



# **LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS FOR GEORGIA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**2025 Legislative Session**

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# 1 | CHILD/FAMILY PROTECTION

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Increased Funding to Strengthen the Foster Care System

In the FY2026 budget, the state invested an additional \$19.2 million in Georgia’s foster care system to address rising caseloads and costs, plus \$1 million to provide clothing and essentials to foster youth, helping keep children near their families and out of state custody. An extra \$6.1 million supports a 2% rate increase for Child Caring Institutions, Child Placing Agencies, foster parents, and relative caregivers. That’s on top of the more than \$38 million added in the amended FY 2025 budget to address rising costs in out-of-home care.



### Expansion of the Foster Care Tax Credit

Georgia’s foster care tax credit is expanding to encourage services for older foster youth and those involved with juvenile justice. [HB 136](#) broadens eligible contributions to include “wraparound” programs and mentoring for former foster youth ages 16–25 and justice-involved foster youths, ensuring these young people have support as they transition to adulthood.



### Child Abuse Second Opinion Mandates

Any physician who takes a child into temporary protective custody for suspected abuse or neglect is now required to promptly inform the parents of their right to an independent medical evaluation. [SB 259](#), also known as “Ridge’s Law,” also mandates that the physician report to DFCS the basis for any suspected abuse diagnosis or findings.



### Clarifying Free-Range Kids

[SB 110](#) clarifies Georgia’s child neglect laws, affirming that it is not considered neglect for parents to allow children to engage in reasonable independent activities—such as playing outside, walking to school, or running errands—unless the child is placed in real, imminent danger.



### Revising Human Trafficking Laws

[SB 42](#) repeals O.C.G.A. § 16-6-13(b), which imposes criminal penalties of 10 to 30 years’ imprisonment and fines up to \$100,000 for offenses such as keeping a place of prostitution, pimping, or pandering involving a minor under 18. The repeal addresses a rule of lenity issue to align penalties more clearly with Georgia’s human trafficking laws.



### Access to Birth Records and Grandparent Visitation

[SB 100](#) allows adopted adults to request a copy of their original birth certificate for a small fee. [SB 245](#) permits grandparents with court-ordered visitation to petition for changes to those rights if a parent dies, becomes incapacitated, or is incarcerated, helping preserve vital family connections.

# 1 | CHILD/FAMILY PROTECTION

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)

To offset federal cuts to victim services, the state is investing \$3.1 million in the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to support child advocacy centers, domestic violence shelters, a shelter for sexually exploited children, and sexual assault centers.



### Protections for Pets in Domestic Violence Cases

[HB 177](#) expands family violence protective orders to include household animals, preventing abusers from harming or taking pets owned by survivors or their children.



### Funding for IT Modernization Projects

The AFY 25 budget allocates \$58 million to the Georgia Technology Authority to support IT modernization projects with the Department of Human Services and fund the Department of Community Health's Integrated Eligibility System.

## VETOED BY THE GOVERNOR

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### Access to Sealed Records

[HB 433](#), which would have allowed the Department of Human Services access to sealed criminal records for screening prospective foster or adoptive parents, household adults, employees, and contractors, was vetoed by the governor.

# 2 | JUVENILE JUSTICE

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Juvenile Justice Pay Raise

Increased support for juvenile justice includes a 4% pay raise for juvenile correctional officers and an 8% raise for behavioral health counselors in juvenile facilities to enhance safety and rehabilitation.

# 3 | K-12 EDUCATION & SUPPORTS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Investing in Out-of-School Time

Legislators recognized the importance of afterschool and summer learning programs by investing \$12.5 million for BOOST 2.0 grants.



### Increasing School Psychologists Ratios

The FY 2026 budget lowers the school psychologist ratio from 1:2,475 to 1:2,420, allocating \$871,982 through the Quality Basic Education program. Additionally, [HB 81](#) creates the Interstate Compact for School Psychologists, allowing licensed school psychologists to obtain equivalent licenses in member states to ensure qualified services across states.



### Boosting School-Based Mental Health & Student Supports

Legislators invested in school-based mental health support by allocating \$6.9 million funding for student advocacy specialists to identify and assist at-risk students, and establishing a new \$19.6 million Student Support Services grant program to help schools provide counseling, telehealth, or in-house mental health professionals—about \$20,000 per middle and high school.



### Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

[SB 123](#) revises Georgia’s compulsory attendance laws by prohibiting expulsion solely for absenteeism and requiring regular compliance reports. If a school system’s chronic absenteeism rate exceeds 10% or an individual school’s rate exceeds 15%, an attendance review team must be created.



### Quality Basic Formula (QBE) Funding

K-12 education is fully funded through Georgia’s Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula with a record \$14.7 billion in state funds for FY 2026, marking the seventh full funding year in the past eight years.



### Promise Scholarship Funding

The Promise Scholarship program is fully funded with \$141 million, providing eligible K-12 students grants for private school tuition, tutoring, and other education expenses, as established by SB 233 (2024).

# 3 | K-12 EDUCATION & SUPPORTS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Expanding the State's Literacy Initiative

A \$22.7 million statewide K-5 literacy initiative was launched to improve early reading skills by funding 116 new literacy coaches and providing a universal reading screener for all elementary schools, focusing on evidence-based instruction to ensure children read proficiently by 3rd grade.



### Updating Georgia Code

[SB 154](#) updates Georgia Code by adding “or its successor” after references to the U.S. Department of Education and replaces the term “student aid reports” with “Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)” in the statute.



### “The Riley Gaines Act”

[SB 1](#) requires schools and postsecondary institutions to provide restrooms, changing areas, and sleeping arrangements separated by sex, with accommodations available upon request. It also mandates that all athletic events and teams be designated as male, female, or coed.



### Privacy Protections

[SB 212](#) prohibits unauthorized disclosure of confidential voter registration data, bans using public student directory information for political purposes, and prevents schools from allowing students to be solicited for organizing political events when restricted by law or local policy.



### Communities in Schools Expansion

The state allocated \$250,000 to **Communities in Schools** for new site coordinators, rural expansion, and training – helping at-risk students improve attendance, behavior, and academic performance and ultimately boost graduation rates.



### School Security Grants

Georgia aims to strengthen school security by providing a \$50 million one-time grant in the Amended FY 2025 budget (about \$21,635 per school), on top of \$109 million in base funds, totaling roughly \$68,000 per school for security upgrades



### Cell Phone Use in Schools Banned

[HB 340](#) prohibits cellphone use for public school students in kindergarten through eighth grade during school hours in an effort to reduce distractions and improve academic focus.

# 3 | K-12 EDUCATION & SUPPORTS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Ensuring All Students Can Access Standardized Exams

[SB 63](#) amends O.C.G.A. § 20-2-324.8 to require local school systems to allow home school students to take standardized exams (PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, PreACT, ACT, ASVAB, AP) offered to resident students. Schools may charge home school students a fee if it is required of all students.



### Local Approval for Charter Schools

[SB 82](#) establishes the "Local Charter School Authorization and Support Act of 2025," requiring the Office of Charter School Compliance to set evaluation guidelines for local boards reviewing charter petitions. Boards must notify petitioners, the state board, and compliance office within 10 days of denial. If a local board denies a petition later approved by the State Charter Schools Commission, it risks losing its flexibility contract. The bill also creates a support program offering \$250,000 grants to boards that approve new local charter schools.



### “Poverty Weight” Pilot Funding

The state is providing additional academic and wraparound supports for disadvantaged students with a one-time “poverty weight” pilot funding in the K-12 funding formula directing an additional \$15.3 million to high-need districts to address the needs of low-income students.



### New Crisis Recovery Network

Georgia established a Regional Crisis Recovery Network with a \$160,000 grant to train and deploy about 650 counselors (in partnership with SREB) who provide up to 10 days of support, including stabilization and psychological first aid, to schools affected by traumatic events or natural disasters.



### Pupil Transportation Funding

The FY 2026 state provides \$10.2 million in additional funding for pupil transportation to cover the cost of updated buses, mileage, and rising fuel and operating costs. It also allocates \$158,400 for mandatory federal bus safety training, bring total pupil transportation funding to \$364.2 million.

# 3 | K-12 EDUCATION & SUPPORTS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

### Omnibus School Safety Bill (HB 268)

#### School Safety Systems & Emergency Preparedness

- Requires all public schools to implement a mobile “Alyssa’s Alert” panic button system by **July 1, 2026**, integrated with 911 and school mapping data.
- Mandates schools procure **school mapping data** viewable by emergency responders; must be verified annually.
- GEMA/HS will oversee a **statewide school emergency alert system** and create an **Office of Safe Schools**.

#### Student Records, Enrollment & Data Privacy

- Parents/legal custodians must disclose **serious discipline** or **criminal history** when enrolling students in grades 4–12.
- Students transferring without full records may be placed in **temporary remote learning** until records arrive.
- Schools must provide **electronic copies of student records** within 3 business days of request.
- GaDOE’s **Chief Privacy Officer** must issue statewide guidance on student record sharing by Dec. 2025.
- **RESA student affairs officers** and a **dispute resolution process** will be established to resolve record access conflicts.

#### Custody & Interagency Coordination

- Clarifies school enrollment procedures for students in **DJJ or DFCS custody**; DBHDD is removed from this authority.
- Facilities educating non-transferrable students (e.g., psychiatric or secure residential care) must have MOUs with school districts.
- School districts aren’t financially liable when another district places a student in their area.

#### Behavioral Health & School Climate

- Schools with poor climate ratings must implement **PBIS and RTI frameworks**.
- School safety plans must include **behavioral health supports**.
- Suicide prevention and youth violence programs must be **evidence-based**.
- Creates a **statewide anonymous reporting system** for safety threats and encourages school-based **violence prevention clubs**.

#### Law Enforcement & Student Information

- Requires **MOUs with school-based law enforcement** to include student data sharing rules.
- Peace officers must notify schools and parents when students are arrested or charged.
- Parents/legal custodians retain access to **disciplinary hearing records**.
- Courts can compel parents to authorize release of student records if refused.

# 3 | K-12 EDUCATION & SUPPORTS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

### Omnibus School Safety Bill (HB 268) continued

#### Support Personnel & Local Flexibility

- Establishes a **grant program** to reimburse districts for hiring **student advocacy specialists** (1–3 depending on district size).
- RESAs must support schools with technical assistance on new data and enrollment provisions.

#### New Offenses & Criminal Penalties

- Creates new crimes: **terroristic threat or act upon a school**; severe offenses are **Class A designated felonies**.
- Allows certain school-related violent offenses by youth (13–17) to be tried in **superior court**.
- Makes it a crime to **materially disrupt** a school, bus, or stop—with progressive discipline required.

#### Miscellaneous & Administrative

- Updates Georgia’s **Parents’ Bill of Rights** to reinforce transparency and access.
- Exempts sensitive school safety data (e.g., mapping, emergency plans) from **Open Records** laws.
- Contains standard **effective date and repealer** provisions.

# 4 | GRADUATION-ISH

## ENACTED INTO LAW



### Top State for Talent Act

[HB 192](#) aligns workforce-related laws and agencies and requires the use of the High Demand Career List when developing career education courses for grades 6–12. The bill also mandates a report on articulation agreements to ensure students do not repeat coursework they've already completed.



### Increased Dual Enrollment Funding

Georgia increased funding for Dual Enrollment to meet growing demand by adding \$21.3 million in the mid-year 2025 budget (AFY25) and another \$17 million in the FY 2026 budget. Annual funding now exceeds \$108 million, supporting more than 63,000 students statewide.



### Adult High School Diploma Program

[SB 193](#) authorizes the Technical College System of Georgia to launch an adult high school diploma program, creating a second-chance pathway for adults without a diploma. The program enables participants to earn a state-recognized high school diploma focused on workforce readiness. This authority is set to sunset in 2031.

# 5 | HIGHER EDUCATION

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Increased HOPE Scholarship Funding

Georgia added \$6 million in FY 2025 and \$49.9 million in FY 2026 to HOPE Scholarships for students attending public colleges, bringing total funding to \$895.8 million and supporting approximately 100,000 students. Legislators also increased the HOPE Private Scholarship by \$10 million to align the award amount with the Zell Miller Private award level, providing additional support for roughly 15,000 students.



### Georgia Foster Care Scholarship Act

Legislators established the Georgia Foster Care Scholarship Act through [SB 85](#) to provide grants for eligible current or former foster youth. The scholarship covers up to the full cost of tuition, room, board, and books at public or private postsecondary institutions, with awards capped at \$30,000 per year for up to 10 years or until the completion of a bachelor's degree.



### Extension on College Completion Grants

[HB 38](#) extends the Georgia College Completion Grant through June 2029, providing critical financial support to students who have completed at least 70% of a four-year program or 45% of a two-year program. The grant is designed to help near-completion students cross the finish line and earn their degrees.



### Veterinary Loan Program Eligibility

Georgia passed [HB 172](#) to clarify and expand eligibility for the Veterinary Education Loan Repayment Program. The bill ensures former students are eligible and specifies that applicants must have practiced in the required specialty for 10 years or less. It also increases the maximum repayment award from \$80,000 to \$90,000, disbursed in \$30,000 increments for each 12 months of qualifying service.



### Establishing Public Safety Memorial Grants

[SB 20](#) expands eligibility for the Public Safety Memorial Grant to include spouses of law enforcement officers, firefighters, prison guards, EMTs, and highway response operators who are killed or permanently disabled in the line of duty. It raises the maximum annual grant from \$2,000 to \$18,000 and the lifetime cap from \$8,000 to \$72,000. The bill also authorizes similar grant amounts for the spouse or child of a public school teacher or employee killed or permanently disabled by an act of violence at school. Additionally, SB 20 expands the State Veterinary Education Board's membership and creates a loan repayment program of up to \$75,000 for veterinarians practicing shelter medicine or working full time at nonprofit pet sterilization clinics.

# 6 | EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Georgia Pre-K Class Size Reduction

The FY 2026 budget provides \$14 million in lottery funds for the Georgia Pre-K Program, marking year two of a four-year plan to reduce class sizes from 22 to 20 students. This phase includes funding for the addition of 93 new Pre-K classrooms and associated costs, aimed at improving instructional quality.



### Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Expansion

The FY 2026 budget includes \$3.9 million to add 500 more state-funded slots in the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, along with \$1.5 million to annualize the state match from FY 2025 that raised reimbursement rates to the 60th percentile.



### Expanding Child & Child Care Tax Credits

[HB 136](#) offers a \$250 state income tax credit for each child under age 6 and allows taxpayers to claim a credit for 50% of qualifying child or dependent care expenses, up to their income tax liability. Additionally, it provides a tax credit for employers who contribute at least \$1,000 annually per child directly to child care providers—offering \$500 per child (or \$1,000 in the first year the benefit is offered). The total annual cap for employer credits is \$20 million, and unused credits cannot be carried forward.



### Food Service Grants

The Amended FY 2025 budget allocates \$100,000 to the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) for \$10,000 start-up grants to Summer Food Service Program providers in unserved and underserved areas. Last year, DECAL's Happy Helpings program expanded to over 100 counties, added 12 sponsors, served more than 100,000 additional meals, and reached 14 new counties using Amended FY 2024 funds.



### Pay Parity for ECE Professionals

The AFY 2025 budget includes \$7.42 million in new lottery funds for DECAL to implement recommendations improving Pre-K lead teacher and assistant teacher pay. This funding will bring pay parity between Pre-K assistant teachers and K-12 paraprofessionals and move Pre-K lead teachers onto the State Board of Education salary schedule.



### Capital Outlay Increases

[HB 371](#) raises the annual cap on state capital outlay funding from \$300 million to \$375 million. It also requires that new elementary school construction projects beginning July 1, 2027, include inclusive playgrounds designed to accommodate a wide range of student needs—including physical, sensory, cognitive, social, emotional, imaginative, and communication needs.

# 7 | HEALTH/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Youth Health and Well-Being Initiatives

The FY 2026 budget funded new public health initiatives focused on youth well-being, including a \$500,000 awareness campaign addressing the dangers of vaping and other health risks. Additionally, \$270,000 was dedicated to studying the impact of social media on the mental health of Georgia's children.



### NOW/COMP Waiver Expansion

Georgia added 150 slots to the Medicaid NOW/COMP waiver program with \$3.4 million in funding, reducing the waitlist and allowing more children and young adults with developmental disabilities to access home- and community-based services.



### Home Visiting Expansion

The state expanded maternal and infant health services by increasing the state's evidence-based home visiting program for new mothers and babies from 50 to 75 counties, with a \$2.9 million boost to improve birth outcomes and reduce infant and maternal mortality.



### Babies Can't Wait Investments

An investment of \$550,895 was made to recruit and retain professionals in the Babies Can't Wait program, strengthening support services for families with young children who have disabilities and developmental delays.



### Improvements in Maternal Care

The state invested nearly \$2 million to improve obstetric care by upgrading birthing facilities and regional perinatal centers. Additionally, almost \$4 million was allocated to enhance payments for rural hospital deliveries, supporting high-quality maternity care in underserved areas. The passage of HB 352 ensures that pregnant women with gestational diabetes qualify for Medicaid-covered continuous glucose monitors.



### Releasing Maternal Mortality Information

[HB 89](#) authorizes the release of psychiatric records of a deceased person involved in a maternal death review to the Maternal Mortality Review Committee. It also establishes the Regional Perinatal Center Advisory Committee to assess the adequacy of regional perinatal centers in Georgia, considering factors like patient safety, interfacility coordination, evaluation of high-risk pregnancies and deliveries, and transportation adequacy.

# 7 | HEALTH/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### Access to IVF & Fertility Preservation

[HB 94](#) requires insurers to cover fertility preservation services, such as egg or sperm freezing, for patients undergoing medical treatments—like chemotherapy—that may cause infertility. Meanwhile, HB 428 clarifies that state law does not prohibit individuals from accessing in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments.



### BHRIC Expansion

[SB 233](#) expands the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission by increasing its membership from 24 to 30 members. It replaces the former Involuntary Commitment and Workforce and System Development subcommittees with new subcommittees focused on Addictive Diseases and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Additionally, the bill extends the commission's expiration date from June 30, 2025, to December 31, 2026.



### Licensing and Oversight Reforms

[HB 584](#) transfers licensing and oversight of drug abuse treatment and education programs, narcotic treatment programs, community living arrangements, and adult residential mental health programs from the Department of Community Health to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). It also designates community service boards as the governing bodies for these programs.



### New Funds for Graduate Medical Education

FY 2026 allocates \$7.4 million in new funding for graduate medical education, including \$3 million to create 150 new residency slots, \$469,654 for new fellowship programs, and \$4 million to establish a grant program supporting new and expanding residency programs.

# 8 | HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### **New Rules for Out-of-State Landlords**

Out-of-state landlords of single-family or duplex rental properties in Georgia are required to employ a licensed broker and maintain in-state staff to manage tenant communications ([HB 399](#)). Code enforcement officers are allowed to request property manager information from tenants when there is probable cause of a code violation and narrows real estate licensing exemptions to ensure proper regulation of these landlords.



### **Homelessness Prevention Act of Chatham County**

[HB 797](#) creates Interagency Council on Homelessness for Chatham-Savannah.

# 9 | TAX REBATES

## ENACTED INTO LAW

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### **Reduction in the State Income Tax**

[HB 111](#) accelerates the reduction of Georgia's income tax rate to a flat 5.19%, aiming to provide tax relief to individuals and families.



### **One-Time Tax Rebate Provisions**

[HB 112](#) authorizes \$1 billion in one-time tax rebates to Georgia taxpayers, providing up to \$250 for single filers, \$375 for heads of household, and \$500 for married joint filers, delivered as refunds on 2024 tax returns.

# 10 | STUDY COMMITTEES OF INTEREST

## EDUCATION (PRE-K TO HIGHER EDUCATION)



- [HR 711](#): Student Attendance in Pre-K to 12 Education
- [HR 887](#): Reducing and Prioritizing Mandates for Public School Administration
- [SR 217](#): Combating Chronic Absenteeism in Schools
- [SR 301](#): Rosenwald School Study Committee
- [SR 474](#): Higher Education Affordability
- [SR 476](#): Local School System Flexibility Options
- [SR 489](#): Inclusive Educational Settings for Students with Disabilities



## CHILD & FAMILY WELLBEING / HUMAN SERVICES

- [HR 611](#): Abandoned Child Placement Following Hospital Discharge
- [HR 735](#): Affordability and Accessibility of Georgia's Legitimization Process
- [SR 310](#): Additional Services and Resources for Transition-Age Youth in Foster Care
- [SR 393](#): Improving Family Caregiver Services

## HEALTH & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



- [Blue-Ribbon Study Committee on Insurance Rates](#)
- [Blue-Ribbon Study Committee on Georgia's Medical Marijuana Policies](#)
- [HR 72](#): Cancer Care Access
- [HR 304](#): Costs and Effects of Smoking
- [HR 753](#): Improving Access to Internal Medicine in Rural Areas
- [HR 847](#): Evaluating Funding for Public Health
- [SR 311](#): Recovery Residences
- [SR 427](#): Intoxicating Cannabinoids in Consumable Hemp Products



## TECHNOLOGY, YOUTH SAFETY & CIVIL RIGHTS

- [SR 391](#): Artificial Intelligence and Digital Currency
- [SR 431](#): Impact of Social Media and Artificial Intelligence on Children and Platform Privacy Protection
- [SR 444](#): Civil Rights Protections

## TAX POLICY & GOVERNANCE



- [SR 386](#): State Fair Tax Study Committee
- [SR 429](#): Felony Disenfranchisement in Georgia's Constitution

The logo features the word "Voices" in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font. Above the letter "i" in "Voices" is a cluster of small, multi-colored dots in shades of blue, orange, and grey. Below "Voices" is the text "for Georgia's Children" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

# Voices

for Georgia's Children

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

To access a digital version of this report with links to the referenced legislation, scan the QR code below or visit [tinyurl.com/Voices2025GAKeyWins](https://tinyurl.com/Voices2025GAKeyWins).



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