This Week in the Senate
February 9 - 13, 2015

A Message from Senate President
Pro Tempore David Shafer

The Senate approved several bills focused on protecting children and families. Senate Bill 3, the “Supporting and Strengthening Families Act,” will allow parents to temporarily transfer custodial oversight to another adult during times when extenuating circumstances impact the ability to properly care for a child. Senate Resolution 7 and Senate Bill 8 aim to bring more severe punishments to those who capitalize on the exploitation of children. They also establish a fund that provides support services to these victims.

The Senate also took up the amended budget for Fiscal Year 2015, making adjustments to keep it in balance as required by our Constitution. We anticipate the House will send us the budget for Fiscal Year 2016 later this month; beginning our line-by-line review of proposed spending for the next year.

We also adopted Senate Resolution 167, which lays out a schedule for the remainder of the 2015 Legislative Session. Day 30, known as “Crossover Day” because it is the last day for a bill to pass the house in which it originated and “cross over” to the other house, will be Friday, March 13. Day 40, when we adjourn sine die, will be Thursday, April 2.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9
Sunset Date Extended on Mental Health Evaluation Bill

Senate Bill 53, sponsored by Sens. Greg Kirk (R - Americus), Renee Unterman (R - Buford), Tyler Harper (R - Ocilla), Jesse Stone (R - Waynesboro), William Ligon (R - Brunswick) and Dean Burke (R - Bainbridge), passed the Senate with a vote of 51 to 4. SB 53 extends the sunset provision on a bill passed last year that allows licensed professional counselors to perform emergency examinations on individuals who are mentally ill, alcoholic or drug dependent. The sunset date would be extended from March 15, 2015 to June 30, 2018. Freshman Sen. Kirk took part in the Senate’s tradition of receiving a playful grilling from his peers when presenting his first piece of legislation. - SB 53

Youth Villages Georgia Day

Sens. Lindsey Tippins (R - Marietta), Mike Dugan (R - Carrollton), Fran Millar (R - Atlanta), John Wilkinson (R - Toccoa) and Hunter Hill (R - Atlanta) sponsored Senate Resolution 102 recognizing February 9, 2015, as Youth Villages Georgia Day at the Capitol. Youth Villages is a nonprofit organization that serves children and their families with psychiatric needs at a residential treatment facility in Douglasville, GA. - SR 102
Delta Sigma Theta Day
Sen. Gloria Butler (D - Stone Mountain), sponsored Senate Resolution 156 commending the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority for 102 years of exemplary service and recognizing Monday, February 9, 2015, as Delta Sigma Theta Day at the Capitol. The sorority is composed of more than 200,000 college educated women committed to equal educational opportunities and equal rights for all. - SR 156

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Day
Sens. Ronald Ramsey (D - Stone Mountain), Emanuel Jones (D - Decatur), Lester Jackson (D - Savannah), Donzella James (D - Atlanta), Steve Henson (D - Tucker) and Gail Davenport (D - Jonesboro) sponsored Senate Resolution 161 commending Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity for their leadership and recognizing February 9, 2015, as Kappa Alpha Psi Day at the Capitol. With over 130,000 members, the fraternity aims to reach local youth through various initiatives and networking opportunities promoting community leadership service. - SR 161

Adjournment Resolution Set Through Day 40
Sens. Bill Cowsert (R - Athens), David Shafer (R - Duluth), Steve Henson (D - Tucker) and Steve Gooch (R - Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Resolution 167, which sets the legislative calendar through Day 40 on Thursday, April 2, 2015. - SR 167

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Senate Passes Supporting and Strengthening Families Act
Sens. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), David Shafer (R – Duluth), Bill Cowsert (R – Athens), William Ligon (R – Brunswick), Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) and John Albers (R – Roswell) sponsored Senate Bill 3, which states that parents may delegate power of attorney and authority regarding the care and custody of a minor child in certain extenuating circumstances. SB 3 includes the right to enroll the child in school, view records concerning the child and be involved with any other school-related functions or health treatments. SB 3 passed as amended with a vote count of 43 to 10. – SB 3

Savannah Harbor Expansion Project Protection Clause
Sens. Bill Cowsert (R – Athens), Ben Watson (R – Savannah) and William Ligon (R – Brunswick) sponsored Senate Bill 5, which clarifies to the Federal government that the Georgia Ports Authority will be responsible in any instance of injury, loss, or damage occurring during the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project. - SB 5

Sen. Renee Unterman Recognizes Girl Scouts Day
Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) sponsored Senate Resolution 19 recognizing February 10, 2015, as Girl Scouts Day at the Capitol. For more than 100 years, Girl Scouts has promoted the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of its members and has been an expert resource for growth and development. - SR 19.

Georgia College and State University Day
Sen. Burt Jones (R – Jackson) sponsored Senate Resolution 64 recognizing February 10, 2015, as Georgia College and State University Day at the Capitol and celebrating the institution’s 125th anniversary. Since 1996, Georgia College & State University has served the state as Georgia’s designated public liberal arts university and currently has an enrollment of 6,772 undergraduate and graduate students. – SR 64
Gary Chadwick “Chad” Durrence Remembered
Sens. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa), Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega), Butch Miller (R – Gainesville), Frank Ginn (R – Danielsville) and Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga) sponsored Senate Resolution 141 honoring the life and memory of Gary Chadwick “Chad” Durrence. Durrence gave inspiration to many through his high ideals, morals, and deep concern for his fellow citizens. He passed on December 25, 2014, and will be missed by all who had the great fortune of knowing him. - SR 141

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11
Amended FY2015 Budget
The Senate passed the Amended Fiscal Year 2015 Budget by a vote of 54 to 1. The bill was sponsored by House Speaker David Ralston (R - Blue Ridge) and carried in the Senate by Sen. Jack Hill (R - Reidsville). The $21.1 billion supplemental budget runs through June 30, 2015, and includes increases for K-12 education growth and public health initiatives. – HB 75

Cordele-Crisp County Fish Fry
Sens. Greg Kirk (R – Americus), Bruce Thompson (R – White), Mike Dugan (R – Carrollton), Ellis Black (R – Valdosta), Bill Jackson (R – Appling) and Frank Ginn (R – Danielsville) sponsored Senate Resolution 140 recognizing the second annual Cordele-Crisp County Fish Fry at the Capitol. Sen. Kirk welcomed the cooking team and commended them for their hard work put into hosting the event. – SR 140

Fort Valley State University Day
Sen. Freddie Powell Sims (D – Dawson) sponsored Senate Resolution 191 recognizing February 11, 2015, as Fort Valley State University (FVSU) Day at the Capitol. Sen. Sims invited the university’s Student Government Association president, Ariel Hill, to speak to members of the Senate about FVSU’s continued academic achievements and commitment to excellence. – SR 191

Jackson-Butts County Day
Sens. Burt Jones (R – Jackson), Hunter Hill (R – Atlanta) and Bill Cowsert (R – Athens) sponsored Senate Resolution 107 recognizing February 11, 2015, as Jackson-Butts County Day at the Capitol. SR 107 also commends Jackson-Butts County for its culture, tradition and history. Sen. Jones welcomed dozens of county leaders and constituents to the Capitol. – SR 107

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12
“Safe Harbor/Rachel's Law”
Sen. Renee Unterman (R - Buford) sponsored Senate Bill 8, also known as the “Safe Harbor/Rachel's Law” bill. The legislation extends the statute of limitations for child sex trafficking victims from the age of 23 to the age of 25, incorporates federal guidelines for victim support services, increases penalties for sex trafficking, requires convicted sex traffickers to register as sex offenders, and allows for the forfeiture of vehicles used in or money gained from trafficking crimes. SB 8 also creates the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund and the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund Commission. SB 8 passed with a vote of 52 to 3. - SB 8

Companion Resolution to “Safe Harbor/Rachel's Law”
Senate Resolution 7 provides a funding mechanism for the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund by placing a constitutional amendment for approval by Georgia voters on the 2016 ballot. The proposed amendment would allow the Georgia General Assembly to set additional penalties or fees in cases where a person is found guilty of severe sex crimes, including keeping a place of prostitution, pimping, pandering, trafficking of persons for sexual servitude, or sexual exploitation of children. The proposed amendment would also permit the General Assembly to impose state regulatory fees on adult entertainment establishments. The resolution was approved with a vote of 53 to 3. - SR 7
The Georgia State Senate will reconvene for **DAY 16** on Tuesday, February 17, at 10:00 a.m.