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**Weekly Legislative Report #3**

**Week Ending January 27, 2023**

**State of the State**

Gov. Brian Kemp was welcomed to the House chambers on Wednesday (he may enter only upon invitation), where he delivered the State of the State address to a joint meeting of the House and Senate, reinforced by constitutional officers, justices of the state Supreme and Appeals Courts, and heads of the various state agencies. The gallery was packed with spouses and other dignitaries. The Governor delivered a speech strong on law-and-order language and reiterated many of the priorities contained in his previously released budget. Kemp also delved into his positions on healthcare and economic development. Click for the [printed speech](https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2023-01-25/governor-brian-p-kemps-2023-state-state-address), or the [video is here](https://www.gpb.org/events/news/2023/01/25/governor-kemps-state-of-the-state-address).

**Senate Republicans Release Priorities**

On the day following Kemp’s address, Senate Republicans stepped into the limelight, holding a press conference to promote their legislative priorities. Majority Leader Steve Gooch of Dahlonega presented the priorities, backed by the members of his caucus.

1. Bolstering Opportunity and Innovation in the Georgia Economy

* Conduct a prudent income tax reform and tax credit review
* Support and implementation of new taxpayer and homeowner relief initiatives
* Lay the groundwork for the continued electrification of transportation

1. Cultivating an Educated Workforce

* Senate-led effort to improve literacy rates in line with graduation rates
* Implementation of learning loss grants
* Review degree requirements for state employment

1. Creating Safer Communities

* Serious penalties for the recruitment of minors for gang activity
* Aggressive bail bond reform for violent offenses
* Enhanced school safety legislation

1. Supporting the Health and Well-Being of Families and At-Risk Youth

* Expansion of telehealth services for rural and underserved communities
* Increased support for foster families and children
* Extended benefits for income-eligible pregnant women

**Majority Caucus Secretary Replaced**

The Senate majority also acted to replace former Senator Dean Burke as Caucus Secretary. Burke, an MD and hospital Chief Medical Officer from Bainbridge, resigned from the Senate to become Chief Medical Officer for the state’s Medicaid program. Sen. Larry Walker (R-Perry) was chosen to fill the vacant position.

**Crime Stoppers Legislation**

Last week saw a bi-partisan emphasis on deterring crime. Here are five bills in that category.

* [SB 7](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63555) was introduced by Sen. Brandon Beach (R-Alpharetta) and seeks to impose minimum sentences for crimes committed with a knife or firearm. The Lt. Governor assigned the measure to the Judiciary Cmte.
* Sen. Emanuel Jones, a Decatur Democrat, has introduced [SB 10](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63580), that would stiffen penalties for individuals who knowingly attend or facilitate a street drag race. Assigned to the Public Safety Cmte., this bill found favor early with a long list of bi-partisan co-sponsors.
* [SB 11](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63584), introduced by Chairman John Albers (R-Roswell), has already passed out of the Public Safety Cmte. It would endow the GBI with “concurrent jurisdiction in cases involving the violation of state laws concerning domestic, cyber, biological, chemical, and nuclear terrorism.”
* The “Protecting Victims and Dismantling Georgia Street Gangs Act,” [SB 12](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63591) by Sen. John Albers (R-Roswell), would impose minimum prison sentences for convicted felons found to be in possession of a firearm. Referred to the Judiciary Cmte.
* An anesthesiologist by profession, Johns Creek Democrat Rep. Michelle Au has introduced legislation, [HB 46](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63549), that would extend enhanced punishment for aggravated assault and battery committed upon EMERGENCY health workers to ALL healthcare workers in a hospital or healthcare facility. Her bill is another one with bi-partisan co-sponsors, including Public Health Cmte. Chair Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta) and Rep. Mark Newton, (R-Augusta), an emergency physician and owner of urgent care centers. The bill was assigned to the Judiciary Non-Civil Committee.

**Insurance Coverage for Biomarkers**

Rep. Sharon Cooper has dropped in the hopper [HB 85](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63669), a bill that would require insurance companies to provide coverage of biomarker testing. “Biomarker” is defined as “a characteristic that is objectively measured and evaluated as an indicator of normal biological or pathogenic processes, or pharmacologic responses to therapeutic intervention.” Included would be medical terms such as gene mutations, protein expressions, gene-drug interactions for medications, etc. The bill will be first-read and assigned to committee next week.

**Mining Permits Swamped**

Rep. Darlene Taylor (R-Thomasville) introduced [HB 71](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63631), a bill that would restrict future mining operations on the Trail Ridge area bordering the Okefenokee Swamp. The bill prohibits the renewal of mining permits after July 1, 2023. The legislation will not impact the current permit application by an Alabama company seeking to mine titanium and zirconium. It has been assigned to the Natural Resources and Environment Committee.

**Emergency Medical Services Control**

Until you’ve had to wait a long period of time for an ambulance, you don’t really concern yourself with who determines which service responds to your geographical area. [SB 16](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63644), John Albers (R-Roswell), is intended to authorize local entities to have a greater say in the process of establishing EMS boundaries and call distributions for the provision of emergency medical services. It’s been referred to the Health and Human Services Cmte.

**Statistic of the Week**

Georgia Labor Commissioner Bruce Thompson said Thursday that the Atlanta, Central Savannah River, Coastal Georgia, Heart of Georgia, Middle Georgia, Northeast Georgia, River Valley, Southern Georgia, Southwest Georgia, and Three Rivers Regional Commissions all recorded a drop in unemployment rate in December.

Currently, the unemployment rate is:

Nationally – 3.5%

Georgia – 3%

Metro Atlanta – 2.5%

**Vacant Seats Draw Special Elections**

It’s not unusual to have a vacant seat here and there during any General Assembly session. However, we’re only three weeks into the session and there are no less than five special elections now scheduled for vacated House and Senate seats:

* Special election runoff for House District 7, Jan. 31 (Speaker David Ralston died.)
* Special election for House District 119, Jan. 31 (Rep.-elect Danny Rampey resigned after being video-taped stealing from elderly residents of his retirement home.)
* Special election for Senate District 11, Jan 31 (Dean Burke resigned to become Chief Medical Officer for Medicaid.)
* Special election for House District 172, Jan 31 (Sam Watson resigned to run for Dean Burke’s Senate seat.)
* Special election for House District 75, Mar. 21 (Mike Glanton resigned last week without publicly stating a reason.)

**Next Week**

The legislature will reconvene on Monday for Legislative Day 9 and meet through Thursday. Thus far, “only” 46 committee meetings are scheduled through the four-day period.

**Tracking List**

Here are the bills we are tracking. New activity is noted in green. Click on the Bill Number to access the current version of the bill.

The 2023 Legislative Session is the first session of the 2023-2024 Term of the Georgia General Assembly. Therefore, bills not passed or defeated during this session will be carried over to the 2024 session. Bills pending in the House or Senate Rules Committees at adjournment sine die of the 2023 session will be recommitted to the committee from whence they came.

**Sections:**

[Aging](#bookmark=id.30j0zll)

[Business](#bookmark=id.3znysh7)

[City & County Governments & Regional Commissions](#bookmark=id.2et92p0)

[Economic Development](#bookmark=id.tyjcwt)

[Elections](#bookmark=id.3dy6vkm)

[Environmental & Natural Resources](#bookmark=id.1t3h5sf)

[Government – General](#bookmark=id.4d34og8)

[Health – General](#bookmark=id.2s8eyo1)

[Hospitals – CON (Certificate of Need)](#bookmark=id.17dp8vu)

[Hospitals](#bookmark=id.3rdcrjn)

[Insurance](#bookmark=id.26in1rg)

[Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities](#bookmark=id.lnxbz9)

[Pharmaceuticals](#bookmark=id.1ksv4uv)

[Public Health](#bookmark=id.44sinio)

[Study Committee](#bookmark=id.2jxsxqh)

[Taxes](#bookmark=id.z337ya)

[Transportation](#bookmark=id.3j2qqm3)

[Workers’ Comp](#bookmark=id.1y810tw)

**Aging**

[HB 91](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63678), Notices to Estate Beneficiaries regarding issuance of letters testamentary (Rep. Will Wade - R)

Relating to wills, trusts, and administration of estates, so as to require personal representatives to send notices to beneficiaries regarding the issuance of letters testamentary or letters of administration; to provide for revocation of such letters as to personal representatives who fail to comply; to provide for trust beneficiary representation. **Status:** House Hopper

**Business**

**City & County Governments and Regional Commissions**

[HB 42,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63545) Ad Valorem Tax; County Tax Commissioner Duties (Rep. Marvin Lim - D)

Relating to ad valorem taxation, so as to revise provisions concerning the duties of county tax commissioners with respect to the assessment and collection of municipal taxes and fees. **Status:** Referred to Ways & Means Cmte

[HB 72,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63633) Revise provisions relating to compensation and benefits for employees and members of governing bodies (Rep. Debra Bazemore - D)

Relating to home rule powers, so as to revise provisions relating to the compensation and benefits for employees and members of governing authorities; to provide for elections and other related matters. **Status:** Referred to Governmental Affairs Cmte

[HR 10,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63511)House Study Committee on Public Water Systems Serving Disadvantaged Communities (Rep. Mandisha Thomas - D)

A Resolution creating the House Study Committee on Public Water Systems Serving Disadvantaged Communities in Georgia. **Status:** Referred to Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Cmte

**Economic Development**

**Elections**

**Environmental & Natural Resources**

[HB 71,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63631) Okefenokee Protection Act (Rep. Darlene Taylor - R)

Relating to surface mining, so as to prohibit the director of the Environmental Protection Division of the Natural Resources Department from issuing, modifying, or renewing any permit or accepting any bond to conduct surface mining operations on Trial Ridge for future permit applications and amendments. **Status:** Referred to Natural Resources and Environment Cmte

**Government -- General**

**Health – General**

[HB 82,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63666) Limit eligibility for rural physician tax credit to physicians (Rep. Mack Jackson - D)

Relating to state income tax credits, so as to limit eligibility for the rural physician tax credit to persons who qualify; to create a new tax credit for rural physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. **Status:** House Hopper

**Hospitals -- CON (Certificate of Need)**

**Hospitals**

[SB 16,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63644) Georgia EMS Reform Act (Sen. John Albers - R)

Relating to emergency medical services, so as to amend provisions relative to the Emergency Medical Systems Communications Program administered by the Department of Public Health; to provide for legislative findings, determinations, and declarations; to authorize local entities to establish boundaries for the provision of emergency medical services. **Status**:Referred to Health and Human Services Cmte

[SB 20,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63655) “Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act” (Sen. Kay Kilpatrick - R)

To create the “Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act” to ensure consumer access to quality healthcare by setting adequacy standards for network plans offered by an insurer. **Status:** Referred to Insurance and Labor

**Insurance**

[HB 63,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63622) Require insurance policies for groups of 20 or more to furnish claims experience (Rep. Noel Williams Jr. - R)

Relating to furnishing claims experience to policyholders, so as to require insurers providing policies for groups of 20 or more to timely furnish claims experience at the request of a group policyholder; to allow such insurers that use other methods to apply to the Commissioner for approval of the use of an alternative form of claims experience reporting. **Status:** Referred to Insurance Cmte

**Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities**

[HB 41,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63544) Emergency Involuntary Treatment for Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Dependency (Rep. Marvin Lim - D)

Relating to mental health, so as to revise procedures regarding emergency involuntary treatment for mental health and alcohol and drug dependency; to require that certain documents become part of the patient’s clinical record. **Status:** Referred to Public Health Cmte

**Pharmaceuticals**

[HB 85,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63669) Require Health Benefit Policy Coverage for Biomarker Testing (Rep. Sharon Cooper - R)

Relating to general provisions regarding insurance, so as to require health policy coverage for biomarker testing if supported by medical and scientific evidence; to provide for request exceptions or appeal adverse determinations. **Status:** House Hopper

**Public Health**

[HB 66,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63625) Grant Program for physicians and nurse practitioners (Rep. Mandeisha Thomas - D)

Relating to the Department of Public Health, so as to provide for the establishment of a grant program to provide funding for liability premiums for physicians and nurse practitioners under certain conditions and to provide for eligibility requirements. **Status:** Referred to Health Cmte

[HB 69,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63628) Georgia Triple Threat SNAP Act (Rep. Mandisha Thomas - D)

Relating to general provisions for public assistance, so as to provide for a pilot program to provide a monthly supplemental benefit of $75 to certain federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients who have been diagnosed with high glucose, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. **Status:** Referred to Public Health Cmte

[HR 10,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63511) House Study Committee on Public Water Systems Serving Disadvantaged Communities (Rep. Mandisha Thomas - D)

Resolution to create the “House Study Committee on Public Water Systems Serving Disadvantaged Communities” to study the drinking water systems in areas serving disadvantaged communities and recommend any action or legislation that the committee deems necessary. **Status:** Referred to Energy, Utilities, and Telecommunications Cmte.

[HR 43](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63643), Costs and Effects of Smoking Joint Study Committee (Rep. Michelle Au - D)

Resolution to create the “Costs and Effects of Smoking Joint Study Committee” to study the impact of smoking on the health of adults and children; to study the effect that smoking has on the state economy; to recommend any action or legislation it deems necessary. **Status:** Referred to Health Cmte

[SB 9,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63567) Kathleen Cominski Act (Sen. Michael Rhett - R)

Relating to emergency response within public offices, so as to require that there is at least one functional automated external defibrillator on site at all times for use during emergencies within these spaces. **Status:** Referred to Health and Human Services Cmte

[SB 22,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63654) Prohibit the sale of, purchase of, and the offering of samples of hemp products to minors (Sen. Kay Kilpatrick - R)

Relating to offenses against public health and morals concerning hemp farming to prohibit the purchase of, sale of, and the offering of sample of hemp products by or to any individual under the age of 18 years old. **Status:** Referred to Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Cmte

**Study Committees**

**Taxes**

**Transportation**

[HB 52,](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63560) GDoT board election provisions and related transportation matters (Rep. Brad Thomas – R)

To amend provisions relating to GDoT board elections notices; relating to provisions regarding to alternative procurement procedures; relating to the permitting of an off-scene medical examiner to authorize on-the-scene personal to remove bodies in a fatal automobile accident to clear blocked lanes; and relating to the towing of modular housing. **Status:** Referred to Transportation Cmte, Passed Cmte, Pending Rules Cmte

**Workers’ Comp**

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