



General Assembly Schedule

Spring Break April 2-11
Legislative Day 34 Monday, April 12
The last six legislative days have not been scheduled.

Budget Update

Instead of considering other sources of revenue to maintain these important programs, cuts continue to be the main approach in balancing the budget.

The House was prepared to vote out the FY 2011 budget last week but the process was stalled when the Senate merged a capital gains tax cut, known as the JOBS bill, with the hospital tax bill. The capital gains tax cut would take from the state treasury an estimated \$300 million to \$350 million a year in revenues while the hospital tax would raise \$170 million to help plug holes in the budget. The House learned about the Senate's plan on March 30th when the Senate Finance Committee added the JOBS bill, HB 1023, to the hospital tax bill, HB 307. House leaders canceled all meetings of Appropriations subcommittees scheduled for the week and further delayed any hopes of getting the budget out before they went into spring break. On Thursday, April 1st, after much debate, the Senate passed the hospital tax with a few amendments, and the next day the Speaker announced that the House will not approve the amendments because they are not germane and will send the bill back to the Senate. The House set up meetings for the Subcommittees of Appropriations to return on April 12th and vote out the FY 2011 budget.

Advocates were disappointed neither the FY 2010 Amended nor the FY 2011 budgets were voted out of the House. Georgia's seniors have endured many devastating cuts over the past year. During last year's legislative session, vital programs were completely eliminated – programs like Life Long Planning which provided thousands of counseling sessions and outreach presentations, the GeorgiaCares Prescription Assistance program which counseled thousands of individuals and saved them over \$8 million, Public Guardianship, Wellness and Nutrition and Wellness: Take Charge of Your Health which served hundreds of thousands of consumers in group activities.

This year, contracts for the Center for Visually Impaired (the only such provider in Georgia), Navigator Training and Kinship Care Programs which help grandparents raising grandchildren, the Senior Legal Hotline which provides free legal advice to thousands of low income seniors, and Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC) have been eliminated while the non-Medicaid HCBS respite services which provide such programs as in-home respite, out-of-home respite, Adult Day Care, Adult Day Health Care, Mobile Adult Day Care, Homemaker, and Personal Care services are being reduced, causing caregivers to have a heavier burden in taking care of seniors in their homes. These programs are the ones the Governor, legislature and advocates worked hard to implement over the past ten years.

As a result of the Governor's revised revenue estimates for the FY 2011 budget, another 3% across-the-board reduction was ordered for all Departments. Senior programs are once again slated for cuts like the elimination of the Alzheimer's Respite program (approximately 20,500 hours of client service); a deep cut to Adult Protective Services program which protects disabled adults and elder from abuse, neglect and exploitation; the reduction of 34,200 one-way trips for seniors who desperately need transportation; and elimination of the Money Follows the Person program which helps seniors who desire to leave nursing homes and live in the community.

After years of cuts in human services and elsewhere, it is clear Georgia has a revenue crisis, not a spending crisis. Other states are looking at both sides of the ledger. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 33 states enacted more than 100 revenue raising measures last year. Most other southern states have taken steps to increase state revenues. We urge the Legislature to do the responsible thing and put additional revenue options on the table and have a more sensible balanced budget. Georgia's seniors cannot continue to lose vital supports.

Speak to Your legislators



Over the next week while legislators are at home, please encourage them to support revenue enhancements, to prevent budget cuts, and to **Be There for Seniors** by restoring the following in the FY2011 budget:

- ✚ \$1,376,718 (almost 135,000 respite hours) for non-Medicaid HCBS respite services
- ✚ Support the Governor's proposal to replace state funds of \$611,520 in the Adult Protective Services (APS) and \$1,000,000 in the Long Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) programs with the Nursing Home Civil Monetary Penalty (CMP) funds.

CO-AGE Legislation Update

SB 22: Human Services Transportation Bill passed out of the House Railway and Transit Subcommittee of Transportation by unanimous vote on March 31st and now moves to the full Transportation Committee. It establishes the Georgia Coordinating Council for Rural and Human Services Transportation to encourage efficient transportation service delivery in rural areas and to coordinate human service transportation services in both the rural and urban areas. Senator Doug Stoner, sponsor, noted that the idea came from a Joint Transportation Funding Study Committee a few years ago and provides coordination between the many state agencies providing human services transportation. He presented subcommittee members with a diagram showing the difficulty of state operations regarding federal transportation dollars and said there should be a better way to leverage funding. Aging, disability, and United Way advocates spoke in favor of the bill. Representative Donna Sheldon, Vice-Chair of the House Transportation Committee will carry the bill on the House floor.

HB 37 (Bruce 64th) Enacts the "Parent Protection Act" which allows employees to take up to 24 hours of unpaid leave per year for going to medical appointments or taking a parent, child or spouse to routine medical appointments. **Note:** *Advocates worked behind the scenes to get the bill moving but all efforts have failed.*

HB 354 (Walker 107th) relates to social services, so as to transfer the functions, duties, and employees of the Division of Aging Services of the Department of Human Services. H. Human Relations and Aging. No Movement for bill.

New Bills of Interest dropped during the past week may have an impact on seniors:

HB 1473 (Ralston 7th) relates to ethics in government, so as to substantially revise the "Ethics in Government Act". H. Ethics.

SR 1391 (Buckner 44th) A resolution recognizing and commending Ms. Sudha Reddy for her dedicated support of women and families. Read and adopted.

These Bills had Movement within the Past Week

SB 57 (Hamrick 30th) relates to the "Georgia Fair Lending Act,"; to amend Code Section 15-6-77, relating to fees to be collected by clerks of the superior courts, so as to provide for fees for filing documents pertaining to a deed under power more than 30 days following the exercise of a power of sale in a mortgage, security deed, or other lien contract. Passed H. July 4/1 after all consumer protections were stripped out.

SB 206 (Goggans 7th) relates to management of budgetary and financial affairs by the Office of Planning and Budget, so as to require tax expenditure reviews as a part of the budget report. Passed House 4/1/10.

HB 128 (Benton 31st) relates to disabled veterans and blind persons engaging in peddling, operating businesses, or practicing professions, to provide that a certificate of eligibility for an exemption from occupation taxes, administrative fees, and regulatory fees be valid for a period of ten years. Passed Senate 3/31/10.

HB 307 (Cole 125th) relates to the care and protection of indigent and elderly patients, so as to provide for a fee to be imposed on hospitals to be used to obtain federal financial participation for medical assistance payments under Medicaid. Passed Senate 4/1/10.

HB 916 (Maxwell 17th) relates to retirement ages, application and eligibility for a retirement allowance, suspension of retirement allowance upon reemployment, and health benefits. Passed Senate 4/1/10.

HB 1023 (Graves 12th) a bill entitled an Act to enact the Jobs, Opportunity, and Business Success Act of 2010; that provides for a period of time, employers who hire persons receiving employment security benefits shall be entitled to a credit against employer contributions; to amend Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, the "Georgia Public Revenue Code," to provide that a portion of net long-term capital gains be excluded from state taxable income of corporations and individuals. Passed Senate 4/1/10.

Information about specific legislation: Georgia Council on Aging (404) 657-5343. Bills and information about the General Assembly: www.state.ga.us/services/leg. Copies of bills: House Clerk's office (404) 656-5015.