

# Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Session Week Seven — 2016



Greetings from the Gold Dome! Last week, the House was productive on Capitol Hill as we completed days 25 through 29. My colleagues and I passed a number of key bills relating to insurance coverage for cancer patients, military job protections, special needs education and kinship care.

## **House Bill 965- Jimmy Carter Cancer Treatment Act**

Patients diagnosed with stage four metastatic cancer would have more aggressive treatment options under [House Bill 965](#), “The Honorable Jimmy Carter Cancer Treatment Act.” Under the legislation, health benefit plans issued in Georgia cannot deny coverage for drugs approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for metastatic cancer treatments.

Currently, many insurance companies require patients show a history of failing to respond to initial cancer treatments, before covering additional medications. This bill will allow doctors to initially recommend more aggressive treatments, regardless of a patient’s response history.

HB 965 is a result of former President Jimmy Carter’s miraculous recovery from stage four metastatic melanomas. After the grim diagnosis in August, President Carter entered remission in December as a result of his advanced treatment. This legislation would ensure that all Georgians with insurance covering cancer have access to the best available treatment and drugs.

I don’t know a single person, including myself, that has not been affected with cancer in some form or another. Whether it is seeing a family member, friend or acquaintance fighting this terrible disease, we have all felt the emotions and know what it means to hear the diagnosis. As many of you know, both Casey and I lost our first spouses to Cancer. I sincerely hope this legislation gives options to those suffering from this terrible disease so that other families don’t have to go through the pain of losing their loved ones. I believe by providing patients with more aggressive treatment options, we will see a positive effect, and most importantly, save lives.

**House Bill 831- Protecting Guardsman's Employment Act.** The House unanimously passed [House Bill 831](#), the “Protecting Guardsmen’s Employment Act.” If enacted, this legislation would offer employment assistance to active duty military personnel by providing protections to Georgia workers called into service by the national guard of a neighboring state. Further, HB 831 would ensure the reemployment of National Guardsmen in their civilian job once their service is complete. The men and women whom willingly and voluntarily serve our Country can now have peace of mind in knowing that they will have gainful employment upon their return. As a Veteran, I appreciate the initiatives our General Assembly has taken to ensure our military families are well taken care of.

## **House Bill 614- The Landon Dunson Act**

The Landon Dunson Act, [House Bill 614](#), was bipartisan bill passed in the House last week. HB 614 would install video monitoring camera equipment as a safety measure in self-contained classrooms providing special education services. Local school participation would be voluntary providing the following:

*Education Continued....*

- Consent of the parents of the children in the self-contained classroom
- Access to the footage from the cameras would be strictly limited to school administrators for educational and safety monitoring purposes
- Department of Education would have final approval of the local schools that choose to opt-in to the program

Each individual school would be responsible for providing their own video monitoring equipment.

This legislation was introduced in response to concerns of alleged abuse in special education classrooms. We are hopeful with the passage of this legislation; video footage will serve as a valuable tool in evaluating educational environments in special needs classrooms. This legislation would help improve our special needs programs while providing teachers and administrators additional tools to review work and assure the safety of the students.

**House Bill 768- ABLE ACT**

The Georgia Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, [House Bill 768](#), passed the House and now heads to the Senate. The bill is aimed at easing financial strains on individuals with disabilities, allowing them to save tax-exempt private funds without being ineligible for Medicaid. An ABLE account is a tax-free savings account which allows individuals to cover costs for the following:

- Medical Care
- Education
- Community-based supports
- Employment training
- Assistive technology
- Housing
- Transportation

The Georgia ABLE Program would be governed by a board of directors appointed by the Governor, and would oversee the operations of the ABLE Program, including criteria for the tax-free savings accounts and establishing insurance policies to protect the assets of the funds. The Office of the State Treasurer would ensure the proper management of funds and bank accounts for the program. Various Georgia departments work with the board of directors to define qualified ABLE applicants and program material. Currently, 34 states have ABLE legislation and we are hoping Georgia will be the 35<sup>th</sup>. Every citizen has different needs, and we are hopeful that allowing Georgians financial freedom will be helpful in covering future expenses.

**House Bill 962- Kinship Care**

Last year we passed House Resolution 474 which created a study committee to investigate Georgia's kinship services. A kinship caregiver is any relative of a child, other than the child's parents, raising the child. According to statistics, approximately 100,000 to 300,000 children are in kinship care in Georgia.

The committee's hard work resulted in HB 962, which would create the position of Kinship Care Enforcement Administrator within the Department of Human Services. This position would monitor, facilitate, and ensure compliance with all federal and state laws related to programs available to kinship caregivers or the children in their care. There is no doubt that kinship caregivers play a vital role in the lives of Georgia children. This bill will help address their needs while providing adequate resources to assist with their kinship care.

Monday, February 29<sup>th</sup>, the House reconvened for Day 30, Crossover Day. Crossover day is extremely important because it is the last day bills can transfer or "crossover" to the other chamber with time for consideration before day 40, the last day of session. Now that Crossover Day is over, we will begin to review a number of Senate Bills that have been sent to us for consideration. I will be back next week to update you on all Crossover Day happenings, as well as, what we can expect in the last 10 days of the legislative session. As always, it is a pleasure to work on your behalf Under the Gold Dome and if you need anything at all, please let me know. God Bless!



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