

FAMILY & POLICY



AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM OF

APRIL 1, 2011

The struggle over tax reform has led to a change in the General Assembly's schedule. Lawmakers adjourned Thursday and put off Day 38 until Monday, April 11th. Without further changes, they will have three days that week to pass a conference committee report on the FY 2012 budget and to pass tax reform and any other bills.

Tax reform writers are scrambling to get over a stumbling block. The Special Joint Committee on Georgia's Revenue Structure had hoped for quick passage of a bill reflecting some of the recommendations from last year's Special Council on Tax Reform (3/25 Bulletin). The Joint Committee raced to amend it, though, after Democrats released figures from Ga. State University showing that the bill's changes in itemized deductions would raise taxes on many middle income families despite lowering the individual income tax rate. Dealing with that problem in [HB 387](#) could mean the reform might lower the total amount of revenue collected, so lawmakers are considering what to do and trying to round up votes.

A conference committee is starting work on the FY 2012 budget. The [Senate FY 2012 Budget](#) adopted this week makes some changes from the House version. A Ga. Budget & Policy Institute [report](#) notes that the budget cuts more than \$500 M and underfunds enrollment growth in education and Medicaid by another \$500 M. The total decrease since the FY 2009 budget is 14.6% or \$2.9 B. In Community Health, Medicaid is short up to \$180 M. (About \$98 M is used for other purposes.) It agreed with the House to cut Medicaid provider rates by only .5% (but exempted additional providers) and to fund 33 new ICWP slots. It also agreed to restore health department grant-in-aid funds, Medicaid dental, vision and podiatry for adults, infant and child oral health, and it funded four community health centers. The Senate also agreed to implement 12-month (instead of 6-month) Medicaid recertification, but included less funding for it, and agreed to put in place

express lane eligibility. The Senate added back funds for Children 1st. In Human Services, the Senate agreed to restore funds for Alzheimer's and non-Medicaid community respite services and for Meals on Wheels and agreed to redirect \$1.4 M from the Ferst Foundation contract to add 400 child care slots. It would also save the EMBRACE contract. Both chambers cut \$9.8 M in funds for benefit eligibility workers who already have high caseloads. In Education, the Senate agreed to cut school nurse funding by only 4%; in Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, it agreed to restore Marcus Center funds.

Highlights

- The General Assembly has revised its schedule.
- The Senate passed its version of the FY 2012 budget and it has been sent to a conference committee.

A few bills moved closer to enactment this week, but some may be stalled. [HB 214](#) (Channell, 116th) creating a separate Department of Public Health, is on its way to the Governor for signing. The Runaway Youth Safety Act (Weldon, 163rd) has passed the House as [SB 94](#) and needs agreement from the Senate. [HB 200](#) (Lindsey, 54th) on human trafficking received final passage and awaits Gov. Deal's signature. An amended [SB 17](#) (Golden, 8th) setting up a commission to evaluate health insurance benefit mandates passed the House. [SB 39](#) (Grant, 25th), allowing criminal courts to create a mental health division, got a "do pass" in House Judiciary. [HB 343](#) (Cooper, 41st) licensing community psychiatric crisis stabilization and detoxification units has been recommended for passage by Senate Health and Human Services. [SB 245](#) (Goggans, 7th), improving the definition of developmental disability, probably will not pass this year. The amended [SB 63](#) (Albers, 56th) which originally required fingerprint images for Medicaid patients (3/4 and 3/18 Bulletins) had been set for a hearing in House Health and Human Services, but was removed from the agenda after much opposition. [SB 172](#) (Shafer, 48th), requiring home studies prior to adoptions (3/4 Bulletin) was significantly revised in a House Judiciary subcommittee and then recommitted, so it may not pass.

You can help!

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