



Senior Issues Newsletter

Georgia General Assembly Calendar

The House and Senate reconvene for the 19th Legislative Day on Wednesday February 15th, 2012 at 1:00 pm and 10 am respectively.

The General Assembly has published a change to its calendar through cross over day (Day 30). We have updated the calendar below:

Feb 15 th – Day 19	Feb 24 th – Day 25
Feb 16 th – Day 20	Feb 27 th – Day 26
Feb 17 th – Day 21	Feb 28 th – Day 27
Feb 21 st – Day 22	Feb 29 th – Day 28
Feb 22 nd – Day 23	March 5 th – Day 29
Feb 23 rd – Day 24	March 7 th – Crossover Day

Check <http://www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx> for times (typically 10:00am). The schedule is always subject to change.

Budget Updates

Governor Deal's Amended FY2012 Budget and FY2013 Budget proposals were reviewed in the Jan 16th senior issues newsletter. These reports can be found in their entirety by selecting "Governor's Budget Report – AFY 2012" and "Governor's Budget Report – FY 2013" at <http://opb.georgia.gov>.

The **House voted and passed the Governor's recommended Budget for Amended FY 2012 with some changes but maintained the restoration of proposed 2% cuts to aging services.** We were thrilled to see that the House Budget for Amended FY 2012 added back the 2% cut recommended to the operating budget for the Georgia Council on Aging. We are awaiting movement on the budget bill in the Senate as the stated goal of both chambers was to act quickly so that state departments know their allocations and can make necessary adjustments as early in the year as possible. The **House Appropriations subcommittees** have begun to hold budget hearings on the FY 2013 Budget, with the Health Subcommittee meeting last week to hear the Department of Community Health and Department of Public Health budgets.

You can track legislative changes to the budget at the following website: http://www1.legis.ga.gov/legis/2011_12/house/budget/budgetDocs.htm. In the drop-down boxes, select "FY 2012" or "FY 2013" and the budget version you wish to see. These documents allow the reader to track original appropriations, the Governor's recommendations, the House decisions, the Senate recommendations, as well as the recommendations which will be agreed upon in conference as the budget makes its way through the process.

We still have work to do to ensure funding for aging services stays in the budget so please speak to your legislators through calls, visits, letters, and e-mail. Please encourage them to keep Governor Deal's recommended aging services funding in the FY2012 Amended and FY2013 Budgets.

Make Your Voice Heard!

Come to the Capitol. Join other aging advocates to support funding and services for older adults:

Senior Week at the Capitol February 21st -23rd
Alzheimer's Awareness Day at the Capitol February 13th
Disabilities Day at the Capitol February 16th
AARP Weeks at the Capitol February 21st – March 8th



Call Eric Ryan in the GCOA office to register for Senior Week at 404-657-5344.

Come anytime! Make an appointment to meet with your legislators, view the General Assembly in session from the Gallery, and watch your government at work. If you need assistance from advocates who are at the Capitol daily, call the Georgia Council on Aging office at 404-657-5343 or meet us on the third floor of the Capitol in front of the double elevators.

CO-AGE Legislative Priority Updates

Regional Transportation Governance

CO-AGE's advocacy priority for this legislation is to create regional transportation governance by requiring that regional transportation authorities be an option throughout the state to allow for local coordination and control that also includes the elderly and other transportation disadvantaged groups as a focus of the coordination. The Governor's Transit Task Force presented draft legislation to the Governor's office last week. You may recall, in December 2011, aging advocates presented their input on behalf of CO-AGE to the Governor's Transit Task Force at a public hearing.

The Governor's Transit Task Force draft legislation creates a statewide oversight agency and focuses on creating a transportation authority for metro Atlanta. The draft legislation does not include an option for locally controlled regional transportation authorities throughout the state. There is also no language focusing on the transportation needs of the elderly and transportation disadvantaged such as the disabled. We will be working with CO-AGE and transportation partners at the Capitol on a response as it is possible that legislation may be dropped as early as this week. Be on the look out for an **ALERT** to contact your legislator regarding this important piece of legislation.

Department of Aging

Due to budget constraints on study committees in the House, we will need to move forward with a Senate Resolution to establish a study committee on the Department of Aging. Senator Renee Unterman, Chair of Health and Human Services, has agreed to sponsor a Senate Resolution. The House Human Relations and Aging Chair Tommy Benton is still in favor of this initiative as well.

DCH Releases Navigant Medicaid Redesign Report

The Department of Community Health contracted last year with the Navigant consulting firm to reassess how Medicaid and PeachCare services are organized and to examine approaches other states use. Many consumers and providers offered observations and recommendations through focus groups and surveys. Navigant has now released its study recommending options for DCH to consider.

DCH is convening invited task forces to provide input on the Department's response to the report and is soliciting feedback on the Strategy Report either through their Feedback Tool or by submitting a brief comment or question to MyOpinion@dch.ga.gov. The deadline for submitting feedback or questions is February 29, 2012, at 5 p.m. (ET). To view the executive summary and full 300-page report: http://dch.georgia.gov/00/channel_title/0,2094,31446711_175210527,00.html

DCH's current published schedule for the redesign is to finalize recommendations by April 2012, and to post procurement notices starting in July for implementation in 2014.

Georgia Budget and Policy Institute Released Its Annual Budget Analyses

You may access the reports at www.gbpi.org:

Analysis of the Division of Aging Services budget for FY 2009 - FY 2013 shows a 9.7% overall loss in funding. Over \$8 million has been lost for Elder Community Living Services while Elder Abuse Prevention and Investigation lost \$365,000+, Elder Support Services lost \$322,000+, and the Georgia Council on Aging lost \$51,000+ or over 20% of its funding. The Report describes the Recent Trend as:

“Reduced state funds to the minimum required to receive federal funds: State funds remain at the minimum required level to receive federal funds under the Older Americans Act. The consequence of noncompliance could be an estimated \$6 loss in federal funds for every \$1 of unmet state and local required funds – a risk Georgia should continue to avoid.”

Federal Legislation of Interest to Older Adults

Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act: Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) has introduced a bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). Sen. Sanders is chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging, which is tasked with leading the OAA reauthorization. Over coming months, his proposals will be merged with those in other bills to form a comprehensive package for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee to mark up and report to the full Senate for consideration. The legislation calls for sizable increases in four key areas of the OAA:

- Supportive services
- Senior nutrition
- Health promotion and disease prevention
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)

To review a summary of the proposed Amendments to the OAA, please go to <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/OAA-fact-sheet.pdf>

Georgia Legislation of Interest to Older Adults

HB 337: Sheriffs' Retirement Fund of Georgia; divorced member option to continue coverage; provisions (Representatives Greene - 149th, Maxwell - 17th, and Benton - 31st) House passed; Senate Assigned: Retirement

HB 683: Garnishment proceedings; filing of certain answers may be done by authorized officers or employees; provisions (Representatives Willard - 49th, Smith - 131st, Welch - 110th, McCall - 30th, and Dickey - 136) House Date Signed by the Governor Feb 7, 2012

HR 1151: Resolution creating the Joint Human Trafficking Study Commission; (Representatives Buzz Brockway - 101st, Edward Lindsey - 54th, Donna Sheldon - 105th, Sam Teasley - 38th, Stephen Allison - 8th, and B.J. Pak - 102nd). Assigned: Senate Health and Human Services

HR 1176: Resolution to create House Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities Oversight Committee; create (E. Culver "Rusty" Kidd - 141st, Buddy Harden - 147th, Penny Houston - 170th, and Katie Dempsey - 13th). Assigned: House Health and Human Services

HB 787: Behavioral Health, Department of; changes to allocation rates for providers must have legislative ratification; provide (Representatives Ed Setzler - 35th, Katie Dempsey - 13th, and Penny Houston - 170th). Assigned: House Appropriations

HB 796: Georgia General Assembly 2011 Session; House Bill 87; repeal provisions (Representatives Pedro "Pete" Marin - 96th, Lynmore James - 135th, Stacey Abrams - 84th, Carol Fullerton - 151st, Glenn Backer - 78th, and Simone Bell - 58th). Assigned: House Judiciary Non-Civil

HB 798: Ethics in Government Act; substantially revise (Representatives Tommy Smith - 168th and Mary Margaret Oliver - 83rd) to rename the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission as the State Ethics Commission; to change certain provisions relating to campaign contributions; to change provisions relating to the powers and duties - commission; to change provisions relating to public officials' conduct and lobbyist disclosure; to change provisions relating to postemployment restrictions on public officers; to amend Title 45 - Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to public officers and employees, so as to conform certain cross-references. Assigned: House Rules.

HB 801: Georgia Health Insurance Marketplace Authority; establish (Representatives Pat Gardner - 57th, James Beverly - 139th, Elly Dobbs - 53rd, Calvin Smyre - 132nd, Debbie Buckner - 130th, and Stacey Abrams - 84th). Assigned: House Insurance.

HB 831: Human Services, Department of; movement of Rehabilitation Services from Dept. of Labor to Dept. of Human Services (Representatives Tom McCall - 30th, Doug Collins - 27th, Matt Hatchet - 143rd, and Amy Carter - 175th). Passed House Human Relations and Aging Committee and Assigned: House Rules

SR 710: Senior Week; recognize Feb. 20- Feb. 26, 2012 (Senators Renee Unterman - 45th, John Crosby - 13th, and George Hooks - 14th). Senate Adopted

SB 117: Levy/Sale of Property; increase the amount of certain exemptions (Senators Stone - 23rd, Davis - 22nd, Ligon, Jr. - 3rd, Seabaugh - 28th, Carter - 42nd and others) Senate passed; House Assigned: Judiciary

SB 292: Social Responsibility and Accountability Act; Drug testing for Medicaid and TANF applicants; require (Senators Albers - 56th, Rogers - 21st, Gooch - 51st and others) Adult applicants would have to pay for a test of bodily fluids to detect illegal drugs and be reimbursed from their first month's benefits if the test is negative and they qualify otherwise. Assigned to Healthcare Delivery Subcommittee of Senate Health and Human Services, and was read in the subcommittee meeting. Senator Albers stated that he is working on a substitute bill that will exempt individuals with mental and physical disabilities as well as those Medicaid applicants who are nursing home bound. Advocates have also requested an exemption for individuals who are nursing home eligible but living at home or in the community receiving benefits under the Medicaid waiver programs.

Research shows people receiving public benefits are not much more likely to use drugs than the general population. Moreover, "suspicionless" testing by government agencies without adequate justification has been found unconstitutional. Note: several other bills in the House Judiciary Committee would require drug testing for public benefits, and one bill requires it for unemployment compensation.

SB 312: Public Assistance; applicants for food stamps and temporary assistance; require personal growth activities (Senators William Ligon, Jr. - 3rd, John Albers - 56th, Buddy Carter - 1st, and Tommie Williams - 19th). Assigned: Senate Health and Human Services. This bill was also heard by the Healthcare Delivery Subcommittee on 2/5. A substitute bill that exempts any applicant age 59 and over passed out of the subcommittee and has been assigned to Senate Health and Human Services. At this time the committee is waiting on a fiscal note for the substitute bill before it will be read in committee.

SB 346: State Board of Pharmacy; prescription drugs by mail/other common carriers; provisions (Senators Don Balfour - 9th, Buddy Carter - 1st, and Steve Henson - 41st). Assigned: Senate Health and Human Services.

SB 349: Taxes; provide for income tax credit for certain veterans; conditions; limitations (Senators Stoner - 6th, Harbison - 15th, Jackson - 2nd, Jones - 10th, Sims - 12th and others) Assigned: Senate Finance

SB 353: Civil Practice; default judgment; require plaintiff to provide notice to the defaulting party (Senators Jones - 10th, Jackson - 2nd, Davenport - 44th and Stoner - 6th) Assigned: Senate Judiciary

SB 373: Counties; provide authority; operate vehicle for hire equipped to transport passengers in wheelchair throughout the State (Senators Mullis - 53rd, Jackson - 24th, Unterman - 45th, Hill - 32nd, Stoner - 6th, and Seay - 34th) Assigned: Senate Transportation

**Watch the Georgia Council on Aging Website
for alerts and regular legislative updates.**

Department of Human Services Board: February 15th cancelled

The next meeting is scheduled for March 21, 2012.

Meets 3rd Wednesday of each month at 1:00 pm on the 29th Floor at 2 Peachtree

Department of Community Health Board: March 8, 2012

Meets 2nd Thursday of each month at 10:30 am on the 5th Floor at 2 Peachtree

Learn about Legislation that Impacts Seniors

This newsletter will inform you each week the Legislature is in Session.

Ask about specific legislation: Georgia Council on Aging (404)657-5343.

Follow legislation or learn about the General Assembly: www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx

Get copies of bills: House Clerk's office (404)656-5015

Watch the General Assembly and some Committee Hearings at <http://www.gpb.org/lawmakers>.
Watch GPTV's "Lawmakers" each evening at 7:00 pm to see the events of the day at the Capitol.