

Gold Dome Report – Legislative Day 25

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With less than a week to go before Crossover Day, the General Assembly continued to advance major propositions through the legislative process on Tuesday. One of those major propositions, Speaker Ralston's Mental Health Parity Act ([HB 1013](#)), made its appearance on the House floor and garnered nearly unanimous support (169-3) as it crossed the rotunda to the Senate. Meanwhile, the Senate signed off on legislation to expand apprenticeships in the state ([SB 379](#)) and a proposal purporting to ban social media platforms from censoring users ([SB 393](#)).

Time is quickly running out for legislators to get their bills and resolutions through the committee process and onto the floor by Legislative Day 28, leading to packed committee agendas with late arriving notices and substitutes. Tuesday marked the last day that bills could pass out of Senate committees for floor consideration by Crossover Day according to the Senate Rules, and opportunities are fleeting to push bills through the House. We try to make sense of as much of the madness as we can in this [#GoldDomeReport](#).

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Floor Action

The House of Representatives took up the following measures on Tuesday:

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- [HB 1013](#) - Mental Health Parity Act; enact - PASSED (169-3)
 - [HB 1039](#) - Income tax; expenditures on maintenance for Class III railroads; extend tax credit - PASSED (164-4)
 - [HB 1040](#) - Social services; community action agencies to submit audit reports and IRS forms before any contracts are made with DHS; require - PASSED (173-0)
 - [HB 1042](#) - OneGeorgia Authority Act; grant program to establish primary care medical facilities in health professional shortage areas; provide - PASSED (162-0)
 - [HB 1194](#) - Motor vehicles; federal regulations regarding safe operation of commercial motor vehicles and carriers; update reference date - PASSED (173-0)
 - [HB 1304](#) - Georgia Caregivers Act; create - PASSED (164-0)
 - [HB 1319](#) - Georgia Student Finance Authority; provide for Georgia LEO Scholarship grant - PASSED (172-1)
 - [HB 1344](#) - Public officers and employees; updated language regarding spouses of armed forces service members; provide - PASSED (170-0)

The Senate took up the following measures on Tuesday:

- [SB 379](#) - State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia; establish a program to promote the creation and expansion of registered apprenticeship programs in the state; provide - PASSED (42-4)
- [SB 381](#) - Pimping and Pandering; penalty provisions; increase - PASSED (42-11)
- [SB 393](#) - 'Common Carrier Non-Discrimination Act'; enact - PASSED (33-21)
- [SB 441](#) - Courts; reestablishment of the Criminal Case Data Exchange Board as an advisory board to The Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia; provide - PASSED (53-0)
- [HB 342](#) - Professions and businesses; certain advertisements related to plumbing; prohibit - PASSED (54-0)

Committee Reports

House Health and Human Services

The House Health and Human Services Committee, temporarily chaired by Representative Houston Gaines (R-Athens), met on Tuesday to consider several propositions:

- [HB 731](#), authored by Representative J. Collins (R-Villa Rica), amends Title 31 to require hospitals and ambulatory surgical centers to utilize surgical smoke evacuation systems during surgical procedures to protect patients and health care workers from the hazards of surgical

smoke.

Representative Collins presented the bill to the Committee with the assistance of a representative of the Georgia Council of Perioperative Nurses and Georgia Association of Surgical Technologists. The representative explained that this is not an unfunded mandate because 82% of hospitals in Georgia already have surgical smoke evacuation systems. Six states have already adopted measures on surgical smoke and 12 other states are considering them.

Chairman Cooper asked why, if 82% of hospitals already have the systems, legislation is necessary, to which the representative said that the use of these systems are at the discretion of the surgeons and there are no uniform standards or requirements on when they should be used. Chairwoman Cooper further asked whether masks make a difference, to which the representative noted that the masks can help block some smoke particles but not the gasses released. Another nurse appeared in support of the legislation. A surgeon at Emory also testified on the bill, explaining that the efficacy of smoke evacuation systems is unproven and PPE should be the first line of defense. He called for more study before a mandate.

The Committee took no action on the bill but did note that the Senate Health and Human Services passed a similar bill earlier in the afternoon.

- [HB 1069](#), authored by Representative Bruce Williamson (R-Monroe), to provide for the licensure of adult mental health programs.

Representative Williamson presented the bill to the Committee as a Substitute (LC 33 9088S). He explained that adult mental health programs are now being licensed as personal care homes, and many of the licensure standards and rules for personal care homes do not work for these programs. This is a step-down level of care (not acute inpatient care), and the substitute provides the Department of Community Health time for implementation. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by Committee Substitute and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [HB 1449](#), authored by Representative Darlene Taylor (R-Thomasville), amends Title 49 to provide for the Department of Community Health to contract directly with dental care administrators to cover dental services for recipients of medical assistance under Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids programs. The bill also requires DCH to competitively bid out such contracts and limit such contracts to a minimum of two but no more than three dental care administrators.

Representative Taylor presented the bill to the Committee, explaining that this legislation will provide for better transparency and evaluation of the provision of dental services under Medicaid and PeachCare.

The Committee took no action on the bill with Chairman Cooper suggesting that the issue be studied through a study committee or other forum.

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Chairman Ben Watson (R-Savannah) called the Health and Human Services Committee to order on

Tuesday afternoon to discuss several bills.

- [SR 584](#), by Senator Kim Jackson (D-Stone Mountain) and presented by Senator Michelle Au (D-Johns Creek), would recognize May 4th, 2022 as Maternal Mental Health Day in Georgia. An amendment was made to change it to “Day at the Capitol” instead of “in Georgia”. The amendment passed unanimously, and the measure received a DO PASS recommendation.
- [SB 539](#), by Senator Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia), amends Part 1 of Article 3 of Chapter 11 of Title 16 of the OCGA. Currently, you are allowed to enter into a health clinic and videotape and record. This bill would prohibit videotaping or recording patient activities without the consent of the patient. The major concern is patient privacy, which this bill seeks to remedy. There were no questions or concerns, and the Committee moved the bill DO PASS.
- [SB 573](#), authored by Senator Matt Brass (R-Newnan), amends Chapter 7 of Title 31 of the OCGA. As defined in the bill, surgical smoke is the gaseous by-product produced by surgical tools or heat-producing equipment used for dissection and hemostasis during surgical or invasive procedures. The measure would require hospital and ambulatory surgery centers to adopt policies to reduce exposure to surgical smoke.

Chairman Watson elected to not have public testimony due to public testimony in previous years. Many members spoke favorably on the flexibility created in the bill. The Committee made a DO PASS recommendation.

- [SB 609](#), by Senator Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga), amends Article 9 of Chapter 12 of Title 16 of the OCGA. This bill amends the dates for the retrospective study and amends the Class I and Class II production licenses. It sets a deadline for the appeals process and increases process transparency. Newly awarded licenses would be scored under the new scoring system. Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge) mentioned this was in an effort to move this process forward without completely opening the process to everyone.

Senator Chuck Hufstetler asked about the six that had already received licenses. To which, the authors mentioned they would move through the appeals process instead of starting over. Several members expressed concern over changing the rules of “the game” for licensees. The measure passed 8-5 and is headed to Senate Rules.

- [SB 610](#), authored by Senator Sally Harrell (D-Atlanta), amends Article 7 of Chapter 4 of Title 49 to require the Department of Community Health to conduct a comprehensive review of provider reimbursement rates for home and community based services covered by the waiver programs.

Senator Harrell presented the bill to the Committee, explaining that the legislation is aimed at addressing the substantial waitlists for NOW, COMP, ICWP, and EDWP waivers. She posited that these waitlists stem from the lack of providers due to low reimbursement rates. The bill requires that provider rate studies be conducted every three years beginning in 2024 so that provider rates can be adjusted regularly. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

Senate Education & Youth Committee

The Senate Education & Youth Committee, chaired by Senator Chuck Payne (R-Dalton), met on Monday to consider the following propositions:

- [SB 328](#), authored by Senator Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga), amends Title 20 to provide for the designation of a nonprofit organization to govern high school athletics in this state.

Senator Mullis presented the bill to the Committee as a Substitute (LC 49 0929S), explaining that the legislation “simply creates a new athletic association” for high school athletics. He further stated that GHSA, the current athletic association, has “mistreated” every school “at one time or another” and that this bill does not replace GHSA, it “just creates a new one.” Senator Mullis complained that there is no accountability for GHSA, but this bill has teeth.

Robin Hines, Executive Director of GHSA, spoke in opposition to the legislation. In response to a question, Dr. Hines explained that GHSA has been around since 1903 and is in the “top 3” of high school athletic associations in the nation. Senator Randy Robertson (R-Cataula) appeared before the Committee and spoke in favor of the legislation. Buddy Costley of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders testified with concerns that the bill has not been vetted with the school administrators who will ultimately be impacted and asked for the opportunity to collaborate outside of the legislative process to either resolve concerns or craft legislation that is tailored and effective. Richard Ricketts, Athletic Director at Prince Avenue Christian School, spoke in opposition to the bill, noting that he does not always agree with the result but agrees with GHSA’s processes. He explained that GHSA works just like the legislature.

Senator Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) proposed that the bill be amended to change the permissible distance for athletic travel from 25 miles to 75 miles for regular season games. The amendment was adopted. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by Committee Substitute by an 8-3 vote. It proceeds to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 377](#), authored by Senator Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia), as introduced amends Titles 20 and 50 to require state agencies, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, the State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia, units of the University System of Georgia, units of the Technical College System of Georgia, local boards of education, and local school systems to take measures to prevent the use of curricula or training programs which act upon, promote, or encourage certain concepts.

Senator Hatchett presented the bill to the Committee as a Substitute (LC 49 0900S), which removes higher education from the bill’s scope and changes the penalty for local school systems to potential loss of waivers. Senator Hatchett explained that the bill “does not prohibit the teaching of history.” The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by Committee Substitute with a 5-4 party-line vote. It proceeds to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 498](#), authored by Senator Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta), amends Title 20 to provide for the recognition of certain accrediting agencies as reliable authorities as to the quality of education offered in secondary schools.

Senator Tippins presented the bill to the Committee as a Substitute (LC 49 0924S), explaining that it is “not intended to put anyone out of business” but is aimed at ensuring that accreditation entities are evaluating the quality of student learning. He also addressed rumors that his bill would shift school evaluation to standardized testing, which he said was not the

intent and was clarified in the Substitute. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by Committee Substitute and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 545](#), authored by Senator Sonya Halpern (D-Atlanta), amends Title 20 to require schools to provide training in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and the use of an automated external defibrillator for students in grades nine or ten.

Senator Halpern presented the bill to the Committee, and the Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 575](#), authored by Senator Lindsey Tippins (R-Marietta), amends Title 20 to provide that local boards of education shall review the financial status of the local school system at least quarterly rather than monthly.

Senator Tippins presented the bill to the Committee, and Gretchen Walton of the Cobb County School District spoke in support of the bill. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by a 5-4 vote with a tie broken by the chair.

- [SB 603](#), authored by Senator Sheikh Rahman (D-Lawrenceville), amends Title 20 to provide for an outdoor learning spaces pilot program.

Senator Rahman presented the bill to the Committee, noting that it is the product of the Senate Outdoor Learning Study Committee. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

The Committee was also scheduled to consider two bills authored by Senator Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), [SB 588](#), limiting how members of the public can be removed from local school board meetings, and [SB 601](#), establishing the Georgia Educational Freedom Act. These bills were deferred until Tuesday's Committee meeting.

The Committee reconvened on Tuesday morning to take up the two bills postponed in Monday's meeting:

- [SB 588](#), authored by Senator Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), amends Title 20 to provide that members of the public shall not be removed from the local board of education meetings except for actual disruption and in accordance with rules adopted and published by the local board of education. The bill further provides that visual and sound recording shall be permitted at such meetings and gives authority to superior courts to enforce compliance and award relief.

Senator Miller presented the bill to the Committee, explaining that the bill is intended to allow school boards to manage and mitigate disruptions without retaliating against disrupters. Senators Lester Jackson (D-Savannah) and Elena Parent (D-Atlanta) pressed Senator Miller on the necessity of the legislation.

Public testimony was limited to one minute per speaker. Justin Pauly of the Georgia School Board Association explained that the bill was not necessary to address the issues being discussed by proponents, and Buddy Costley of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders also expressed operational concerns with the language. Lisa Morgan of the Georgia

Association of Educators expressed concern with the legislation. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by a 6-4 vote and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 601](#), authored by Senator Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), is the “Georgia Educational Freedom Act.” The bill amends Title 20 to establish promise scholarship accounts to be funded by the state in the amount of \$6,000.00 per school year for each participating student, subject to appropriations.

Senator Miller presented the bill to the Committee. Senator Elena Parent (D-Atlanta) pressed Senator Miller on the details of the bill, and Senator Sonya Halpern (D-Atlanta) focused on the destabilization of public schools caused by the continuing fixed costs after a student departs and minimal six-week attendance requirement. Senator Halpern also urged caution given the recent passage of Senate Bill 47, an expansion that has not been fully evaluated yet. Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) discussed fixed and variable costs, contending that school districts are left with more money per student when a student takes a voucher. Senator Freddie Powell Sims (D-Dawson) expressed support for school choice, but not at the expense of other children. Senator Sims explained there are many ways for private schools to exclude children they do not want, but public schools have an obligation to educate everyone.

Public testimony was not allowed, but the Chair did note that 13 individuals signed up to speak in opposition, and 8 individuals signed up to speak in support.

Senator Parent moved to table the bill because no public testimony was taken, and the motion failed. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS by a 6-4 vote and be sent to the Rules Committee.

Senate Insurance and Labor Committee

The Senate Insurance and Labor Committee, chaired by Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), met on Tuesday to consider the following measures:

- [SB 468](#), authored by Senator Kim Jackson (D-Stone Mountain), amends Title 45 to provide that death by suicide of a public safety officer in certain instances be considered a death in the line of duty for purposes of indemnification by the Georgia State Indemnification Fund.

Senator Jackson presented the bill to the Committee, explaining that she wants to ensure that families are taken care of when a public safety officer takes his or her own life. The bill will specifically allow the department to consider a death caused by suicide within 30 days of the officer’s last day on duty as a death in the line of duty. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 487](#), authored by Senator Sheila McNeill (R-Brunswick), amends Title 33 to provide that diagnostic breast examinations shall not be treated less favorably than screening mammography for breast cancer with respect to insurance cost-sharing requirements.

Senator McNeill presented the bill to the Committee, which recommended the bill DO PASS by a unanimous vote and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [SB 566](#), authored by Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), amends Title 33 to clarify that,

under the Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act, a medical or traumatic condition, sickness, or injury includes a mental health condition or substance use disorder and that emergency medical services include post-stabilization services.

Senator Burke presented the bill to the Committee, and Anna Adams of the Georgia Hospital Association and Tim Kibler of the Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals appeared in support of the bill. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS with a unanimous vote and be sent to the Rules Committee.

Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee

Chairman Bill Cowsert (R-Athens) and the Committee reviewed three bills on Monday:

- [SB 421](#), authored by Senator Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome), seeks to enact the “Georgia Utility Rate Reduction Act” in Title 46. It addresses the financing of Plant Vogle. The Committee looked at the Committee Substitute, which seeks changes on page 7 of the original bill, which in its underlying form was brought to permit the “securitization” of the debt proposal. The Public Service Commission Chair Tricia Pridemore spoke out against the legislation - she did not speak for the Commission. Senator Hufstetler indicated it was the first time he had heard Ms. Pridemore was against the legislation. The goal is to save the rate payers money and get lower financing costs. North Carolina uses a similar process and the Georgia Manufacturing Association also is in favor of the legislation. After hearing more on the legislation, the Committee in a divided vote moved the legislation forward.
- [SB 495](#), authored by Senator Matt Brass (R-Newnan), seeks to amend Chapter 4B of Title 43. It specifically seeks to place conditions on non-transferable tickets to athletic events, concerts, theatre performances, amusements, exhibitions, or other entertainment events where the public is admitted. Former Attorney General Sam Olens spoke against the legislation noting that the exception in the legislation for promotional events is 100 percent wrong legally; he also mentioned that there was a lot about the legislation he did not like. Mr. Olens appeared today on behalf of his client, the Atlanta Falcons. Further, Mr. Olens stated that the winners in this legislation were the third parties. Former Representative Earl Ehrhart, on behalf of the Atlanta Braves, also spoke against the legislation. He noted that the other teams Atlanta United and Hawks also were opposed to the legislation. Stub Hub spoke in support of the legislation despite that it has an exclusive relationship with the University of Georgia. The Stub Hub representative noted that it is not a ticket broker. Live Nation Georgia and Ticket Master spoke against the legislation - noting that non-transferability is a protection for fans. Further, they noted that artists make their own decisions on venues and other requirements. Ticket Master’s DOJ consent decree was brought up but the representative noted that the consent decree did not deal with ticketing. Further, a former Deputy Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representative spoke to the legislation noting that there were other states which allowed transferability - he recited the states of Connecticut, New York, Virginia, Illinois, Colorado, and Utah. A motion was made to move the legislation forward but the DO PASS vote failed.
- [SB 420](#), authored by Senator Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome), amends Title 3 to authorize manufacturers of malt beverages to sell or donate malt beverages they produce under certain limitations or conditions. Senator Hufstetler brought forth an amendment to his bill, eliminating the portion of the original legislation addressing donations. The legislation failed to

receive a DO PASS recommendation.

House Regulated Industries Committee

The House Regulated Industries Committee, temporarily chaired by Representative Dale Washburn (R-Macon), met to consider the following propositions on Tuesday:

- [HB 972](#), authored by Representative Dave Belton (R-Buckhead), amends Title 43 to update the licensure statute for licensed professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists.

Representative Belton presented the bill to the Committee as a Substitute (LC 36 5255S), and there were no questions from the Committee. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [HB 1424](#), authored by Representative Alan Powell (R-Hartwell), amends Title 50 to update Georgia law regarding coin operated amusement machines. Specifically, the bill brings COAM regulation under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Procedures Act, increases the prize limit for crane games from \$5 to \$50, allows for gift card awards, and exempts military and fraternal organizations from the 50% rule.

Representative Powell presented the bill to the Committee, noting that it passed out of the Committee last year. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

- [HB 1441](#), authored by Representative J. Collins (R-Villa Rica), amends Title 43 to exempt a certified peace officer employed by a licensed private detective business or private security business as an independent contractor from licensure under Chapter 38.

Representative Collins presented the bill to the Committee, which he noted will help a business in his district. A representative of Extra Duty Solutions spoke in favor of the legislation. The Committee recommended the bill DO PASS and be sent to the Rules Committee.

House Juvenile Justice Committee

Chairman Mandi Ballinger (R-Canton) and the Juvenile Justice Committee focused on four proposals on Tuesday. These bills were:

- [HB 274](#), authored by Representative Mandi Ballinger), came to the Committee as a Committee Substitute addressing the pay for juvenile court judges in O.C.G.A. 15-11-52.1 so as to increase the judges' pay. This bill received a DO PASS recommendation.
- [HB 403](#), authored by Representative Marcus Wiedower (R- Watkinsville), also came to the Committee as a Committee Substitute. The Committee held a hearing on this proposal and took no vote. The legislation revises the duties of Georgia's Child Advocate for the Protection of Children Act in O.C.G.A. 15-11-743 so as to add that the Advocate is also to support quality legal representation for parties involved in legal proceedings involving Articles

3, 4 and 4A of Chapter 11 of Title 15.

- [HB 1508](#), authored by Representative Marcus Wiedower (R-Watkinsville), proposes to amend Chapter 11 of Title 15 and also arrived at the meeting in the form of a Committee Substitute. The goal of the legislation is to expedite and prioritize processes for the termination of parental rights in certain cases involving parental incapacity and child maltreatment. This legislation, supposedly requested by DFCS, received only a hearing; however, no groups testified except for Jennifer Shinpaugh who is with Generation Justice and Adoption and Foster Care Parent Association of Georgia.
- [HB 1234](#), authored by Representative Mandi Ballinger (R-Canton), proposes to amend O.C.G.A. 15-11-3(b) to require that a court appoint an attorney to a dependent child and any child receiving extended youth care services through Division of Family and Children Services. This legislation received a DO PASS recommendation and now moves to the House Rules Committee.

House Ways and Means Public Finance and Policy Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman Ron Stephens (R-Savannah) called the Monday afternoon meeting to order.

- [HB 934](#), by Representative Rob Leverett (R-Elberton), amends Part 1 of Article 5A of Chapter 8 of Title 48, which would allow T-SPLOST funds to operate similarly to SPLOST funds. Funds are raised based on an estimate provided in the local referendum or after five years whichever comes first. HB 934 would allow the funds to be raised until the 5 years instead of being capped at the estimated amount. Concerns were raised on estimates being underestimated to create an excess. GMA and ACCG spoke in favor of the measure. The bill received a DO PASS recommendation.

House Ways and Means Sales Tax Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman Chuck Martin called the Monday meeting to order.

- [HB 594](#), by Representative Casey Carpenter, amends Chapter 8 of Title 48. The bill seeks to provide clarity on digital goods and services. A substitute was presented by the author. The measure provides an exemption for broadband companies in underserved areas on equipment while adding a tax on the goods or services being downloaded. Representatives from DISH, DirectTV, and Comcast expressed concern, particularly over fees and those who are exempt and not exempt. The Subcommittee tabled the measure until a new fiscal note could be provided to incorporate the changes in the substitute.
- [HB 1291](#), by Representative Vance Smith (R-Pine Mountain), amends Code Section 48-8-3 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated. LC 43 2354S was presented to the committee. With the original measure passed in 1999, the bill is aimed at furthering the work for high technology by increasing the sale and lease for the calendar year cap from \$15 million to \$18 million. It was set to expire next June. This extended the measure to December 2033. The committee did not have the correct version in front of them, so the committee moved to table the legislation.

House Ways and Means Ad Valorem Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman David Knight (R-Griffin) called the subcommittee to order Monday afternoon.

- [HB 997](#), by Representative Sam Watson (R-Moultrie), amends Part 1 of Article 2 of Chapter 5 of Title 48. This measure adds definitions for timber producers, products, and equipment and adds a ballot question to be voted on in the General Election in November of 2022. The ballot question asks if timber products and equipment should be exempt from ad valorem taxes. The Subcommittee unanimously passed the measure.

House Ways and Means Income Tax Subcommittee

On Monday afternoon, Subcommittee Chairman Bruce Williamson (R-Monroe) called the meeting to order to hear one bill.

- [HB 1437](#), authored by Representative Shaw Blackmon (R-Bonaire), amends Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated to change the income tax rates. This bill is the Speaker's and Chairman of Ways and Means income tax reduction bill. The measure removes the tax brackets from statutes and imposes a maximum tax at a flat 5.25%, a 0.5% reduction. The current standard deductions are \$5,400 for single filers and \$7,100 for joint-filers. The measure increases the standard exemption for single filers, from \$2,700 to \$12,000, for those joint-filing from \$7,400 to \$24,000. Exemptions for dependents would remain at \$3,000, and exemptions for retirees would not change either. Representative Casey Carpenter asked how much this will save Georgia's families. Representative Blackmon noted this would save Georgians \$1 billion. He added that he has worked with CPAs, Economists, and other stakeholders on this legislation to ensure a balanced and measured approach to this issue. The measure unanimously passed the Subcommittee.

House Ways and Means Tax Revision Subcommittee

Subcommittee Chairman Mark Newton (R-Augusta) called the Tax Revision Subcommittee Meeting to discuss several measures:

- [HB 1421](#), by Representative Debbie Buckner (D-Junction City), amends Part 2 of Article 3 of Chapter 8 of Title 12 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated. This measure dedicates fees to the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund. There was no public testimony of committee comments or questions on the measure. The bill received a DO PASS recommendation.
- [HB 1429](#), authored by Representative Mark Newton, Article 3 of Chapter 13 of Title 48 to allow local governments more flexibility on local taxes. This measure is targeted towards short-term rentals, primarily local Airbnbs. The author referenced The Masters at the Augusta National. He noted that Augusta did not have enough hotel rooms or beds to accommodate the international event. The measure seeks to allow the local officials to elect to exclude residential short-term rentals from the tax. Before the municipality can exempt rentals, they must adopt a resolution excluding the rentals from the tax. The legislation also contains a provision that municipalities cannot discriminate or exclude any rentals; it is all or nothing. The

author reminded legislators this bill would not have a fiscal impact on the state, only the local municipality, and that the measure only applies to Augusta. Representatives Williamson and Martin both discussed why this measure should only be limited to one municipality. Representative Newton mentioned his amenability to changing this provision. This was a hearing only so no subcommittee action was taken.

- [HB 1041](#), by Representative Clay Pirkle (R-Ashburn), amends Code Section 48-7-29.20 to increase the Rural Hospital Tax Credit Cap from \$60 million to \$75 million. Committee members did not have any questions nor was there any testimony in favor or expressing concern. This is the first hearing on the measure so no committee action was taken.
- [SB 370](#), also known as the “Fostering Success Act”, by Senator Bill Cowsert (R-Athens), amends Chapter 7 of Title 48 in an effort to help children and youth who are aging out of the foster care system by providing tax credits for donations to qualified organizations, which is capped at \$20 million per year to provide wraparound services to the youth aging out of the state's care. Lt. Governor Duncan indicated that this was really a policy credit and came about through his church, Northpoint, and its “Be Rich” program. DFCS will be required to qualify an entity receiving the donations for an individual to receive the credits. There are reporting requirements in the legislation so that the entities must report on how the money came to them and how it is spent.

Several members expressed their support and gratitude for Senator Cowsert shepherding the measure through the process. A few members inquired why funds were not just appropriate. Senator Cowsert mentioned the concern that since the benefactors of this fund are technically adults and have aged out of being wards of the state. Comments by Representative Blackmon alluded to this bill being added to the rural hospital tax credit depending on which bill moves faster. Senator Cowsert mentioned he was amenable to whatever the Representative needed. This was the first hearing on the measure so no committee action was taken.

House Ways and Means Committee

Chairman Shaw Blackmon called the full Committee to order on Monday evening to quickly vote on legislation that recently passed through the subcommittees. The following measures were passed on to the Rules Committee:

- [HB 934](#), authored by Representative Rob Leverett (R-Elberton), relates to special district mass transportation sales and use tax, so as to provide for the maximum amount and time frame for the collection of such tax when an intergovernmental agreement has been entered into between a county and municipality.
- [HB 997](#), authored by Representative Sam Watson (R-Moultrie), provides for a state-wide exemption from all ad valorem taxes for timber equipment and timber products held by timber producers.
- [HB 1421](#), authored by Representative Debbie Buckner (D-Junction City), dedicates the proceeds of certain hazardous waste fees to the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund as authorized and subject to the conditions imposed by Article III, Section IX, Paragraph VI(r) of the Constitution of Georgia.

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- [HB 1437](#), authored by Representative Shaw Blackmon (R-Bonaire), seeks to amend the income tax rates as previously described.

House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee

Chairman James Burchett (R-Waycross) and the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee held a couple of meetings on Monday, and in the afternoon discussed the following:

- [HB 1426](#), authored by Representative Beth Moore (D-Peachtree Corners), amends Title 17 so as to change the standard of proof, which a defendant in a capital case where that defendant has a claim of an intellectual disability. The current standard of proof is “beyond a reasonable doubt” and this legislation seeks to move this standard to a “preponderance of the evidence.” In the substitute presented, the standard of proof was changed but also it proposed to seek a separate process for the determination of the individual’s claim of an intellectual disability. The Southern Center for Human Rights spoke in favor of the legislation noting that the cases where this would be an issue would be instances where the defendant had a sub-average IQ of 75 or below and had difficulty with communication and information processing. Further, the Center noted that Georgia is the only state that has a concurrent process with the defendant’s guilt phase and the intellectual developmental disability determination. The Center supported Representative Moore’s bill. Robert Smith, with the Prosecuting Attorneys Council, spoke against the substitute for a number of reasons but in part because of the way in which will change the appeals process and that the Attorney General needs to weigh in on the proposal. Chairman Burchett indicated that the legislation was a “huge policy” decision and that he would like to keep working on the proposal but to take out the procedural portion of the proposal.
- [HB 1354](#), authored by Representative Scott Holcomb (D-Atlanta), seeks to create the “Wrongful Conviction Compensation Act” in Title 28. This legislation received a DO PASS recommendation and now moves forward to the House Rules Committee.

House Governmental Affairs - State and Local Government Subcommittee

Chairman Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville) and the Subcommittee examined these measures:

- [HB 1461](#), authored by Representative Victor Anderson (R-Cornelia), seeks to amend Chapter 36 of Title 36 regarding annexation and disputes arising from the annexation process. ACCG and GMA both spoke in favor of the proposal. ACCG stated that annexation may be a disruption and can impact multiple infrastructure issues. A commissioner from Cherokee County noted that the findings of the arbitration panel should have more “teeth.” No action was taken at today’s meeting on the proposal.
- [HB 1373](#), authored by Representative William Boddie (D-East Point), seeks to require in Chapter 80 of Title 36 that local governments or authorities, which are operating parks or recreational facilities used by youth athletic organizations are equipped with cold water baths which may be used to help cool a youth suffering from heat issues before EMS arrives. This legislation was brought in response to the death of Johnnie Tolbert and as a result of a study committee that previously looked into ways in which to address concerns regarding youth sports occurring especially in the summer months and endangering youth. The subcommittee

noted that perhaps there should also be language to address water and ice for the cooling tanks proposed. A number of groups and individuals spoke in favor of the legislation, including the mother of Johnnie Tolbert and her attorneys. Others included the Georgia Athletic Trainers Association, the Georgia Nurses Association, etc. No action was taken on the legislation.

House Regulated Industries Occupational/Professional Licensing Subcommittee

Chairman Jason Ridley (R-Chatsworth) called the subcommittee to order on Monday to discuss one measure.

- [HB 998](#), by Representative Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton), amends Article 3 of Chapter 4B of Title 43 to defines non transferable tickets as a ticket that its holder is unable to give, re-sell, or otherwise exchange by the holder's choosing and/or requires the holder and re-sale purchaser to facilitate the second sale on the originally purchasing platform. Representative Carpenter outlined a few groups exempted in the substitution which includes civic groups, such as religious, veteran, student, disabled, or charitable groups and NCAA college events.

Considerable discussion was held on the measure. Representative Karen Bennett (D-Stone Mountain) asked how this would change the current process of re-selling a ticket. Representative Carpenter noted that this would not change the way ticket holders re-sell tickets. He added that there is a trend for the original selling platform to want another fee added on to the re-sale or some type of additional compensation. He added that many ticketing platforms view the ticket as a revocable license rather than owned by the purchaser. Representative Bennett asked if the platform was able to buy back the ticket. The author said yes and that the majority of them are ticket brokers. Representative Bennett asked a final question on ticket brokers and if they are currently engaged in this process and if there was an expectation that this would increase the number of brokers. Representative Carpenter noted that brokers are currently engaging and did not expect an increase.

Representative Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville) expressed confusion over what the bill was aiming to tackle. He asked about the definitions of transferable versus non-transferable tickets, specifically if you can re-sell them. Representative Carpenter provided definitions and mentioned that both can be re-sold depending on the way the ticket is provided. Representative Carpenter said this is the primary issue. The platforms have "created an ecosystem" that prevents the resale. Often platforms use a revolving barcode or QR code which changes frequently. It is meant to be a protective measure to counter theft, but it can also prevent resale.

Representative Chuck Martin (R-Alpharetta) asked if locking a customer into an ecosystem is a defacto monopoly. Representative Carpenter agreed. Representative Martin explained that he had tickets to a game that he could not attend nor could he give them to his son because of the ecosystem problem. He further added that there is nothing stopping these platforms from charging you fees and has concern over the vendors charging multiple fees.

Representatives from StubHub and Ticket Network spoke in favor of the measure, while advocates for the Atlanta Braves, Atlanta Falcons, and Live Nation expressed concerns. The bill did not pass the subcommittee.

House Public Safety and Homeland Security Subcommittee

Chairman J. Collins (R-Villa Rica) called the Subcommittee to order on Monday afternoon to discuss two measures.

- [HB 1448](#), by Representative J. Collins, amends Title 40 of the OCGA. This would allow cameras on police vehicles to identify vehicles operated on a highway with expired, suspended, canceled, or revoked registration. Those identified by the automated license plate recognition system can be liable for a civil monetary penalty. The penalty shall be \$100 for those operating with an expired registration and \$500 for those operating with a suspended, canceled, or revoked registration. The citation for the violation will be mailed first-class to the registered owner last on file along with images and GPS coordinates of where and when the pictures were taken by the automated recognition system. This measure also gives discretion to the officer. The system will alert the officer of the violation so the officer can pull the driver over and follow the current procedure. The officer is not required to pull the driver over, instead, the system will store the information to be reviewed later and the documentation sent.
- [HB 1004](#), by Representative Mesha Mainor (D-Atlanta), amends Title 20 of the OCGA. Representative Mainor described an issue in her district. She described how if a Morehouse police officer sees illegal activity on the Spellman campus, the officer has to call 911 and wait for APD to respond. This bill aims to correct this by allowing the schools to enter into a united police force agreement. This would allow for the pooling of resources to protect students and campus property. The subcommittee members recommended the bill DO PASS.

House Relations and Aging Committee

Chairman Jesse Petrea (R-Savannah) called the House Relations and Aging Committee on Tuesday to order to discuss four bills:

- [HB 1520](#), authored by Representative Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville), amends Title 31 of the OCGA to create the Georgia Council on Addressing Health Care Workforce Challenges. The 26-member council will be comprised of the Governor's appointments of a chairperson and a representative from USG and TSCG. The President of the Senate shall appoint an administrator from a nursing home, a representative from an urban hospital or health system, a registered nurse, and a representative from an area health education center. The Speaker of the House will appoint representatives from a private college, the state-wide nursing association, the state-wide hospital association, the state-wide nursing home or assisted living facility, a hospital or health system in a rural underserved area, a nurse educator, and a state-wide dentist association. With the following serving as ex-officio members: a designee from OPB, the Chair of the Board of Healthcare Workforce or a designee, the division director of the professional licensing board or a designee, the Chairperson of the Board of Nursing or a designee, the Commissioner of DPH or a designee, the Chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, the Chair of the House Health and Human Services, the Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee Chair.

The Council's primary purpose is to provide strategic thought leadership and recommendations on the future of the health care workforce in Georgia. They will be charged

with identifying workforce data to help direct the Georgia General Assembly and agencies on workforce changes and by developing a comprehensive plan to support the expansion of educational programs and clinical placements as well as identifying programs and strategies to improve retention and resiliency of the current healthcare workforce.

The following individuals voice their support for the measure: Scott Steiner, CEO of Phoebe Health System; Anna Adams, Georgia Hospital Association; Representative Patty Bentley (D-Butler); Representative Viola Davis (D-Stone Mountain); Deb Bailey, Northeast Georgia Health System; Tom Bauer, Leading Age Georgia; Julie Wyndom, Atrium Health; Terrie Hodges, St. Joseph's Health Center; Josh Mackey, Georgia EMS Association; and Tim Kibbler, Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals.

Representative John LaHood (D-Valdosta) made a motion DO PASS. The bill (LC 33 9091S) unanimously passed.

- [HB 1531](#), by Representative John LaHood (R-Valdosta), amends Article 1 of Chapter 7 of Title 31. The measure (LC 33 9089S) specifically works to address senior living facilities. The measure alleviates some of the staffing challenges while balancing care standards. The bill shifts the license nursing hours to an average monthly minimum instead of weekly. This would give providers and nurses the flexibility to adjust their schedules. The author also noted changes to staffing requirements. The bill would continue to require two on-site direct care staff persons at all times but would reduce that to “only one direct care staff person shall be required to be on-site at all times if there are fewer than 15 residents during all waking hours or fewer than 20 residents during all nonwaking hours”.

Representative Rebecca Mitchell (D-Snellville) asked for clarification on the monthly minimum requirements. Representative LaHood said if eight hours was expected for the average week, that totals 32 hours for the month. This would allow nurses to shift those hours around during the month and provide more flexibility. Representative Mitchell followed up by saying it might be better to change it. Representative Mitchell suggested changing the language from average monthly minimum to minimum monthly average for clarity purposes. The author was favorable to the change along with the departmental representatives.

The following individuals express concern: Mary Lou Boatwright Quinn, Georgia Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and Debra Stokes, Council on Aging; and Terry Rogers, Georgia Trial Lawyers Association.

While Tom Bauer, Leading Age Georgia, and Skin Edge, Georgia Senior Living Association, expressed support.

Chairman Petrea requested the bill be held in committee so the author can be reviewed by stakeholders and departmental representatives.

- [HB 1436](#), authored by Representative Michael Smith (D-Marietta), amends Article 3 of Chapter 8 of Title 31. The bill (LC 33 9073S) adds a requirement for long-term care facilities to post the State Ombudsman on their websites. This will allow family members to access the programs more efficiently. There is no requirement to create a website. Currently, the information must be displayed in the facilities.

Representative LaHood noted that this would be helpful for consumers and providers.

Representative Mary Robichaux (D-Roswell) agreed that for family members who do not live near the facility, this would be a great service to them.

The Committee moved the bill DO PASS and unanimously passed.

- The hearing on [HB 1427](#) was postponed.

New Legislation

The following legislation of interest has been introduced in the House:

H.B.1523	Giving the Gift of Life Act; enact	GA Rep. Jodi Lott (R-GA-122)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62609
H.B.1525	Professions and businesses; amend certain definitions to include consultants as contemplated by Chapter 80 of Title 36	GA Rep. Jason Ridley (R-GA-006)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62611
H.B.1526	Healthy Georgia Act; enact	GA Rep. Matthew Wilson (D-GA-080)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62612
H.B.1530	Education; provide for HOPE small business grants	GA Rep. Yasmin Neal (D-GA-074)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62631
H.B.1531	Health; minimum staffing requirements in assisted living communities and memory care centers; revise provisions	GA Rep. John LaHood (R-GA-175)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62632
H.B.1532	Agriculture; hemp farming; provide for intent	GA Rep. Jason Ridley (R-GA-006)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62634
H.R.915	General Assembly; members elected in 2024 and thereafter shall serve four-year terms of office; provide - CA	GA Rep. Angela Moore (D-GA-090)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62613
H.R.917	House Study Committee to assess "Too Young To Suspend"; create	GA Rep. Henry "Wayne" Howard (D-GA-124)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62615

The following legislation of interest has been introduced in the Senate:

S.B.605	Employment Security; certain nonprofit organizations have the option of making installment payments to finance unemployment benefits paid to its employees for certain time periods during the COVID-19 public health emergency; provide	GA Sen. Dean Burke (R-GA-011)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62605
S.B.609	Medical Cannabis; the Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission is subject to state procurement laws; provide	GA Sen. Jeff Mullis (R-GA-053)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62619
S.R.623	Election and Term of Members; implementation of staggered terms of office for members of the Senate; provide -CA	GA Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R-GA-037)	https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/62603

What's Next

The General Assembly will reconvene for Legislative Day 26 on Wednesday, March 9 at 10AM.

The House is expected to consider the following propositions on Legislative Day 26:

- [HB 849](#) - Domestic relations; add human resources personnel and supervisory personnel in a workplace that employs minors as mandatory reporters for child abuse
- [HB 884](#) - Professions and businesses; expedited licenses for military spouses; provisions
- [HB 1043](#) - Georgia Endowment for Teaching Professionals; create
- [HB 1279](#) - Georgia Caregivers Act; create
- [HB 1280](#) - Revenue and taxation; county tax commissioner duties; revise provisions
- [HB 1295](#) - Quality Basic Education Act; group of performance evaluation ratings; remove

needs development rating

- [HB 1357](#) - Professional Standards Commission; standards and procedures for certification programs; provisions
- [HB 1371](#) - Rural Health Advancement Commission; create
- [HB 1372](#) - Georgia Utility Facility Protection Act; revise provisions and short title
- [HB 1381](#) - Local government; water and sewer authority board members to complete yearly continuing training courses; require
- [HB 1383](#) - Fair Employment Practices Act of 1978; hearing before an administrative law judge; provide
- [HB 1385](#) - Legislative and Congressional Reapportionment Office; revise annexation reporting requirements
- [HB 1396](#) - Georgia Municipal Court Clerks' Council; create
- [HB 1406](#) - Zoning; changes to ordinances that revise single-family residential classifications; provide additional notice and hearing provisions
- [HB 1438](#) - Transportation, Department of; meetings for election of board members; amend notice provisions
- [HB 1455](#) - Georgia Ports Authority; provide for powers of authority

The Senate is expected to consider the following propositions on Legislative Day 26:

- [SB 203](#) - Motor Vehicles; use of mounts on windshields for support of wireless telecommunications devices and stand-alone electronic devices; allow
- [SB 333](#) - Education; agents and agent's permits; to repeal definitions of such terms; provisions; remove
- [SB 371](#) - Fraud; for-profit credit repair services; authorize
- [SB 510](#) - Motor Vehicle; operation of motor vehicles by Class D license holders with certain passengers in the vehicle; remove a restriction
- [SB 562](#) - Department of Administrative Services; companies owned or operated by Russia to bid on or submit a proposal for a state contract; prohibit
- [SR 565](#) - Northwest Georgia Logistics Corridor; official logistics growth corridor in Georgia; designate

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