**GPHA Legislative Report**

Week Ending February 13, 2015

By Scott Maxwell

**Tobacco Tax Fiscal Note**

A fiscal note requested by Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome) has revealed significant revenues from a $1.23 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax. The projection, prepared by the Georgia State University Fiscal Research Center, anticipates additional state income of $561 million to $585 million. That total includes an increase in tax on smokeless and loose tobacco as well.

A tobacco tax coalition at the Capitol, **of which GPHA is a part**, has been planning an educational campaign based on an increase of $1.23 per pack. The “Easy as 1, 2, 3” campaign is geared to a state assessment on cigarettes that would total $1.60. The national average is $1.54.

With the issuance of the fiscal note, we should see a bill dropped soon. For complicated reasons, it may not include a tax on other tobacco products. It remains to be seen if the bill addresses electronic nicotine devices. In short, the simpler a bill, the better its chance of success. Given the opposition to taxes of any kind, a cigarette tax will need every chance of success it can generate. There is greater acceptance of a tobacco tax in the Senate, however, measures that raise revenues must be introduced in the House according to the state constitution. Stay tuned.

**DCH Board Highlights**

The DCH Board held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 12. Of interest . . .

Comm. Clyde Reese told the Board that the big Medicaid CMO RFP had been released this week. The plan is to evaluate the responses and make a decision on which companies will provide coverage for more than one million Georgians by July 1. That will give the selected CMO's (up to four companies) and the state one year to prepare for the new contracts to go live on July 1, 2016.

Reese said a second contract for care-coordination of the aged, blind and disabled (ABD) population would also be released later this year. The winning company (only one) would manage the care of the ABD population by ensuring the use of medical homes and applying case management techniques to save money and improve outcomes. This "intermediary step" would require an initial investment of about $12.1 million in the FY 2016 budget, but is expected to realize savings of $18 million in FY 2017.

Reese worried aloud about the high cost of new drugs to treat Hepatitis C. There are approximately 6,000 Medicaid recipients with Hep C and 800 eligible for the new drugs, which can cost $118,000 for a full treatment. The drugs are expensive; however, they are proving they can cure the disease completely, saving dollars over the long term.

Reese also announced a forthcoming study of the cost, benefits and services provided by the State Health Benefit Plan. The General Assembly requested that the Department compare the SHBP to the Board of Regents' health plan and to those of other states. That report is due by July 1.

The Commissioner reported on the progress of the Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee, saying it will soon issue recommendations to the Governor. Several pilot projects can be expected. Among the proposed cures for rural hospital ailments are programs involving:

--Telemedicine

--Increased flexibility for Emergency Management Services

--Regional tertiary hospitals helping struggling rural hospitals

Charles Owens, the current director of the Rural Health Office, will be resigning effect August 1 to take a teaching slot at Georgia Southern University. He will be replaced by Patsy Whaley.

The Board also approved initial adoption for a Revision of Licensure Rules for Hospice Care. S Among the rule changes – hospice care for private pay could be extended to those who are expected to live as long as two years. Medicaid would NOT cover the extended time. There are various parameters, so see the link below for details.

<http://dch.georgia.gov/sites/dch.georgia.gov/files/Hospice-Rules-Initial-Adoption-Synopsis-Redline-020515fin.pdf>

Several bills of interest to the public health community saw action this past week . . .

[SB 101, Control of Soil Erosion and Sedimentation](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/101) (Sen. Ben Watson-R)

To provide for a buffer against coastal marshlands within which certain land-disturbing activities are prohibited. **Status:** Referred to Natural Resources & Environment Cmte

[SB 51, Substitution of Drugs and Biological Products by Pharmacists](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/51) (Sen. Dean Burke-R)

Relating to pharmacists and pharmacies, so as to provide for substitutions of interchangeable biological products and drugs; to provide for requirements and limitations. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte, Passed Pharmacology Subcmte by Cmte Substitute, Referred to Full Cmte, Passed Cmte by Cmte Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte

[HB 15, Regulation of Fireworks](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/15) (Scot Turner-R)

Relating to regulation of fireworks, so as to allow for the sale of consumer fireworks not prohibited under federal law, relating to definitions relative to crimes related to explosives and other devices, relating to general provisions applicable to counties and municipal corporations, so as to allow for local regulation of fireworks. **Status:** Referred to Regulated Industries Cmte, On Regulations Subcmte Meeting Agenda on Tuesday

[HB 110, Sale of Consumer Fireworks](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/110) (Rep. Jay Roberts-R)

Relating to regulation of fireworks, so as to provide for the sale of consumer fireworks; to provide for definitions; relating to specific, business, and occupation taxes, so as to provide for an excise tax on the sale of consumer fireworks. **Status:** Referred to Regulated Industries Cmte, On Regulations Subcmte Meeting Agenda on Tuesday

[HB 119, AIDS Disclosure](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/119) (Rep. Albert Reeves-R)

Relating to disclosure of AIDS confidential information, so as to change provisions relating to disclosure of such information under certain circumstances. **Status:** Referred to Judiciary Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte

[HB 198, Suicide Prevention Training for Certified School Personnel](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/198) (Rep. Katie Dempsey-R)

Relating to student health in elementary and secondary education, so as to require annual suicide prevention education training for certificated school system personnel. **Status:** Referred to Education Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte

[HB 219, Exempt Certain Private Swimming Pools from Inspection and Licensing](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/219) (Rep. Jeff Jones-R)

Relating to health and public swimming pools, so as to exempt certain privately owned swimming pools from inspection and licensing requirements; to authorize inspection requests to board of health by residents or owners. **Status:** Referred to State Planning & Community Affairs Cmte

[SB 53, Reauthorization of LPC’s for Certain Acts](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/SB/53) (Sen. Greg Kirk-R)

Revise sunset provision to 2018 for LPC’s to perform certain acts. **Status:** Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte, Tabled in Senate, Taken from Table, Passed Senate, Sent to the House, Referred to Health & Human Services Cmte, On Health Cmte Agenda on Wednesday

[HB 86, Creation of Georgia Adult and Aging Services Agency](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20152016/HB/86) (Rep. Tommy Benton-R)

Relating to services for the aging, so as to provide for the transfer of the Division of Aging Services to the Georgia Adult and Aging Services Agency; to provide for the Georgia Adult and Aging Services Board. **Status:** Referred to Human Relations & Aging Cmte, Passed Cmte with Substitute, Pending Rules Cmte, Passed House by Cmte Substitute, Sent to Senate, Referred to Health Cmte

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