:

- Legislators have completed 24 out of 40 legislative days.
- Crossover day (30th legislative day) is scheduled for March 12.
- The Amended FY09 budget passed the House on Feb. 26. The House included federal stimulus funds for Medicaid and education.

Upcoming Events for Advocates

2009 Georgia CASA State Conference
March 28
Cobb Galleria Center, Atlanta
Georgiacasa.org/Conference-2009.html

For more information on legislative priorities from our partner organizations, visit:

[Barton Law Clinic](#)

[Georgia Appleseed](#)

[Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#)

Voices for Georgia's Children:

[Children's Policy Watch](#) and
[Blog for Georgia's Children](#)

Legislators have completed 24 of 40 legislative days. The House and Senate continue to meet Tuesday through Thursday of each week. Only 16 legislative days remain. Bills must pass the chamber of origin by day 30 to have any chance of passage. Day 30 is scheduled for Thursday, March 12.

BUDGET UPDATE

The House passed the amended FY09 budget on Thursday, Feb. 26. When originally passed during the 2008 Session, the FY09 budget was \$21.2 billion. In January, Gov. Sonny Perdue submitted his recommendations for an amended FY09 budget of \$19.2 billion. Perdue further reduced his revenue estimate in mid-February. The FY09 budget is now \$18.9 billion.

The House version of the amended FY09 budget included \$475 million in increased federal Medicaid matching funds from the stimulus package, and \$145 million from the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which was used to restore \$145 million to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula. The final austerity cut for QBE is \$229.1 million. Local school systems must decide how to implement the cuts, which are for the current fiscal year ending June 30.

Other highlights of the House version of the FY09 budget include:

Department of Community Health

\$2 million restored for community health centers

Department of Human Resources

- \$3.2 million restored to Grant-In-Aid for county health departments
- \$100,000 restored for Sexual Assault Centers (total cut \$535,000)
- \$200,000 restored for Family Violence Shelters (total cut \$615,000)
- Child Placing Agency reimbursement rates for the lowest three levels of care restored for the final quarter of the fiscal year

LEGISLATION

Healthy Children

HB 23 (Rep. Matt Ramsey, 72nd) would prohibit use of cell phones and the practice of text messaging by drivers under age 18. *Status: Passed House Motor Vehicles. Assigned to House Rules.*

HB 39 (Rep. Ron Stephens, 164th) would increase tobacco tax by \$1 per pack of cigarettes. *Status: The Ways and Means Public Finance Subcommittee held a hearing on HB 39 on Feb. 25. Many advocacy groups spoke in favor of HB 39.*

HB 229 (Rep. Brooks Coleman, 97th) creates the SHAPE (Student Health and Physical Education) Act. Beginning in 2011-12, students in grades 1 – 12 enrolled in physical education must have an annual fitness assessment approved by the State Board of Education. *Status: Passed the House and is assigned to Senate Education & Youth.*

HB 474 (Rep. Pat Gardner, 57th) increases PeachCare income eligibility from 235 percent of the federal poverty level to 300 percent. *Status: Assigned to House Appropriations.*

SB 5 (Sen. Don Thomas, 54th) requires seat belts in all passenger vehicles, including pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles, but excludes vehicles “used on a farm in connection with agricultural pursuits.” *Status: Passed Senate. Assigned to House Agriculture & Consumer Affairs.*

SB 92 (Sen. Judson Hill, 32nd) seeks to implement a “premium-assistance” program in Georgia’s existing Medicaid and PeachCare programs. The state would pay premiums to enroll members in commercial health plans, such as employer-sponsored health plans. *Status: SB 92 is scheduled to be heard in Senate Insurance and Labor on March 3.*

School Success

HB 149 (Rep. Jan Jones, 46th) creates the Move on When Ready Act, which would allow 11th- and 12th-grade students to attend postsecondary colleges and schools for high-school credit. *Status: Passed House on Feb. 25. Assigned to Senate Education & Youth.*

HB 193 (Rep. Tom Graves, 12th) would allow the requirement for a 180-day school year to be defined as an hourly equivalent. School districts could lengthen the school day and have a four-day school week. *Status: Passed House Education Committee. In House Rules.* **HB 198** (Rep. Mark Williams, 178th) contains the same language. *Status: Was discussed in House Appropriations Education Subcommittee on Feb. 23, but no vote taken.*

HB 215 (Rep. Steve Davis, 109th), the Graduating Everyone Matters Act, establishes three diploma options for high-school students: a general diploma, a career/vocational/technical diploma, and a college prep diploma. This would return Georgia to high-school graduation requirements abandoned in the late 1990s. *Status: Amended to offer two diplomas: Career/Vocational/ Technical and College Preparation. Passed House Education. Assigned to House Rules.*

HB 251 (Rep. Alisha Morgan, 39th) would permit a student to go to any public school within a school district if space permits, effective in 2010-11 school year. *Status: Passed House on Feb. 19. Assigned to Senate Education & Youth.*

HB 400 (Rep. Fran Millar, 79th), titled Building Resourceful Individuals to Develop Georgia’s Economy Act, would develop programs to improve graduation rates and the preparedness of students for postsecondary education and careers, and provide for model programs for students at risk of dropping out of high school. *Status: Assigned to House Committee on Education. Discussed on Feb. 18, but no action taken.*

Stable, Self-Sufficient Families

HB 37 (Rep. Roger Bruce, 64th) would allow 24 hours of unpaid leave annually for parents to attend school conferences, or take children or elderly parents to medical appointments. *Status: Assigned to House Industrial Relations.*

HB 237 (Rep. Ed Lindsey, 54th) provides financial assistance to families adopting “hard-to-place” children with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities. *Status: Passed House. Assigned to Senate Health & Human Services.*

HB 290 (Rep. Doug McKillip, 115th) increases minimum wage and provides for cost-of-living increases. *Status: House Industrial Relations.*

Strong Communities

HB 123 (Rep. Matt Ramsey, 72nd) expands the definition of child molestation from direct contact only to include contact by electronic device, including cell phone or Internet. *Status: Passed House Judiciary Non-Civil. Assigned to House Rules.*

HB 245 (Rep. Wendell Willard, 49th) allows juvenile court to suspend the driver’s license of a child below age 17 charged with a delinquent act. *Status: Passed House Judiciary Non-Civil. Assigned to House Rules.*

SB 69 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) expands the definition of child abuse to include sexual exploitation by any person who allows, permits, encourages, or requires that a child engage in prostitution or any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual or print medium depicting such conduct. The mandate for reporting child abuse expands beyond parent or caretaker responsibility to include any person. *Status: Passed Senate Judiciary.*