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2012 UPCOMING SESSION ISSUES

This document is a report of selected issues that are likely to be addressed during the 2012 Session of the Georgia General Assembly, and is solely intended to provide a general overview. If more information on a particular area of interest is needed, please contact the Senate Research Office.

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AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Immigration

Under House Bill 87, which passed during the 2011 Legislative Session, the Department of Agriculture (“Department”) was directed to conduct a study of the conditions, needs, issues and problems associated with various immigration reform concerns and report its findings to the Governor and Legislature by January 1, 2012.

The federal H-2A program (aka guest worker program) is a temporary assistance program that allows agricultural employers anticipating a labor shortage to bring nonimmigrant foreign workers into the U.S. to perform temporary or seasonal agricultural labor. Temporary labor lasts no longer than one year, except under extraordinary circumstances. Seasonal labor is for a certain time of year tied to an event or pattern, like growing cycles, and the employer requires above normal levels of employment for ongoing operations. The employer must state on his application to the U.S. Department of Labor that there are not sufficient able, willing, qualified, and available U.S. workers and that the employment of aliens will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers with similar positions.

Recognizing that many agricultural employers have complaints about the administratively cumbersome nature and flaws of the federal guest worker program, the Department is directed to provide recommendations for reforming the H-2A program and changes the state may take that may improve the H-2A process. The report will also include an evaluation of the legal and economic feasibility of the state implementing its own guest worker program.

In addition to recommendations regarding the federal and a state guest worker program, the report should include recommended actions or legislation that the Department deems appropriate to address the current and future impact immigration reform may have on Georgia’s agriculture industry.

APPROPRIATIONS

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 General Budget passed in the spring of 2011 at a state-funds level of \$18.3 billion. This is the highest level since the FY2009 Amended Budget.

The FY2013 budget will require legislators to address an approximately \$1 billion shortfall that is currently projected. The primary components of this shortfall are needs in Medicaid and the State Health Benefit Plan at around \$400 million. Growth in Regents, Technical Schools and K-12 Education will require an additional \$220 million, while contributions to teacher and state employee retirement systems will require \$170 million extra. The remainder of the shortfall occurs in areas such as Behavioral Health and Corrections.

Tax revenue growth is expected to increase; however, weakness in the economy still makes the exact level difficult to predict.

Agencies have been directed to submit 2 percent reduction plans; however, because QBE and Medicaid are exempt, this will not yield more than \$130 million. The unknown factors in the budget will be the impact that federal reductions have on Georgia, as well as any tax changes that state lawmakers pass.

BANKING AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Georgia leads the nation in bank failures, and Georgia's foreclosure rates are among the highest in the nation. Federal legislation has been introduced or recently passed which directly relates to banking regulation and/or bank failures, and the state will likely consider legislation on these issues.

Dodd-Frank Act

In 2010, the federal Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Act) passed into law. The Act represents the most comprehensive financial regulatory reform measures taken since the Great Depression. The Act included changes that affect the oversight and supervision of financial institutions and introduced more stringent regulatory capital requirements. Many of the Act's provisions affect the nation's money centers and large regional institutions and do not directly impact state-chartered banks. Therefore, there may be legislation introduced which subjects state-chartered banks to more oversight or more stringent capital requirements.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation: Bank Failures

House Resolution 2056, sponsored by U.S. Representative Lynn Westmoreland, passed on December 21, 2011. This bill requires the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to study the impact of FDIC practices and procedures on troubled or failing institutions in the ten states, including Georgia, that have had more than ten bank failures since 2008. The purpose of the bill is to determine whether the FDIC is playing a role in the bank failures, to determine whether the various FDIC policies and procedures for resolving bank failures are appropriate, and to ensure all FDIC employees and bank examiners are performing consistently with the policies and procedures currently in place. Similar legislation may be introduced in the 2012 Legislative Session which would require the Attorney General to perform a study of the bank failures in Georgia.

Foreclosures

Georgia's foreclosure rate remains among the sixth highest in the nation despite attempts in past sessions to remedy this crisis. There are several live bills that address foreclosures including the following:

- HB110: This bill authorizes counties and municipalities to establish vacant property registries and establishes state-wide requirements for such registries.
- HB 338: Neighborhood Stabilization Act, or NEST Act, which extensively revises current provisions relating to the creation, transfer, modification, and foreclosure of mortgages and deeds to secure debts and other documents creating security interests.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Georgia Competitiveness Initiative

The Georgia Competitiveness Initiative (Initiative) was created by Governor Deal for the purpose of coordinating state government and the business community to develop a concise long-term strategy for sound economic development, with an emphasis on job creation. The group held information-gathering hearings across Georgia to assist with determining the state's strengths and weaknesses in terms of competition and workforce development, government efficiency, and transportation and logistics infrastructure. A final report of the Initiative is expected at the beginning of the 2012 Legislative Session.

Savannah Port

The Savannah port remains a key component for Georgia's economic development strategy. The deepening of the Savannah River to enable larger container ships to utilize the ports is a major issue. The timing of the deepening project is critical to the expansion of the Panama Canal in 2014; the expanded capacity in the canal zone will increase traffic of the large container ships needing access to east coast ports. Currently, Savannah is the nation's fourth-busiest container port, and the dredging of the river will enable the port to remain competitive to other ports. Federal funds are needed to help the state cover the costs of the \$600 million project. Further, the Savannah-Brunswick container port corridor is the second busiest in the nation in terms of exports, behind only the massive Los Angeles port complex. The Georgia ports provide an immediate gateway for Georgia businesses and exports and are crucial for sustaining and expanding the state's economic engine.

EDUCATION

State Education Finance Study Commission

During the 2011 Session, the General Assembly passed House Bill 192 which created the State Education Finance Study Commission (Commission). The Commission is comprised of teachers, superintendents, principals, Georgia Department of Education officials and legislators, and charged with the task of evaluating the current education funding formula, Quality Basic Education (QBE) over the next year and a half. Throughout this past summer and fall, the Commission deliberated if new funding methods were needed, and also reviewed policies in Title 20, the education portion of the Georgia Code, that needed revision or repealing.

The Commission has been divided into four Sub-Committees; each assigned different areas to allow the complex formula to be studied from all aspects, as well as to provide a thorough examination. Education groups, grassroots level teachers, principals, superintendents and other experts all provided additional data and input.

The Commission issued a report in accordance with the September 30th deadline required by legislation, including five recommendations heard by the Sub-Committees and passed by the Commission as a whole. The recommendations include funding school nurses based on student population needs, funding supplies for school nursing programs, and funding for the Department of Education to develop professional learning centered on statewide strategic initiatives.

The Commission also recommends the repeal of the 65 percent law, otherwise known as "Minimum Direct Classroom Expenditures." Passed during the 2006 Legislative Session, the rule requires systems to spend 65 percent of their budget on direct classroom expenditures. The problem with the law is that the definition of classroom expenditures excludes functions and expenses that indirectly support the classroom and direct instruction such as counselors, nurses, media specialists, school leadership, maintenance and operations, transportation and food services. The law allows achievement or hardship waivers for systems that are not in compliance with the 65 percent expenditure rule.

A review of the data found that more systems were in compliance with the law based on academic achievement waivers (meeting AYP, graduation rate or SAT scores) than the actual expenditure controls – meaning these systems were meeting academic achievement criteria despite spending less than 65 percent of their budget directly in the classroom. The Commission also found no direct link between the 65 percent rule and improved student achievement, and therefore recommends repealing the law during the 2012 Legislative Session.

Charter Schools Commission

Another issue that has come to the forefront in education is the Georgia Supreme Court's ruling on the Charter Schools Commission. Since the Court found the authorizing Commission unconstitutional, the Legislature must revisit the issue in order to find a new solution.

Both Georgia Supreme Court Justice David Nahmias and Attorney General Sam Olens have expressed statements that would lead us to believe a Constitutional Amendment is needed to define the state's role in education. Writing for the minority in the dissent, Justice Nahmias stated, "The majority of this Court has announced the new policy and removed the issue from the political process, unless the General Assembly and the people of our State bear the delay and enormous burden required to correct the Court's error through a constitutional amendment." Similarly, Attorney General Olens stated, "Under the Court's order the General Assembly's power has been transformed from one of broad power unless expressly limited, to one of limited powers that do not exist unless expressly stated in the Constitution."

The General Assembly, if deciding to take up the issue, would face a constitutional amendment that would either grant the state broad power in educational powers or limit the question to creating the Commission with its previous legal power of approving and funding. If it received the two-thirds vote in both chambers by the conclusion of the next Legislative Session, it would be placed on the November 2012 ballot and conceivably, a new Commission would be functional to approve schools during the 2013 school year. Georgia would be the only state in the nation to take this type of action with regards to charter schools.

ETHICS

Voting Rights for Physically and Mentally Disabled Georgians

Currently, only persons with physical disabilities are granted specific voting rights under Georgia law regarding assistance with voting. Some of the rights include permitting certain family members to request an absentee ballot on their behalf, allowing the absentee ballot to be mailed to an address other than the voter's permanent address, allowing certain family members to deliver a voted ballot to the board of registrars or absentee ballot clerk, and granting the voter assistance in preparing his or her ballot.

A bill was introduced during the 2011 Legislative Session (Senate Bill 198) to extend these same rights to mentally and physically disabled persons registered to vote in Georgia.

FINANCE

Tax Reform

Tax reform continues to be the prevailing issue relating to revenue. The Special Joint Committee on Georgia's Tax Structure considered several variations of legislation during the 2011 Legislative Session. House Bill 388 was the final version considered and endorsed by the special committee. Following are some general highlights of that legislation.

The Georgia income tax rate would decrease to 4.55 percent with changes to exemptions and deductions.

Georgia sales tax bases would be expanded to add automotive repair, maintenance, and installation services to the state and local sales and use tax base. Additionally, casual motor vehicle sales would be captured. Services included (but not limited to):

- Tires;
- Audio and video;
- Body work and painting;
- Transmission;
- Brakes;
- Tune-ups and oil-changes;
- Front-end and rear-end work;
- Batteries;
- Electrical and cooling systems;
- Accessories; and
- Cleaning and detailing.

Sales tax exemptions would be provided for energy used in manufacturing and agricultural inputs.

A communications services tax would be enacted in lieu of current taxes and franchise fees. A sales tax refund would be available for infrastructure improvements and expansions.

It is generally conceded that Georgia needs to support its manufacturing sector by permanently exempting energy used in production from the state sales tax. Forty-two states currently exempt the sales tax; Georgia is the only southern state that fully levies it on energy used in manufacturing. Georgia is in company with Arizona, Arkansas, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Washington; however, Colorado has temporarily suspended its exemption. It is important to note that Georgia does provide an exemption if the energy costs exceed 50 percent of all the production costs, and this is rarely achieved. There have been numerous attempts the past few legislative terms to provide this sales tax exemption. The estimated annual fiscal impact for exempting manufacturing, mine, and newspaper publishing is approximately \$144 million.

Generally, each tenth of a percent of the income tax rate generates \$134 million annually.

Further, each tenth of a percent of the Georgia sales tax rate generates \$130 million annually.

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

Sunset Review

A sunset review is an evaluation of need for the continued existence of a program or agency. During the 2011 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 223 called for the creation of a Joint Legislative Advisory Committee (Committee) to serve as the vehicle through which the General Assembly would routinely review and evaluate the productivity of each state agency and similar state entities in order to ensure efficiency of state government. Amended versions of the bill passed both the House and the Senate, and it was appointed to a Conference Committee, which did not meet prior to Sine Die.

The Committee would establish a schedule for the routine review of all state agencies, boards, departments, advisory committees, authorities, bureaus, offices and any other state entity of the executive branch. After considering an agency's submitted report detailing its efficiency, productivity and utilization of state resources to best meet the needs of the public, and conducting a thorough review of the agency the Committee will include specific findings and recommendations and indicate whether there is a public need for the continued existence of the agency or the functions it provides.

Should the Committee recommend the abolition of a state entity, it will only be abolished after a finding by the General Assembly through a joint resolution that the laws the agency is responsible for implementing or enforcing have been repealed, revised, or reassigned to another remaining agency.

In 1977, Texas established its Sunset Advisory Commission (Commission) with the goal of making state government agencies more efficient and less wasteful. Since then, the Commission, which subjects approximately 130 state agencies to review, has become the model for states in establishing and operating their own sunset review process. Since the Commission began reviewing agencies in 1978, it has led to the abolishment of 58 agencies and the consolidation of 12 other agencies. It is estimated that these actions have resulted in a savings of nearly \$784 million, with a return of more than \$27 for every dollar spent on the process.

Almost half of all states have some active form or process for sunset review, including Alabama, California, and Florida.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Health Care Exchanges

One of the most prominent features of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) are provisions related to state-based health care exchanges. These exchanges are intended to make the purchasing of insurance more affordable and accessible for individuals and small businesses. With the exchanges scheduled to launch in 2014, Georgia lawmakers must make many difficult decisions in the near future in order to meet federal deadlines. According to ACA, if a state fails to set up an exchange by January 1, 2014, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will establish and operate an exchange in the state. Moreover, federal rules require states to show "readiness" for full implantation of the exchange by January 1, 2013. This means that the General Assembly must act in 2012 if we wish to run our own exchange. Issues that must be decided by the General Assembly regarding an exchange include the following:

- Whether to operate an exchange at all or whether to have the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services run an exchange for us.
- Deciding what entity will oversee the administration of the exchange. Such an entity could be a new or existing state agency, an independent public agency, or a quasi-governmental agency.
- If the exchange administration is not located in a state agency, the governance mechanisms for the exchange, including deciding the details of a governing board (including size, composition, terms, and appointment process).
- Whether to work with other states to establish a regional or interstate exchange, which is an option under ACA.
- Establishing the duties of the exchange.
- Designating the state authority responsible for certifying that health benefit plans meet the requirements to be sold within the exchange.
- Granting necessary rulemaking authority to appropriate state entities responsible for implementing state law related to exchanges.

- Whether to operate a single exchange for the individual and small group markets or to operate separate exchanges for individuals (the American Health Benefit Exchange) and for small businesses (the Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP) Exchange);
- Whether to operate a Basic Health Plan. The PPACA gives states the option to create a Basic Health Plan for uninsured individuals with incomes between 133 percent and 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) who would otherwise be eligible to receive premium subsidies in the Exchange. The Basic Health Plan must provide at least the essential health benefits and must meet certain requirements for premiums and cost-sharing. If Georgia chooses to operate a Basic Health Plan, individuals with incomes between 133 percent and 200 percent of the FPL will not be eligible for subsidies in the exchange.
- Whether to allow the exchange to selectively contract with health insurance plans, limiting the number of plans selling insurance within the exchange, or to accept all plans that seek to do business within the exchange.
- Determining the budget for exchange, Medicaid, and CHIP information technology system needs capable of meeting ACA's interoperability requirements.
- Reviewing the state's insurance coverage mandates to determine whether they exceed the essential benefits package established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and if so, determining whether to revise such requirements or possibly exclude plans sold within the exchange from state mandates. ACA requires insurance policies sold within an exchange to include coverage for "essential health benefits;" the scope of these benefits is to be determined by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Final regulations on these benefits are pending and are expected to be released later this year. ACA expressly allows states to require coverage of additional benefits beyond the essential health benefits. However, a state that requires additional benefits must reimburse the insurance plans, or enrollee, as applicable, to defray the cost of these additional benefits.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Governor Deal introduced his Complete College Georgia Initiative in August of 2011. The plan is aimed at increasing the number of students with access to higher education and ensuring students graduate with postsecondary degrees in a timely manner. Additionally in August, Georgia was named one of ten states selected to receive funding through Complete College America, a national organization focused on increasing the nation's college completion rate through state policy change.

Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012

In November, a draft plan of the Complete College Georgia Plan was approved by the Board of Regents; this was one of the first steps towards enacting Governor Deal's initiative, the plan must still be approved by the Technical College System Board and then submitted to the Governor's office. The plan does not require legislative action, but could impact legislation.

The Higher Education Completion Plan is a joint effort between the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia. The main goal of improving the number of students completing college in Georgia will be accomplished by achieving improvement in other areas including: Georgia's high school graduation rate; the academic readiness of students who do graduate; and opportunities for access to college.

The plan also requires Georgia's higher education institutions to continue to be a comparatively low-cost, high-quality opportunity, and emphasizes the importance of balancing the cost of a quality education with the economic conditions of the state.

Articulation Agreement

A key part of the plan is the new articulation agreement between the Technical College System and the University System of Georgia that eases the transfer process and prevents the loss of already earned credits and valuable time. The articulation agreement will be implemented in January 2012.

Transforming Remediation

In order to create a more effective system, the plan will work to improve performance on transforming remediation. Students admitted to college, but unprepared in mathematics, reading, or writing, receive remediation, also known as learning support.

Over the next two years, two institutions from each System will pilot remediation transformation programs, with program expansion to follow statewide. Pilot projects at the University System will focus on modularization of courses, creation of alternate paths for those significantly behind, development of options to work at one's own pace, and integration of support to teach success skills.

Pilot projects at the Technical System will begin with: implementation of a redesign of remedial English, math, and reading using recommendations from the Work Group and the President's Council Learning Support Task Force; development of content modules so a student may progress at their own pace; and development of new diagnostic tools to ascertain which modules are required based on a student's need.

Shortening Time to Degree

Both Systems will work together to shorten the time to earn certificates and degrees through three areas of work:

1. Articulation and transfer agreement: expansion of the agreement is to be implemented in January 2012.
2. Student-Centered Transfer Portal: this web portal will be housed part of GACollege411, and will enable students to submit their college courses and grades and immediately have access to information showing transferable credits.
3. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): provides a pathway for students who have not obtained a degree but who have acquired knowledge through other means the chance to complete their education. Each System will expand the use of PLAs.

Restructuring Delivery

The University System will address the mismatch between the needs of today's students and the current delivery models in five areas: (1) Building and sustaining effective teaching; (2) Exploring and expanding the use of effective models; (3) Distance education; (4) Adult and military outreach; and (5) Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiatives.

The Technical System will focus on two areas: (1) Accelerating success; and (2) Providing greater structure and clearer pathways to completion.

INSURANCE AND LABOR

Certified Capital Companies (CAPCOs)

Under House Bill 298 (House Committee Substitute) and Senate Bill 203 (House Floor Substitute), Certified Capital Companies (CAPCOs) are state-certified venture capital companies funded by insurance companies. As an incentive to invest in CAPCOs, insurance companies receive a specific credit, usually a \$1 credit, on premium taxes for each \$1 invested (the tax credits are spread out over five years). The aggregate amount of investment tax credits to be allocated to all participating insurers must not exceed \$125,000,000.

With the money from insurance companies, CAPCOs act as venture capitalists, investing in small businesses and startups either by lending them money or buying stock in them according to an established time schedule to ensure the availability of tax credits to the insurance companies. An insurer's return-on-investment is virtually guaranteed as the legislation authorizes the CAPCO to return up to 100 percent of the insurer's initial investment in the form of a distribution. The State does not participate in any form of profit sharing with the CAPCO or insurer.

Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund Solvency

Unemployment insurance (UI) pays temporary cash benefits to workers who have lost jobs through no fault of their own. The UI system is administered as a federal-state partnership. To finance the program, the State levies and collects payroll taxes from employers. The State undertakes most UI administrative activities related to both paying benefits and collecting from employers the payroll taxes that support the program. The funds collected are managed in a trust fund administered by the federal government.

Although Georgia has the lowest unemployment insurance tax rates in the Southeast, the fund has been kept solvent in recent years through an influx of federal stimulus funding as well as over \$720 million in loans from the federal government. According to the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL), Georgia is one of 35 states to have borrowed money from the federal government during this last recession, with 28 states still have outstanding loans. With interest accruing at 3.94 percent, Georgia made its first interest payment on September 20, 2011 in the amount of \$21,041,643.71. Interest cannot be paid from the unemployment tax or trust fund, but must be paid from other state revenues.

In an effort to keep the trust fund solvent, repay interest, and eventually pay off the federal loan, the General Assembly and GDOL may adopt some of the following options:

- Implement a Waiting Week for drawing benefits payments;
- Reduce the \$330 maximum weekly benefit amount;
- Reduce the 26 weeks of state benefits; and
- Increase an administrative assessment of .08 that that GDOL currently collects from employers on their existing UI tax rates.

These steps could eventually help stabilize the trust fund, but there are more permanent and long-term issues that the General Assembly may also address so Georgia does not fall into the same pattern in every economic recession. The fund's balance stood at \$305 million at the end of the 2nd Quarter of 2011. To put this into perspective, the fund's balance stood at nearly \$1.4 billion with no outstanding loans only four years ago. Clearly, the current economic downturn has shown that the trust fund's solvency is fleeting and can become very unstable during periods of high unemployment. Some issues that may be addressed by the 2012 legislature concerning the unemployment insurance program may include:

- The UI system operates counter-cyclically, paying out benefits during recessionary times and collecting revenue during recovery times. Is there a better alternative to this pattern which would provide for a more stable trust fund balance in times of recession and recovery periods?
- How many months' worth of benefit payments should Georgia's UI trust fund maintain to provide an adequate reserve of money available to be paid as benefits?
- What is the ratio of Georgia's UI trust fund balance to Georgia's annual total wages in covered employment that would fund an adequate reserve?
- Is Georgia's UI experience rating system and benefit financing model sound and sustainable? Should the system and the model be amended or revamped?

Insurance Coverage for Orally Administered Anticancer Medication

During the 2009-2010 legislative session, Senator Don Thomas introduced Senate Bill 245 which would have required individual and group health benefit plans that provide coverage for cancer chemotherapy treatment to provide coverage for a prescribed, orally administered anticancer medication used to destroy or slow the growth of cancerous cells on a basis identical to intravenously administered or injected cancer medications that are covered as medical benefits. Although the bill was never addressed in committee, similar legislation is expected to be introduced in 2011.

Many believe this legislation is necessary because the economics and practice of cancer medicine have not caught up with the convenience of oral drugs. The oral drugs can free patients from frequent trips to a clinic for IV chemotherapy treatment. Fewer visits might save the health system money as well as time. Moreover, the pills represent an early step toward making cancer a manageable chronic condition, like diabetes.

However, drugs that are infused at a clinic are typically paid for as a medical benefit, like surgery. Pills, though, are usually covered by prescription drug plans, which are typically much less generous; for expensive cancer pills, patients might face huge co-payments or quickly exceed an annual coverage limit. Although sometimes a single insurer is involved, many times, a separate company — a pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) — provides the prescription drug coverage. PBMs continue to treat orally administered anticancer medication as a prescription drug, and thus reject coverage for such pills.

Although Oregon was the first state to pass legislation requiring insurance companies to provide equivalent coverage of oral and intravenous cancer drugs, several other states have followed, and many more states have introduced similar legislation.

JUDICIARY

Juvenile Code Revision

There has been a movement over the past several years to substantially revise the current Georgia Juvenile Code, found in Chapter 11 of Title 15 of the O.C.G.A. The original focus of criminal punishment for juveniles was on rehabilitation. However, an increase in juvenile crime during the 1980s and early 1990s led most states to pass much stricter laws that, in many cases, treated juveniles as adults for sentencing purposes.

Here in Georgia, the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1994 placed jurisdiction over juveniles aged 13 to 17 who commit one of the "seven deadly sins" in superior court, rather than juvenile court.

The seven deadly sins are: murder, rape, armed robbery (with a firearm), aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery and voluntary manslaughter. Juveniles can be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole under this law. The stated goal of the bill was retribution and deterrence, as opposed to rehabilitation.

Many believe these reforms have led to unjust results, including high rates of recidivism in children who do obtain parole, and a disproportionate effect on minority juveniles. African American and Latino juveniles are 45 percent of Georgia's youth population, but comprise 77.2 percent of those arrested under current law. There is growing research to suggest that the adolescent brain is not sufficiently developed for mature decision-making, therefore making prosecution as an adult unfair.

Beginning in 2004, stakeholders from across the state, including prosecutors, public defenders, juvenile court judges, law professors and the State Bar of Georgia, collaborated to create a proposed model code.

The model code became the foundation for Senate Bill 172 and House Bill 641, introduced by Representative Wendell Willard and Senator Bill Hamrick, respectively, during the 2011 Legislative Session. Stakeholders continue to work on the bill, as some issues are still being ironed out.

The juvenile code is a comprehensive set of laws that governs how our state responds to abuse and neglect of children, violations of criminal law by children, and other issues that require court involvement. Under the current statutory scheme, these issues are improperly commingled. One of the main goals of the juvenile code revision is to create a new organizational structure that separates different types of cases, therefore allowing greater flexibility and fairness. The different juvenile court case types include:

- Deprivation cases involve children who are abused or neglected by their caregivers;
 - Some deprivation cases will lead to Termination of Parental Rights;
 - Foster children nearing age 18 will need Independent Living Services;
- Children in Need of Services are those who commit minor juvenile infractions, such as truancy, disobedience, and running away from home;
- Delinquency cases involve acts that would be crimes if committed by an adult;
 - Notably, Senate Bill 292 (from the 2009 Legislative Session) would have eliminated exclusive jurisdiction in superior court for a juvenile who has committed one of the seven deadly sins; instead, superior court retains original jurisdiction, but the bill would have allowed such cases to be remanded to juvenile court.
 - Due process requires that courts determine whether a juvenile in a delinquency case is Competent to participate.
- Access to Records and Hearings is an issue in juvenile court;
- Emancipation cases, which release parents and caregivers from their obligations to a child, and allow juveniles to take on adult responsibilities.

The proposed juvenile code would do the following for the different court case types:

- Dependency (formerly deprivation) cases involve children who are abused or neglected by their caregivers. Some of the proposed changes for dependency cases include:
 - Shorter timelines for:
 - First review hearings;
 - Permanency hearings for kids under 7.
 - The removal of times limitations on custody orders to DFCS:
 - Currently, custody orders last for 12 months, then are renewed for another 12 months, and then a new petition must be filed;

- This change would make the orders permanent until court order or a natural expiration in the order, such as the minor turning 18.
 - More specificity included on case planning requirements
 - Clarifies efforts to keep siblings connected.
 - Requires planning for educational stability.
- Termination of parental rights provisions govern proceedings to terminate a parent's rights relative to their child when the parent is unable to safely and adequately care for the child.
 - One substantial change in this issue area is the reinstatement of parental rights. When the state cannot find another home for a child in the system, there is currently no way to re-establish legal parenthood. This bill would allow for that to happen.
- Independent Living Services would be a new addition to the juvenile code.
 - This encourages normal, age-appropriate activities for children in care.
 - Examples: sleepovers, sports teams, etc.
 - Provides for a tiered level of services:
 - Ages 14-16, pre-independent living services ("What do I do when I grow up?");
 - Ages 16-18, independent living services (how to find part-time jobs, build a resume, balance books, etc.);
 - Ages 17-21, transitional living services (rent support, supervised facility care);
 - Aftercare to age 23 (help out with rent just this month).
- Children in Need of Services reflects a new approach for intervening with children who are currently considered "unruly," as well as children who are unrestorably incompetent.
- Delinquency cases involve children who have committed acts that would be crimes if the children were adults.

One major purpose of the juvenile code revision was to ensure that our juvenile court system continues to receive federal funding. States must meet certain federal requirements, and the law as it stands today places that revenue stream at risk. House Bill 641 would bring Georgia into compliance with these federal requirements, with such changes as:

- When a child is placed in out-of-home care, the court must ensure the use of case plans and periodic reviews of the case and the placement:
 - Courts cannot place a child in long-term custody without creating a legal guardianship;
- In delinquency cases, the circumstances and amount of time for which a child can be held in an adult detention facility are strictly limited;
 - Children who are in these facilities must be kept completely separated from the adult residents;
 - A child in need of services can be held in secure detention no more than 24 hours before a court hearing and 24 hours after, unless certain exceptions apply.

Criminal Justice Reform

During the 2011 Legislative Session, the General Assembly passed House Bill 265, which created the 2011 Special Council on Criminal Justice Reform for Georgians (Council). State leaders laid out the following goals for the Council:

- Addressing the growth of the state's prison population, containing corrections costs, and increasing efficiencies and effectiveness that results in better offender management;
- Improving public safety by reinvesting a portion of the savings into strategies that reduce crime and recidivism; and
- Holding offenders accountable by strengthening community-based supervision, sanctions, and services.

The Council met a number of times since the summer, and its members divided into three working groups to develop specific recommendations for sentencing and prison admission, prison length-of-stay and parole, and community supervision. In November 2011, the Council released its report, which outlined the challenges Georgia faces currently and provided recommendations reflecting the work of the different working groups. The recommendations focus on four areas: (1) Ensuring access to effective community-based sanctions; (2) Strengthening community supervision; (3) Ensuring resources are used effectively; and (4) Improving government performance to achieve long-term success.

Ensuring Access to Effective Community-Based Sanctions

There are a number of accountability courts currently operating in Georgia, including drug courts, mental health courts, veterans' courts, and others, but some areas of the state do not have any accountability courts. By expanding the courts' coverage and basing court administration on best practices, Georgia can ensure that its accountability courts are making the most of their potential to increase public safety and controlling costs.

Strengthening Community Supervision

Some serious and chronic offenders are released from prison with no parole or probation supervision to follow, and one recommendation requires that all inmates who would be released without any supervision be transferred to parole supervision six months before their discharge date. This recommendation would free up financial resources to pay for the cost of short and long-term increases to the parole population.

Ensuring Georgia's Resources Are Used Effectively

Another recommendation would allow for the implementation of earned compliance credits for probation and parole. Earned compliance credits allow agencies to devote time and effort to offenders who present a greater threat to community safety and who are more likely to benefit from supervision and programs. Similarly, the report recommended the expansion of Georgia's Performance Incentive Credit (PIC) program, which would allow offenders to earn up to 12 months of PIC time off their sentence for participation in work or risk reduction.

Focusing Expensive Prison Beds on Serious Offenders

The Council found that drug and property offenders represent almost 60 percent of all admissions to Georgia prisons, and that five of the top six most common prison admission offenses are drug and property offenses. Many of these offenders are identified as lower-risk to reoffend, and the Council considered a number of options to identify lower-risk offenders who could be effectively supervised in the community at a lower cost, ensuring prison beds are available for more high-risk offenders.

The Council developed three policy options that could build upon each other. The first policy package contained the recommendations with the most consensus, and would reduce projected prison growth by up to 3,300 offenders by 2016. However, even if the following reforms are implemented, the prison population will still grow by approximately 600 offenders by the end of the next five years. Some of the package's recommendations include:

- Increasing the theft threshold for certain theft offenses;
- Creating two degrees of burglary by separating burglary of unoccupied structures from dwellings;
- Creating degrees of forgery by separating forgery of checks from forgeries of other documents; and
- Allowing judges to depart from mandatory minimum sentences for drug trafficking under a set of very specific circumstances.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Solid Waste Disposal

Solid waste management in Georgia is governed by the Georgia Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Act of 1990, which charges the Director of the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) with the primary responsibility of the state's solid waste management program. Current law requires an EPD permit for solid waste or solid waste handling. The law prohibits EPD from issuing a permit for a municipal solid waste landfill which accepts solid waste generated outside of the county, or in the case of a regional landfill, the counties or special districts, if any part of the landfill site is within any area that has been designated by the Director of EPD as a significant ground-water discharge area.

However, federal case law prohibits Georgia from restricting the movement of solid waste through the political subdivisions of the state. For example, in a 1992 U.S. Supreme Court case, Fort Gratiot Sanitary Landfill v. Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Court found a Michigan statute which generally prohibited private landfill operators within a county from accepting solid waste generating outside the county unconstitutional.

Senate Bill 110, which passed the Senate in the 2011 Legislative Session, repeals the provision in current law to ensure compliance with federal law. Opponents of the legislation argued that the bill removes significant environmental protections. However, other environmental protection provisions in current law remain in place; municipal solid waste landfills within two miles of any area designated by the Director of EPD as a significant ground-water recharge area must have a liner and leachate system.

Joint Water Supply Study Committee

Senate Resolution 15, which passed in the 2011 Legislative Session, re-authorized the Joint Committee on Water Supply that was created in the 2010 Legislative Session. The Committee is charged with undertaking a study and analysis of the current status and future needs of the state's reservoir system. The Committee held one meeting in August and will be holding meetings during the 2012 Legislative Session. Legislation may be introduced based on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Streamlining and Clarifying Firearms and Weapons Carry Provisions

Over the years, Georgia's firearms statutes have been amended several times over creating confusing and sometimes contradictory provisions. In response, Senate Bill 102, currently in the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee, was introduced last year to help streamline and clarify some provisions and restrictions.

Significant provisions of the bill include the following:

- Allow weapons carry license holders to carry in county or municipal government buildings unless the local governing authority prohibits it through a local ordinance or resolution;
- Allow license holders to carry a firearm in places of worship if that church/temple, etc. authorizes it;
- Allow license holders to carry a firearm in any area of an airport that is not prohibited by federal law;

- Current law allows the carrying of a weapon inside a school safety zone only under certain circumstances. Under this bill, a person with a valid weapons carry license may carry a weapon inside a vehicle or in a container or rack on a vehicle. This clause replaces an complicated and confusing exception that currently requires the person using the vehicle to be over 21 who is picking up or dropping off a student and also requires the weapon to be locked;
- Former law enforcement officers will be issued distinctive licenses;
- A person who has had their weapon's permit revoked may reapply for a new one after five years;
- Weapons carry license holders will no longer be required to be in possession of their license while carrying a firearm;
- Exempts all state and local elected officials from certain carry restrictions; and
- Prohibits state and local governments from carrying out specific acts, most of which involve registering, seizing, or prohibiting firearms under certain conditions or states-of-emergency.

Unifying Georgia's Fire Services – Creation of the Department of Fire Safety

Currently, Georgia's fire services are carried out and coordinated by five entities spread out over four separate state departments:

1. The Safety Fire Commissioner/State Fire Marshal (within the Insurance Commissioner's Office);
2. The Georgia Fire Academy – Operated by the Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Board of Public Safety;
3. The Georgia Firefighter and Standards Council – Located within Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC) under the Department of Public Safety (DPS);
4. The Georgia Forestry Commission; and
5. The Department of Corrections Fire Services.

Introduced last session, and sitting in the House Public Safety Committee, Senate Bill 186 seeks to streamline and consolidate the fire service functions found in the Insurance Commissioner's Office and DPS under one unified agency to be known as the Department of Fire Safety. To accomplish this, this legislation repeals:

1. The Office of Safety Fire Commissioner/State Fire Marshal which exists within the Commissioner of Insurance's office;
2. The 11-member Georgia Firefighter and Standards Council; and
3. The Georgia Fire Academy.

In their place, the bill establishes the Department of Fire Safety and a 17-member Fire Safety Advisory Board which will inherit all the powers, duties and authority of the other entities. Within the Department, the Professional Development Division will succeed and carry out all of the duties of the Georgia Fire Academy.

The Commissioner of the Department of Fire Safety will be appointed by the Governor and must have at least ten years' experience as a fire service professional. The Commissioner will appoint a State Fire Marshal to head the Fire Safety Division within the Department.

Because of the unique mission and nature of the Georgia Forestry Commission's and the Department of Correction's fire fighting responsibilities; the bill preserves their current structure.

REGULATED INDUSTRIES

Secondary Metals Thefts

Thefts of metals, such as copper and aluminum, have been a growing problem in Georgia and other states for several years. Thefts may occur in homes, churches, farms, utility properties, and electrical infrastructure. With increased demand in the United States and overseas, the price of metals, especially copper, remains high. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, copper theft costs the national economy approximately \$1 billion per year. Many states have considered legislation aimed at fostering stricter penalties, more transparent record-keeping, as well as new permit requirements for the selling and transport of metals.

Georgia passed Senate Bill 82 in 2009, which primarily focused on strengthening previous laws and adding new restrictions on the recordkeeping and timing of payment for the purchase of metals; moreover, it precluded local governments from enacting their own ordinances on these issues. Under current law, secondary metals recyclers must maintain legible records of all purchases for a period of two years; purchases of copper, catalytic converters, and aluminum forms designed to shape concrete must be made by check or with cash after a 24-hour delay. There is a 15-day tag-and-hold policy when a recycler is notified by law enforcement. It is unlawful for: (1) A recycler to purchase or sell regulated metals during certain overnight hours; and (2) Any person to give a false statement of ownership or identification, or vehicle tag number, and receive money from a recycler in exchange for regulated metals. Any person in violation of one of these provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor if the purchase is valued less than \$500; however, a person is guilty of a felony if the value exceeds \$500.

House Bill 269, which passed in the 2011 Legislative Session: (1) Increases the value of a vehicle that may be scrapped from \$750 to \$850; (2) Establishes procedures for notifying the Department of Revenue regarding the cancellation of titles to scrap vehicles; and (3) Adds falsifying a statement regarding cancellation of title of a scrap vehicle to the list of acts deemed to be felonies.

The rise in copper theft in Georgia has prompted several Georgia electrical utilities to offer up to a \$3000 reward to any person who provides information leading to the arrest and conviction of a person involved in the theft of copper and metals from utility properties. Georgia's law enforcement community has publicly raised concerns over metal theft in Georgia; one local government has convened its own task force on the issue. Legislation may be introduced in the 2012 Legislative Session which revises Georgia's laws in an effort to stem metal theft.

RETIREMENT

The Legislative Process for Retirement Bills

Retirement bills face a unique and often lengthy process prior to enactment because of requirements in the Georgia Constitution that retirement bills be treated differently from other legislation.

Retirement legislation with a fiscal impact can only be introduced during the first year of a two-year session and can only be acted on during the second year. This means that the retirement bills with fiscal impact introduced during the 2011 Legislative Session may be acted on during the upcoming 2012 Legislative Session. The legislature will also have the opportunity to act on non-fiscal retirement legislation, which is treated similarly to non-retirement legislation.

In Georgia, each bill having a fiscal impact on any public retirement system must be funded in the year of its enactment. This requirement ensures that future benefits are already paid for and do not depend on future appropriations.

Thus, any bill that increases the liability of the retirement system must be funded at the time of enactment. This process ensures the financial stability of the state's retirement systems.

In compliance with the Georgia Constitution, the General Assembly in 1983 enacted the Public Retirement Systems Standards Law, Chapter 20 of Title 47 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated. The "Standards Law" as it is commonly known, establishes the procedures required for the consideration and enactment of retirement legislation.

After Legislative Counsel drafts a retirement bill, it is sent to the State Auditor for a certificate stating whether the bill is a fiscal or a non-fiscal bill. According to the Office of Legislative Counsel, a "fiscal retirement bill" either: (1) increases a retirement benefit, (2) increases the actuarial accrued liability of a retirement system, or (3) increases the normal cost of the retirement system. These definitions are outlined at O.C.G.A. § 47-20-30.

The certificate of the State Auditor must be attached to the bill when it is introduced, whether or not it is a fiscal bill. If no certificate is attached when a bill is introduced, it should not receive further consideration. The certificate of the State Auditor is yellow analysis typically placed behind the copy of the bill.

If the State Auditor determines that a retirement bill is a non-fiscal retirement bill, the bill becomes similar to other legislation; however, non-fiscal retirement bills must be introduced in the first 20 days of either year of the biennium.

If the State Auditor certifies that the bill is a fiscal retirement bill, its treatment becomes more complex. A fiscal retirement bill may be introduced during the first year of the biennium at any time. No fiscal retirement bill may be introduced during the second year and no committee action will take place in either chamber during the first year of the biennium. Therefore, the only fiscal bills the legislature will see during the upcoming 2012 legislative session are the ones that were introduced during the 2011 legislative session and were forwarded for actuarial study.

Because of the requirement that fiscal retirement bills be funded concurrently with their enactment, it is necessary for an actuary to conduct a study to determine how much must be appropriated to the retirement system to pay the benefits granted by the legislation. An actuarial study costs approximately \$5,000 per fiscal bill. The House and Senate Retirement Committees meet individually during the interim to determine which bills from their respective chambers should move forward for an actuarial study. If a fiscal bill does not receive approval for an actuarial study, it cannot move forward in the legislative process.

For all fiscal bills that receive approval for an actuarial study, by November 1, the State Auditor provides the respective chairpersons with copies of each bill's actuarial study showing the cost amortized over 20 years. A copy of the study is commonly stapled to the back of the retirement bill and travels with the bill through the remainder of the legislative process. After the actuarial study is completed, the bill may be amended only in such a manner as to reduce the cost of the bill. Any substitute or amendment must be accompanied by a certificate from the State Auditor certifying whether the substitute or amendment changes the cost reflected in the actuarial study. If there is an increase in costs, a new actuarial study is required.

It is the responsibility of the sponsor of any fiscal retirement bill to ensure that a funding provision appears in the Appropriations Act for the bill. Upon final passage of the Appropriations Act, the State Auditor provides a certificate stating whether funding provisions exist for each fiscal retirement bill enacted. Any bill that does not have a funding provision is automatically repealed as required by the Standards Law.

The Status of Georgia's Pension Funds

Over the past few years, public pension funds have received a great deal of attention in the media because many states will not be able to cover the costs of the future payment of benefits to their retirees. However, there is good news in Georgia regarding our largest state retirement systems known as the Employees' Retirement System (ERS) and the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) for a number of reasons. They each have an actuarial rate of over 80 percent. When looking at the health of pension systems, most experts agree that an actuarial baseline for a well-funded system is 80 percent. As of June 30, 2010, ERS had an actuarial funding ratio of over 80.1 percent and TRS had an actuarial funding ratio of 85.7 percent.

Additionally, in the context of other states' changes to public-employee pension obligations, Georgia was on the forefront when it shifted new state employees to a defined contribution, 401(k)-style plan in 2009. Our early shift will allow the state to realize the savings earlier than states that are just now making changes, such as California, whose governor unveiled a mandatory hybrid benefit composed of a 401(k)-type plan, Social Security, and a smaller guaranteed pension in late October.

According to the Pew Center on the States, which monitors pension systems nationwide, Georgia is a consistently solid performer. The chart below shows how we compare to other southern states.

Plan Name	Actuarial Funding Ratio	Actuarial Assets	Actuarial Liabilities	Unfunded Liability (Surplus)	Actuarial Valuation Date	For FY ending
Alabama Teachers	71.1	\$20,132,779	\$28,299,523	\$8,166,744	9/30/2010	9/30/2010
Alabama ERS	68.2	\$9,739,331	\$14,248,119	\$4,544,788	9/30/2010	9/30/2010
Arkansas Teachers	73.8	\$10,845,000	\$14,697,000	\$3,852,000	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Arkansas PERS	74.1	\$5,409,000	\$7,304,000	\$1,525,000	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Florida RS	86.6	\$120,929,666	\$139,652,377	\$18,722,711	7/1/2010	6/30/2010
Georgia ERS	80.1	\$13,046,193	\$16,295,352	\$3,249,159	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Georgia Teachers	85.7	\$54,529,416	\$63,592,037	\$9,062,621	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Kentucky ERS	40.3	\$4,712,495	\$11,692,944	\$6,980,449	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Kentucky Teachers	61.0	\$14,851,330	\$24,344,316	\$8,514,445	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Louisiana Teachers	54.4	\$12,868,484	\$23,674,842	\$10,806,358	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Louisiana SERS	57.7	\$8,512,403	\$14,764,015	\$6,251,612	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Missouri Teachers	77.7	\$28,931,331	\$37,233,602	\$8,302,271	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Missouri State Employees	87.3	\$8,960,391	\$10,264,071	\$1,303,680	7/1/2010	6/30/2010
Mississippi PERS	64.2	\$20,143,426	\$31,399,988	\$11,256,562	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
South Carolina RS	67.8	\$25,400,331	\$38,774,029	\$13,373,698	6/30/2010	6/30/2010
Texas Teachers	82.9	\$111,293,000	\$134,191,000	\$22,898,000	8/31/2010	8/31/2010
Texas ERS	85.4	\$23,628,570	\$27,668,880	\$4,040,310	8/31/2010	8/31/2010

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Strategic Initiative Joint Study Commission

Currently, there are eight states, including North Carolina and Alabama that have an official strategic plan focusing on Science and Technology and Innovation. Some of the common goals each of these plans includes are:

- Increasing communications and technology transfer among the state's universities, private sector and government agencies;
- Creating a better and more marketable image of the state;
- Providing incentives to the private sector to get them involved in collaborative ventures in the state; and
- Improving enrollment and retention of students in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Georgia hopes to follow these states by creating its own strategic initiative in an effort to better utilize our assets and to continue to cultivate and facilitate the growth of our science and technology sectors. For this purpose, the Georgia Science and Technology Strategic Initiative Joint Study Commission (Commission) was created in 2011 under Senate Resolution 68. The Commission has four stated tasks:

- Inventory Georgia's existing science and technology assets to determine our current strengths and weaknesses;
- Review state and national policies to determine the best practices and lessons learned regarding public policy that encourages advancement of the science and technology sectors;
- Conduct meetings around the state to receive input from science and technology stakeholders with the goal of identifying barriers to growth and progress; and
- Develop recommendations for a strategic plan for science and technology in Georgia with stipulations for what the Commission recommends should be excluded from a plan.

The Commission's report, which is due to the Governor and Legislature no later than January 9, 2012, will include recommendations for any necessary legislation to implement a strategic science and technology plan for Georgia.

Bridging the Digital Divide in Aging Communities

The Georgia Senate Study Committee on Bridging the Digital Divide in Aging Communities was created in 2011 under Senate Resolution 473. The Committee is directed to study the conditions, needs, issues and problems associated with ensuring Georgia's aging population is able to have the appropriate level of training to understand and be able to utilize the modern technology necessary for living in the 21st century.

The Committee will determine the needs of the state's aging population and how to best serve those needs by studying possible solutions utilized by other states and experts in the field. The Committee's findings and recommendations for proposed legislation are due to the Governor and Legislature no later than December 31, 2011.

SPECIAL JUDICIARY

Expungement of Criminal Records

Two pending bills deal with the expungement of criminal records, Senate Bill 118 and Senate Bill 144. Senate Bill 118 changes some of the timing requirements dealing with expungement and grants expungement eligibility to new categories of defendants. Senate Bill 144 likewise grants expungement eligibility to new categories of person's with criminal records.

Driving Under the Influence

There are two pending bills that make it a felony offense to drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs with a child in the car, Senate Bill 13 and Senate Bill 44. Senate Bill 13 changes the definition of "child" to anyone under 16 and makes the crime a felony from the second offense. SB 44 also changes the definition of "child" to anyone under 16 and makes the crime a felony if the child passenger was seriously injured.

TRANSPORTATION

Transit Governance

The Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan indicates that Georgia's job growth and economic prosperity are linked to the state's ability to significantly increase the number of reliable commute options to major job centers at the lowest costs possible. One of the most effective ways of accomplishing these outcomes is the provision and management of efficient regional transit services that meet the travel demands of all Georgians. The Transit Governance Study Commission (Commission), created by House Bill 277 in the 2010 Legislative Session, issued its final report in August of this year, and found that commuters, transit stakeholders and the general public would benefit from oversight, streamlining, and coordination of the individual transit systems in the metro Atlanta region. The Commission also recommended that the state be charged with oversight, which should include meaningful participation by local government officials' and their representatives.

In response to the Commission's findings, Governor Deal signed an Executive Order in September which formed a Transit Governance Task Force (Task Force), co-chaired by Senator Jeff Mullis and Representative Donna Sheldon. The Task Force is charged with using the findings of the Commission as a basis for developing a legislative proposal to be introduced in the 2012 Legislative Session.

Senate Bill 283, which was introduced, but did not pass during the 2011 Legislative Session, addresses this issue by creating the Georgia Department of Public Transit to develop and implement a business plan for combining all regional public transit entities in the state into a streamlined and integrated state-wide public transit system.

VETERANS, MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

Senate Bill 219 was introduced last session to establish an Interstate Compact (Compact) to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families due to the frequent moves and redeployments of their parents. It is designed to bring states together to allow for the uniform treatment of military children who transfer between school districts and states. While states may already support military children, individual states can only control what happens inside their state borders. This Compact allows for cooperation and uniform treatment in all member states. The legislation is currently pending in the House Education Committee.