

FAMILY & POLICY



AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM OF

APRIL 15, 2011

The General Assembly adjourned *sine die* near midnight on April 14th. A flurry of legislation made it under the wire. Governor Deal now has 40 days to sign or veto bills or to allow them to become law without a signature. He will call a special legislative session this summer to draw new legislative districts and may include tax reform in the agenda.

Budget writers blunted some cuts, dealt with unforeseen problems, and left some key issues for another day. The [FY 2012 Budget](#) for *Community Health* reduces cuts in Medicaid provider fees from 1% to 0.5%,

restores adult dental, vision and podiatry services, adds 33 Independent Care slots, provides for Express Lane Eligibility to reduce duplicative paperwork at application, funds bonds for a new eligibility computer system, and adds service copayments for PeachCare children. Unfortunately, legislators did not find funds for 12-month instead of 6-month Medicaid eligibility reviews, despite widespread support. They borrowed \$78 M from Medicaid to help fill an unexpected hole in state employee health care, hoping to keep premium increases near 10%. In *Public Health*, they restored \$2.48 M for health departments, kept funds for infant and child oral health, used \$2.8 M in TANF to protect Children 1st, added \$3.5 M in state and federal funds for trauma, and added \$1 M for 3 new Federally Qualified Health Centers and a behavioral health FQHC. The *Human Services* budget protects Meals-on-Wheels, Alzheimer's and non-Medicaid community respite services, and the Center for the Visually Impaired, but eliminates contracts with Books for Children (Ferst Foundation) and for EMBRACE.

Several significant bills passed in 2011. [HB 500](#) (Pruett, 144th) allows 22,000 Georgians receiving federally funded extended unemployment benefits to continue for 20 more weeks and allows others to qualify. [SB 172](#) (Shafer, 48th), requires home studies prior to most adoptions and affords adoptees access to non-identifying medical information.

[HB 200](#) (Lindsey, 54th) increases penalties for human traffickers including pimps, allows a defense for people who show they are victims, and grants access to victim compensation funds. [SB 94](#), (Weldon, 163rd) protects service providers who serve runaway children from charges of interference with custody if they contact

parents, guardians or DFCS within 72 hours. [SB 17](#) (Golden, 8th) sets up a commission to evaluate mandated health insurance benefits. [HB 47](#) (Ramsey, 72nd) allows health insurance companies to sell policies approved under other states' laws even if they do not include Georgia-

required services; where services are defined differently, a policy must show how they compare to Georgia law. An attempt to thwart federal health reform, [HB 461](#) (Jasperse, 12th) would allow Georgia to enter a compact with other states to regulate health insurance if Congress approves. [SB 39](#) (Grant, 25th), allows criminal courts to create a mental health division. [HB 343](#) (Cooper, 41st) licenses community psychiatric crisis stabilization and detoxification units. [SB 178](#) (Grant, 25th) creates a designation for assisted living facilities of 25 or more beds, allows staff to give residents medication, and allows residents to remain despite needing help with mobility. [HB 214](#) (Channell, 116th), creates a Department of Public Health. [HB 87](#) (Ramsey, 72nd), empowers police to seek immigration status of a suspect, punishes anyone who, while committing a felony, knowingly transports or harbors an undocumented person, punishes use of a fake ID to get work, and requires employers of 10 or more to use E-Verify. (Note: Some bills may not yet appear in final form.)

Tax reform was a high-profile casualty. It had appeared passage of a bill was possible (3/25 & 4/1 Bulletins), but House Speaker Ralston declared it dead for now after new data led to criticism about the impact. Meanwhile, legislators granted more special interest tax breaks that could cause future budget shortfalls.

Highlights
It's done!

You can help!

Locate your State Representative and Senator: www.votesmart.org (Use your 9-digit zip code.)

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