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This Week in the Senate

January 29 - February 1, 2018



Looking Ahead to Budget Week

The Senate reconvened on Monday, January 29, and met for four days this week, completing day 14 of the 2018 Legislative Session.

Senate members were busy with committee meetings and passing six pieces of legislation on the Senate Floor. The legislation passed addresses a variety of issues, such as retirement funds for state employees and veterans, animal cruelty and encouraging our friends in Congress to make expanding broadband a priority.

On Tuesday, we unanimously passed two pieces of legislation, both sponsored by Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia). Senate Bill 131 addresses the termination of parental rights during adoptions and Senate Bill 321 updates Georgia's penalties for Medicaid fraud.

On Thursday, the House took action on House Bill 159, the Adoption Bill, and passed an amended version of the Senate Judiciary Committee substitute. The Senate did not take action on HB 159 so that our members have enough time to review and analyze the impact of the changes made by the House in the over 100 page bill. This legislation is very important to the children and families of Georgia and we must do all we can to ensure that the final passage of this legislation ensures children are placed in loving, caring homes and that their needs are fully met.

Next week, we will continue our committee work and floor votes on legislation. We will also be holding Senate Appropriations Subcommittee meetings to review House Bill 683, the Amended Fiscal Year 2018 budget. The subcommittees and their members will evaluate the proposals in HB 683 for their specific agencies and areas, and will make recommendations to the full Senate Appropriations Committee chaired by Sen. Jack Hill (R – Reidsville).

The budget process is very important and one that we all take seriously. I wish the best to Sen. Hill, the subcommittee chairs and all committee members as they work to ensure the Amended FY18 budget funds are appropriated in a fiscally responsible manner.

Senator Butch Miller
President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

MONDAY, JANUARY 29

Expanding Access to the Employee's Retirement System

Senate Bill 101, sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick), would allow individuals participating in the Georgia Defined Contribution Plan to buy into the Employee's Retirement System (ERS). The bill specifies criteria for interested individuals and expands employee choice when purchasing his or her plan. SB 101 passed by a vote of 52-0. – **SB 101**

Veterans Employment Credit Expanded

Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta) sponsored Senate Bill 129 which would allow former active duty military service members, serving on or after January 1, 1990, to receive retirement credit toward the ERS. In order to qualify, veterans must show proof of service, have had membership in the ERS for two years and pay equal to the cost of creditable service. SB 129 passed with a vote of 52-0. – **SB 129**

GBI Recognized for Commitment to Combating Human Trafficking

Senate Resolution 588, sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), named January as Human Trafficking Month at the Capitol. SR 588 specifically recognizes the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit (CEACC). CEACC's goals are to detect, investigate and assist in stopping human trafficking, as well as to provide internet safety education across the state. – **SR 588**



Dahlonega-Lumpkin County Day at the Capitol

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Resolution 590 which recognizes January 29, 2018, as Dahlonega-Lumpkin County Day at the Capitol. Dahlonega is known for its history, natural beauty and gold mines, which provided the gold on top of the Capitol. Named after former Georgia Governor Wilson Lumpkin, the area is well known as the gateway to the North Georgia Mountains and as the home of Camp Merrill, one of only three United States' Army Ranger camps. In addition, Dahlonega is the home of the University of North Georgia, Georgia's only Senior Military College. – **SR 590**

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30

Amending Adoption Proceedings

Senate Bill 131, sponsored by Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia), would allow for a stay of an adoption while an order terminating parental rights is pending. In addition, SB 131 would allow a juvenile to waive his or her right to an attorney, as long as it is made knowingly, voluntarily and on the record. The bill passed with a vote of 52-0. – **SB 131**

Medicaid Fraudulent Penalties Increase

Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia) sponsored Senate Bill 321 which would change the percentage of fraudulent Medicaid reimbursements that may be claimed in Georgia from 35 percent to 45 percent. Currently the minimum penalty fee is set at \$5,500 but this bill will increase the minimum penalty to \$11,181 to match the federal standard. The bill passed with a vote of 51-0. – **SB 321**

Welcoming Reverend Dr. Edward Rhodes

Senate Resolution 612, sponsored by Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White), recognizes Rev. Dr. Edward Rhodes of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. Rev. Dr. Rhodes is the 16th pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church and began his service to the church in 1995. – **SR 612**

Celebrating Sharon Wilder's Service to the General Assembly

Sharon Wilder's retirement was celebrated in Senate Resolution 640, sponsored by Sen. Bill Cowser (R – Athens). Ms. Wilder will retire from the Georgia General Assembly after 25 years of service. In her career, she has worked in the Senate Majority Leader's office and the Senate President Pro Tempore office, among many others. – **SR 640**

Telehealth Day at the Capitol

The Senate recognized Tuesday, January 3 as Telehealth Day at the state Capitol. The Georgia Partnership for Telehealth is a non-profit organization that works to increase access to primary care and reduce costs in rural and underserved communities throughout the state. Georgia's telehealth network has more than 550 sites statewide.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31

Addressing Animal Cruelty Charges

Sen. Bill Heath (R – Bremen) sponsored Senate Bill 257, which would require a veterinarian approved by the Department of Agriculture to advise and consult with law enforcement in cases of suspected animal cruelty before charges can be filed. The animals addressed under this bill are goats, sheep, pigs and cattle. The bill passed with a vote of 38-14. – **SB 257**

Funding Broadband in Rural Areas

Senate Resolution 502, sponsored by Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega), urges the United States Congress to develop and fund policies and resources in an attempt to bring high-speed broadband access to rural Georgia and rural America. High-speed broadband service is critical to development across many industries including education, telehealth and agriculture. The resolution passed with a vote of 50-0. – **SR 502**



Physicians Recognized at the Capitol

Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah) sponsored Senate Resolution 620 which recognizes Wednesday, January 31, 2018, as Physician's Day at the Capitol. Physicians in Georgia are critical to maintaining the health of members in their respective communities. There are more than 19,000 licensed physicians practicing medicine in Georgia who provide more than \$1.1 billion in local and state tax revenue. – **SR 620**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1



Recognizing Bob Bell

Senate Resolution 625, sponsored by Sen. Fran Millar (R – Atlanta), honors Bob Bell for dedicating his time, talent and energy to public service. Bell served in the Georgia General Assembly from 1968 to 1982, spending four years in the Georgia House of Representatives before being elected to the Senate, where he served for 10 years. In 1981, he was named one of the nation's Top 10 Outstanding Legislators by the National Conference of State Legislatures. – **SR 625**

Monroe County Day at the Capitol

Sen. John F. Kennedy (R – Macon) sponsored Senate Resolution 632 naming Thursday, February 1, 2018, as Monroe County Day at the Capitol. Monroe County was founded in 1821 and named after founding father and fifth President of the United States, James Monroe. Monroe County is home to many of Georgia's outdoor tourist attractions including the Chattahoochee National Forest, High Falls State Park and Lake Juliette. – **SR 632**

Commending Shirley Williamson

Senate Resolution 634, sponsored by Sen. Lee Anderson (R – Grovetown), commends Shirley Williamson for 27 years of involvement and success with the Columbia County 4-H program. Under Williamson’s direction, the program raised more than \$450,000 to provide materials and supplies for implementing programs and distributing educational leadership scholarships. – *SR 634*



Congratulating the Rome High School Football Team

Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R – Rome) sponsored Senate Resolution 647 which congratulates the Rome High School Football team for its successful football season. Rome High School recently won the Class AAAAA Georgia High School Association State Football Championship against the undefeated Warner Robins High School with a score of 38-0. This is Rome High School’s second consecutive state championship victory. – *SR 647*

Recognizing Community Health Centers Day

Senate Resolution 655, sponsored by Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge), recognizes Thursday, February 1, 2018, as Community Health Centers Day. Across the state, there are more than 200 medically underserved communities and federally qualified health centers helping to provide high-quality primary and preventive care to more than 600,000 Georgians. Community health centers add nearly \$300 million to Georgia’s economy every year. – *SR 655*



**The Georgia Senate will reconvene at 10:00a.m. on
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5.**