Januay 22, 2024

Y'all, by some freak of holiday gift-card-giving, Friday night I ended up at this crazy place called Benihana’s. In addition to reminding me of an unfortunate (i.e. “not to be discussed”) waitressing event in 1983, this whacky but enduring restaurant was just what the doctor ordered to help push my reset button after a week of tiny-fonted PowerPoint presentations in the House and Senate budget hearings. If you have not ever been to the big B, this is what it is like: chefs cook rice and meat on these big flat steel grills right in front of you and then entertain by setting onions on fire, tossing their knives and spatulas (and shrimps) around, and telling dad-jokes as they cook. Sometimes they have disco lights at their tables; sometimes they show you “Benihana butterflies” (where they literally throw butter!); and at least seven times in the hour I was there, they sang Happy Birthday super-fast, with a whole lot of tambourines. Not that any of this really surprised me because my house is just like that too - except that at my house, the burning onion is by mistake; the knife throwing is only when I’m startled by the flaming onion; and nobody laughs at the dad (mom) jokes. But we do sing Happy Birthday for no apparent reason, and we do have one, albeit old and missing-a-bunch-of-cymbals, tambourine.

Yet, even with that buttery-melt-in-your-mouth-garlic-and-ginger reset, I still went to bed thinking about the state house and trying to figure out how to get the best wins for kids this session. The Governor’s budget recommendations had a few things that were promising, like raises for state employees, some dollars for early childhood stuff, some literacy stuff, and cash for school transportation, but I think we will need to use our parkour spatula tricks to serve up more dollars for afterschool’s BOOST program (see today’s action alert below!), school based mental health (Georgia APEX program), and other child wellbeing policies. It would be great to see the Legislature add bumps for behavioral health provider reimbursement rates, funds to support children in the foster care system, and policies to help families who face housing...
instability, behavioral health challenges, and health insurance barriers. So, get your aprons on, and grease up your computer keys or smart phones and let’s grill up some wins for kids! I promise you that if we can plate a few orders of "rare" and "well done" advocacy, that we will all get to play tambourines at the end!

Yum!
Polly

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**Justice, Public Safety, & School Discipline**

**HB 463** (Ballinger-23rd) Revises the name of the Sexual Offender Registration Review Board to "Sexual Offender Risk Review Board." Among other provisions, the bill also provides for punishment for certain tiers of sexual offenses, including in certain circumstances, life imprisonment.

**STATUS:** House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. *The bill is expected to be heard in subcommittee this Thursday.*

**HB 873** (Gunter-8th) Creates juvenile treatment court (JTC) divisions as a part of the Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ) to provide alternative adjudication to the traditional judicial system. The bill states that "The juvenile treatment court division shall combine judicial supervision, treatment of juvenile treatment court division participants, drug testing, and mental health treatment." The CACJ will provide standards, practices, technical assistance, and funding opportunities for the JTCs.

**STATUS:** House Juvenile Justice Committee

**HB 882** (Bruce-61st) Prohibits the release or posting of a booking photograph unless and until the individual depicted therein is convicted.

**STATUS:** House Governmental Affairs Committee

**HB 889** (Thomas-65th) States that in cases where the court has been unable to make contact on at least eight occasions within a 90-day period with such child’s parent, guardian, or legal custodian, the court shall find that parental, guardian, or custodial consent has been waived and may order such child for rehabilitation, counseling, and in counsel and advice.

**STATUS:** House Juvenile Justice Committee

**HB 909** (Hagan-156th) Provides for the restriction and seal of First Offender Act sentences until such status is revoked.

**STATUS:** House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. *The bill is expected to be heard in committee this Thursday.*
HB 926 (Reeves-99th) Provides for issuance of certificates ("Program and Treatment Completion Certificate") by a court for purposes of demonstrating rehabilitation and good moral character. The bill also sets out certain provisions regarding driver's licenses.

STATUS: House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee

HB 930 (Ridley-22nd) Prohibits the release or posting of a booking photograph unless and until the individual is convicted.

STATUS: Committee yet to be assigned

HB 932 (Mathis-149th) Provides that a person commits the offense of murder when, under certain circumstances, he or she causes the death of another human being irrespective of malice, by manufacturing or distributing the Schedule II controlled substance fentanyl or any controlled substance containing fentanyl or any derivative thereof.

STATUS: Committee yet to be assigned

Child Welfare & Protection

HB 656 (Reeves-99th) Revises the offenses of cruelty to children in the second and third degrees and establish the offense of traveling to meet a minor for indecent purposes.

STATUS: House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee. The bill is expected to be heard in subcommittee this Thursday.

HB 875 (Roberts-52nd) Prevents persons convicted of family violence offenses or subject to family violence temporary protective orders from receiving, possessing, transporting, purchasing, or transferring firearms.

STATUS: House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee

HB 910 (Jasperse-11th) Creates a civil remedy for damages against commercial entities that distribute material harmful to minors without performing age verification.

STATUS: House Judiciary Committee

SB 335 (Albers-56th) Includes "by virtue of adoption" in the definition of relationships in which the offense of incest is possible.

STATUS: Senate Judiciary Committee

SB 341 (Robertson-29th) Authorizes the disclosure or use of information from child abuse and neglect registries by the Department of Human Services to locate, recover, or provide services to a child determined to be missing or a victim of sexual exploitation. The bill also allows for access to records concerning reports of child abuse and missing or exploited children to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

STATUS: Senate Children and Families Committee
Health & Behavioral Health

HB 82  (Jackson-128th) Relating to tax credits for rural physicians, the bill subsequently creates a tax credit of up to $5,000 for rural healthcare professionals, defined as physicians and dentists operating in a rural county. The tax credit may be claimed for up to five years for eligible professionals, provided that the healthcare professional continues operating in a rural county. The aggregate amount of the tax credit is limited to $2 million per year.

STATUS: PASSED HOUSE. Assigned to Senate Finance Committee. The bill is expected to be heard in committee this Monday.

HB 181  (Townsend-179th) Adds the compound 7-hydroxymitragynine to the definition of "kratom". The bill limits the methods that kratom can be ingested and requires that the sale of kratom be only behind the counter in stores. Anyone violating this section is guilty of a misdemeanor. The bill requires all kratom products to be derived from the natural kratom plant. A kratom processor cannot sell or distribute a kratom product that is adulterated or contains certain compounds or substances within it. An entity that manufactures, distributes, sells, or delivers kratom must maintain a registered agent in the state. A processor who knowingly or recklessly commits an act in violation will be guilty of a high and aggravated misdemeanor as a first offense and a felony on a second or subsequent offense, with a penalty of imprisonment between one to 15 years; a maximum fine of $100,000; or both. A processor who negligently commits an act in violation of O.C.G.A. 16-13-122 will be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a maximum fine of $1,000. A person who suffers injury or damages as a result of a violation of this Code section can also bring a civil action for actual damages, which are presumed to be at least $250, together with court costs.

STATUS: PASSED HOUSE. Assigned to Senate Health and Human Services Committee. The bill is expected to be heard in committee this Monday.

HB 520  (Jones-25th) Authorizes the Department of Community Health (DCH) to collaborate with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to study the psychiatric treatment residential facilities referral processes with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and Department of Human Services (DHS). The bill prohibits health benefit plans from implementing step therapy protocol for medications prescribed to treat severe mental illness. DBHDD is authorized to work with certain other agencies to create guidance for standardized terminology such as the definition of serious mental illness. Definitions for homeless individuals, recidivism, and other terms may also be developed. DBHDD will also work with individuals to provide county-based coordinators to work with criminal justice and behavioral health providers to reduce jail admission of those in a mental health crisis that do not pose a public safety risk. A statewide public-private partnership will be established by DBHDD to serve as a clearinghouse for best practices, information, and resources to support "familiar faces". These are individuals with serious mental illness that have frequent contact with criminal justice, homeless, and behavioral health systems. Subject to appropriations, DBHDD will develop a pilot program to assist jails in implementing behavioral health screening programs and protocols and create a grant program to create or expand jail in-reach and reentry programs which will focus on "familiar faces" and connect individuals with community resources. A comprehensive study on the public behavioral health workforce will be conducted by DBHDD to understand recruitment and retention issues, and target solutions to help with shortages. The bill adds certain members to the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission (BHRIC)BHIRC, with DBHDD, is required to develop a common definition of "serious mental illness" and include "familiar faces" to initiative coordination.
BHRIC is tasked with creating a multi-year plan to expand the use of forensic peer mentors. BHIRC is required to establish a task force to build a continuum of care. The task force will comprehensively study access to inpatient behavioral health beds, and make recommendations on needed capacity building, youth specific care, and autism spectrum-related care. The task force will also formally review competency evaluation and restoration challenges, and forensic laws and regulations that affect those interacting with the behavioral health and criminal justice systems. This task force will study increased capacity of child and adolescent substance misuse intensive outpatient treatment programs. BHIRC will convene a task force to review the effect of behavioral health on homeless populations across the state. A physician's certificate or affidavit is required to be attached to a court order for involuntary treatment. (Personally identifying information will be removed from such document.) OHSC is required to study behavioral health provider licensing requirements to identify barriers to entry or licensure. Professional boards to be included in the study are Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists; State Board of Examiners of Psychologists; and the Georgia Board of Nursing. The study will update licensing application and renewal systems, create pathways for foreign-trained practitioners, and update practicum and supervision requirements. The Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists is authorized to waive experience requirements for applicants licensed under another state that have maintained good standing in that jurisdiction for at least two years. The Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists and the Georgia Board of Nursing are authorized to manage a professional health program for impaired health care professionals across the state. The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) will hire a director as the executive head of the Georgia Data Analytic Center (GDAC). GDAC will serve as the central repository for Georgia from which data can be released to requesting agencies. The director will have the authority to review data sharing disputes between executive state agencies when a data request made by one agency is denied by another with the reasoning that it would violate state or federal law. If the director determines such a request does not break the law, the agency is compelled to cooperate with such request. DCH will ensure that the Medicaid program includes reimbursement for psychological diagnostic assessments and treatment and family therapy services; reimbursement for licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, and certified peer specialists; psychiatric hospitals as eligible for inpatient care for those under the age of 21 years enrolled in fee-for-service Medicaid; updates of reimbursement rates for the assessment and treatment of autism spectrum disorder in collaboration with relevant agencies and organizations; and therapeutic foster care for those under the age of 21 years. Necessary requests for Medicaid state plan amendments or waivers will be made to the United States Department of Health and Human Services by December 1, 2023. DCH is also required to take necessary steps to ensure the receipt of relevant federal funds to provide services, such as housing and employment supports and case management, for recipients and their caregivers if they are under the age of 19 years. The Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce is required to work with state licensing boards to establish the Georgia Health Care Professionals Data System to collect and share de-identified descriptive data about licensed health care professionals in Georgia. Such information will be stored in a publicly accessible repository on the board's website. Information will include demographics and geographical distribution of licensed health care professionals across the state. Licensing boards must provide such data upon request or up to two times annually as required. Information provided by licensing boards will include age, race, gender, ethnicity, language spoken at home, practice location, and license type.

STATUS: PASSED HOUSE. Assigned to Senate Health and Human Services Committee.
HB 856  (Au-50th) Establishes a program to provide urgent insulin assistance to eligible individuals, capping the copay at $35 and outlines the roles of pharmacies and manufacturers.

STATUS: House Public Health Committee

HB 857  (Au-50th) Makes insulin accessible to an eligible individual who needs an affordable supply of insulin for up to one year, with the option to renew annually. The bill also to allows the pharmacy to collect a co-payment not to exceed $75.00 for insulin dispensed through this program.

STATUS: House Public Health Committee

HB 860  (Schofield-63rd) Limits the total cost sharing amount that a covered person is required to pay for a covered prescription insulin drug to an amount not to exceed $100.00 per 30 day supply of insulin, regardless of the amount or type of insulin needed to fill the covered person's prescription.

STATUS: Prefile

HB 861  (Schofield-63rd) Requires ingredients to be listed on packages containing menstrual products.

STATUS: House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee

Maternal & Infant Care

No bills have been filed in this category.

Early Childhood Education & Out-of-School Time

HB 941  (Erwin-32nd) Allows capital outlay funds to be used for educational facilities for voluntary pre-kindergarten programs (i.e., Georgia's Pre-K Program) provided by the school system; The bill also allows that student projection counts may include pre-kindergarten.

STATUS: Committee yet to be assigned

K-12 Education

HB 891  (Thomas-65th) Creates a tax credit of up to $2000 per year per student for certain social extracurricular expenses for home school students. Such expenses shall be limited to tuition or fees for participation or attendance in this state at any in-person children's sports league; children's group instructional class for ballet, dance, or martial arts; or instructional camp for groups of children.

STATUS: House Ways and Means Committee
HB 899 (Davis-87th) Provides for QBE funding assistance to eligible public schools to reduce school violence and improve school safety and security.

STATUS: House Education Committee

HB 900 (Davis-87th) Establishes the Refugee and International Students Equalization (RISE) program to provide for funding and wraparound services for eligible students; defines "international student"; and establishes a program weight and teacher-student ratio for the RISE program in the QBE funding formula.

STATUS: House Education Committee

HB 914 (Barnes-86th) Authorizes local boards of education and other public school governing bodies to offer driver education as an elective course; to provide for funding from local funds, student fees subject to waiver, and state funding subject to appropriations.

STATUS: House Education Committee

HB 936 (Bonner-73rd) Requires multiple occupancy restrooms and changing areas in public schools to be designated for exclusive use by males or females. The bill also states that a public school or local school system that sponsors or supervises an overnight trip involving public school students shall ensure that a public school student attending the overnight trip either shares sleeping quarters with a member or, if necessary, multiple members, of the same sex; or is provided single-occupancy sleeping quarters. A public school student attending an overnight trip may share sleeping quarters with a member of the opposite sex if the member of the opposite sex is a member of such student's immediate family.

STATUS: Committee yet to be assigned

SB 233 (Dolezal-27th) Creates the 'Georgia Promise Scholarship Act', which would provide $6,500 per student to families for qualified education-related expenses outside of the public school system. Qualified education expenses include tuition at a participating school, tutoring, and purchase of curriculum, professional services, transportation, and other expenses authorized by the State Board of Education. Funds will go into an account controlled by a parent to be used for qualified education expenses. In order to allow parents and taxpayers to measure the achievements of this program, students participating must take nationally norm-referenced tests that measure student academic progress in math and language arts annually. The bill stipulates reporting requirements participating schools must provide annually to the Georgia Student Finance Commission and the Department of Education. The commission must annually report to the General Assembly on the previous fiscal year's promise scholarship recipients and their respective schools.

STATUS: PASSED SENATE. Assigned to House Education Committee.
**Higher Education**

**HB 853** (Bell-75th) Repeals the "Drug-free Postsecondary Education Act of 1990", thereby removing provisions that make students convicted of certain drug offenses ineligible for loans, scholarships, and grants. Notably, the bill provides that students shall not be deemed ineligible for HOPE scholarships or grants based solely on certain convictions.

*STATUS: Prefile*

**Environmental Safety**

**HB 855** (Au-50th) Proposes a tax credit for eligible expenses up to $300 per year related to firearm safe storage devices. The bill caps the total amount of tax credits allowed for any year at $5 million.

*STATUS: Prefile*

**SB 340** (Kirkpatrick-32nd) Exempts sales of firearm safes and firearm safety devices from sales and use taxes.

*STATUS: Senate Finance Committee*

**SB 351** (Anavitarte-31st) Requires local boards of education to adopt, implement, and enforce social media policies; and authorizes the Attorney General and the Department of Education to consult with and assist local boards of education in the development and implementation of such policies. Additionally, the bill requires social media platforms to provide certain information to parents upon request; and gives enforcement authority to the Attorney General.

*STATUS: Senate Education and Youth Committee*

**Shelter & Nutrition**

**HB 404** (Carpenter-4th) Requires that rental properties are fit for human habitation. The bill includes cooling as a utility that cannot be shut off prior to an eviction action. Landlords are prohibited from requiring a security deposit that exceeds two months' rent. A tenant, when they fail to pay charges owed to landlord, is afforded a three business day written notice period prior to an eviction proceeding being filed. The eviction notice will be posted conspicuously on the property door in a sealed envelope and delivered via any methods agreed to in the rental agreement.

*STATUS: PASSED HOUSE. Assigned to Senate Judiciary Committee.*
HB 852  (Bell-75th) Repeals the prohibition on local governments regulating the amount of rent to be charged for privately owned, single-family or multiple-unit residential rental property.

STATUS: Prefile

Miscellaneous

HB 30  (Carson-46th) Provides a definition of antisemitism for purposes of state government, using the advisory definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) on May 26, 2016. IHRA defines antisemitism as a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews, and includes rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions, and religious facilities. All state agencies will consider antisemitism as evidence of discriminatory intent for any law or policy which prohibits discrimination. Nothing in the bill will be construed to infringe upon First Amendment rights or an individual's right to engage in legally protected conduct or activity pertaining to U.S. foreign policy or international affairs.

STATUS: PASSED HOUSE. Assigned to Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill is expected to be heard in committee this Monday.

HB 851  (Bell-75th) Exempts the sale of food and food ingredients to individual consumers for off-premises human consumption from all local sales and use taxes.

STATUS: Prefile

HB 858  (Bell-75th) Provides for the issuance of an alternative state identification card by the Department of Driver Services. Notably, the bill states that the department shall make a notation on the driving record of any person who retains a foreign identification card or driver's license, and this information shall be made available to law enforcement officers and agencies on such person's driving record through the Georgia Crime Information Center.

STATUS: Prefile

HB 859  (Bell-75th) Repeals the state income tax in its entirety.

STATUS: Prefile

HB 870  (Washburn-144th) Provides that Georgia shall at all times observe the standard time of the United States.

STATUS: House State Planning and Community Affairs Committee

HB 880  (Ballard-147th) Allows military spouses to use an existing license in good standing from another state to obtain employment in Georgia.

STATUS: House Regulated Industries Committee
HB 887 (Thomas-65th) Prohibits the use of artificial intelligence in making certain decisions regarding insurance coverage, healthcare, or public assistance.

STATUS: House Technology and Infrastructure Innovation Committee

HB 890 (Thomas-65th) Provides for protections against discrimination by artificial intelligence and automated decision tools.

STATUS: House Technology and Infrastructure Innovation Committee

HB 923 (Taylor-92nd) Provides for issuance of a special license plate for individuals with a physical, mental, or neurological condition which impedes the ability to communicate; and for notation of such condition upon a driver's license.

STATUS: House Motor Vehicles Committee

HB 940 (Jones-25th) Requires retail stores to accept cash for purchases.

STATUS: Committee yet to be assigned

HR 779 (Efstration-104th) 2024 Legislative Session Adjournment Resolution (schedule)

STATUS: PASSED & ADOPTED

SB 172 (Cowsert-46th) Authorizes and provides for the regulation and taxation of sports betting, overseen by the Georgia Lottery Corporation.

STATUS: Recommended DO PASS by Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

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**Advocacy Ask**

The Ask:
Ask members of the House Appropriations Education Subcommittee to:

1. **Fund afterschool and summer enrichment programs** by re-upping the Georgia Dept. of Education's BOOST grants funding (suggested funding $20 million a year); and,

2. **Create an Out-of-School Time liaison position**, preferably in the GaDOE to coordinate OST policy across the three state agencies that handle OST programs: GaDOE, Dept. of Human Services, and Dept. of Early Care and Learning.

What's BOOST?
For the last three years, GaDOE, in partnership with GSAN, used a total of $85 Million in COVID relief funding to create the Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) grant program, which has funded evidence-based afterschool and summer learning programs. The federal funds for the program are about to expire, but the BOOST outcomes for kids have been amazing! **Therefore, in order to keep the progress for kids going**, Georgia needs to target dollars into more grants, which we are calling “BOOST 2.0”.

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www.georgiavoices.org
The Why:
The **BOOST 2.0 Grant Program** will build off the existing infrastructure and partnerships of BOOST. This will:

- Create a statewide framework that expands access to and assures quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities.
- Prioritize funding support to OST programs that serve vulnerable youth, such as those who are economically disadvantaged, have a disability, and English language learners.
- Use existing state infrastructure to provide training and technical assistance to OST providers fiscal administration, quality measurement, program effectiveness, and provider leadership.
- Leverage program evaluation and evidence collection strategies embedded within the BOOST grant to determine how to best serve current and prospective afterschool and summer learning providers in the future.

An **Interagency Liaison** can coordinate afterschool and summer programming between DECAL, DHS/DFCS, and GaDOE. If such a liaison is placed in Georgia Department of Education (Office of Whole Child Supports), efficiencies and communications can be maximized in:

- Alignment and coordination of OST services provided to youth and families;
- Development of reliable protocols for interagency communication regarding implementation of similar youth enrichment programs;
- Streamlining of grant application and administration to help both large and small organizations; and
- Streamlining of training, technical assistance, and professional learning provided to organizations funded and/or licensed by the agencies.

For more on OST Funding and Programs in GA, check out our Brief!

The Message:
Dear Representative _____,

I have two requests related to afterschool and summer enrichment funding. First, please include money in the FY25 budget to continue the afterschool and summer enrichment funding known as BOOST (Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time) grants. Also, please include funding for an interagency out-of-school-time liaison at the GaDOE to coordinate the OST policies across the three state agencies that house programs and dollars related to out-of-school time programming. The federal COVID relief dollars that created BOOST are running out and BOOST has been key to student success in academic recovery, mental health, and child wellbeing. These programs are crucial in helping working parents work without concerns about the safety and nurturing of their school-aged children.

Demand for afterschool programs is high. For every child in an afterschool program in Georgia, an estimated 2 more are waiting to get in, and supports for kids in afterschool and summer enrichment improve literacy and learning, youth mental health and behaviors, and vital career-
ready skills. Thank you for your consideration of these requests and thank you for all you do every day on behalf of Georgia’s children and families.

Who to Contact:
House Appropriations Education Subcommittee Members:
- Rep. Matt Dubnik, 404-463-2246
- Rep. Leesa Hagan, 404-656-0325
- Rep. Kimberly Alexander, 404-656-7859
- Rep. Chris Erwin, 404-656-0188
- Rep. Edna Jackson, 404-656-0265
- Rep. Jan Jones, 404-656-5072
- Rep. Todd Jones, 404-656-9210
- Rep. Will Wade, 404-651-7737

House Appropriations Chairman Matt Hatchett, (404) 463-2247

Upcoming Events

Date TBD (watch your emails!) GA-CALL: Child Welfare Policies for Today and Tomorrow
Tuesdays, Beginning January 16 Talk Justice Tuesdays
Monday, January 22 Georgia Head Start Association Day at the Capitol
Tuesday, January 23 Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Day (Maternal Health Awareness Day)
Wednesday, January 24 Mental Health Day at the Capitol
Wednesday, February 14 Afterschool Day at the Capitol, Register Here
Thursday, February 22 GEEARS Strolling Thunder
Tuesday, February 27, 5-7pm Reception in Celebration of Children, Learn more

Other Helpful Resources

- Find Your Legislator
- Contact Your Legislator
- Voices’ 2(ish) Minute Takes
- Voices’ Factsheets
- Voices’ Whole Child Primer, 3rd Edition