



Friday, February 12, 2010

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 8TH – FEBRUARY 12TH

Lawmakers reconvened on Monday, February 8th for the 14th legislative day of the 2010 session. The General Assembly will be back in session - Tues, Feb. 16th, 10 a.m.

ON THE HOUSE FLOOR

HB 859 - This bill allows for the tolling of probated sentences for probationers who are not able to be found or are not responsive to the orders of the court. Existing tolling statutes require that abscondment be proven as a prerequisite of a tolling order. Yeas: 159; Nays: 8

HB 1016 - Identity fraud; include businesses as potential identity theft victims. This bill clarifies that corporate and other business entities that are targets of identity fraud are protected in the same manner as individuals. Further, it ensures that law enforcement personnel and prosecutors are able to investigate and prosecute identity theft against these entities. Yeas: 167; Nays: 0

HB 896 - Continuances; witness on active duty; change provisions. When a defendant demands a speedy trial a continuance tolls the running of that demand if a necessary witness is unavailable for trial because of deployment. The current Code requires a request to the proper military authority, pursuant to the United States Code and other regulations. The bill strikes the current provisions and only requires a party to provide testimony via affidavits or other documents that the witness has been activated to military duty. Yeas: 149; Nays: 1

HB 898 - Driving under the influence. Currently, if a person is convicted of a second or subsequent DUI within 5 years, then the notice of conviction is published in the local paper. The publication includes, among other information, the photograph, name, and address of that person. The bill strikes the provision that the convicted person's address will be published. Yeas: 152; Nays: 8



~EVENTS AT THE CAPITOL~

SENIOR CITIZENS WEEK AT THE CAPITOL
Tues Feb. 23rd, Wed Feb. 24th, and
Thur Feb. 25th

Wednesday, Feb 24th
FULTON COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING
at the Capitol

- also -

DISTRICT 44 SENIOR CITIZENS DAY
at the Capitol

9:45am-11:30am – 4th Floor Gallery
11:45am til 1pm – Room 123

~District Office~

3050 MLK Jr. Drive, Suite X-7
Atlanta, GA 30311
West Ridge Plaza near Wayfield Grocery Store
(Enter from Lynhurst Drive, the office of
Rep. Jones is on the left)

~Contact Representative Jones~

Cell – 404.542.8683
Email – info@sheilajones.org



for allowing me to serve as your State Representative for the 44th District.
I thank you for your continued trust and support.

Sheila

HB 908 - Quality Basic Education Act. This bill gives local systems total flexibility through waivers that:

- Eliminate Expenditure Controls – media center, direct instruction, and staff development costs
- Eliminate Funding for Additional Instruction Days. With this bill, waivers will be available for request by school systems through July 1, 2013.

- Previous provisions regarding maximum class sizes and salary schedules were struck out from the original bill with this committee substitute. Yeas: 137; Nays: 34

HB 963 - Ad valorem tax. This bill eliminates inconsistencies within the ad valorem tax code. In section 1, it eliminates the requirement that property tax returns be submitted in person or by mail. This provision conflicts with another section in the ad valorem code allowing for electronic filing of returns. This bill will allow for electronic filing of such returns.

Section 2 clears up an inconsistency in the code section providing a homestead exemption for those that are 62 and older with income of \$10,000 or less. When an amendment to this section was passed several years ago to change the calculation of income to include only the net income of the resident and spouse rather than the gross income of everyone residing in the homestead, the statute was only changed in one of two places, and therefore is internally inconsistent. The result is that counties are applying the law inconsistently, with some counties not implementing the relaxed requirements of the prior amendment. The bill makes the technical correction so that the provision uniformly provides for a calculation based on the net income of the applicant and spouse only. Yeas: 162; Nays: 4

HB 969 - Retirement and pensions. The bill authorizes the payment of death benefits if a member of a retirement system dies while performing qualified military service. It clarifies provisions regarding the distribution of benefits for persons who have reached the age 70 1/2.

It specifies that earnable compensation for members of TRS will include deferral contributions as defined by Internal Revenue Code. It clarifies the definition of “plan year” for TRS. Stipulates that “pick-up” contributions paid by employers as pre-tax employee contributions must be paid as retirement contributions that are 100% vested and cannot be received by the members in cash. Requires the employer to certify the retirement date for a member of the TRS and to certify no agreement exists to allow the employee to return to service. It also amends other provisions within TRS, requiring members who wish to purchase additional creditable service to file their application and make their payment at the same time that they file their application for retirement.

The bill makes technical corrections to ensure that 60 is the age reported as the normal retirement age in all sections that refer to TRS. It lastly amends provisions relating to the return to service of retired members under the Public School Employees Retirement System. Yeas: 165; Nays: 1

Other Legislation

Bill to raise school drop-out age clears state Senate panel

A proposal to raise the minimum school dropout age from 16 to 17 For all local school systems cleared a Senate panel Thursday (2/11/2010).

The Education and Youth Committee urged passage of the bill, which will divert young dropouts from a course that often includes unemployment, crime and prison.

Parents could take children under 17 out of public schools if they enrolled them at a community college or technical school. Implementing the bill would cost an estimated \$20 million, -- that's cheap compared with the costs of locking up dropouts who get in trouble. The problem is finding the money now -- that's difficult because of shrinking state revenues.

HB 1153 – Cruelty to animals. People who are intentionally cruel to animals or convicted more than once of neglect would face tougher penalties under legislation introduced this week in the House.

The bill not only stiffens the fines and prison sentences for repeat violators, it spells out what is required of animal owners. Animals must be given adequate food, water, a sanitary shelter, housing, ventilation and shade, including protection from harsh temperatures.

The bill specifically outlaws for the first time leaving an animal in a hot car.

A first offense of neglect would remain a misdemeanor. Current law treats a second offense with a \$5,000 fine and imprisonment of 12 months or less. If there is a second offense and the animal dies, then the fine rises to \$10,000, but the time in jail is still 12 months.

SB 316 Expand Medicare. This bill would expand Medicare coverage for those under 65 who have a disability or kidney failure has passed the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee.

kidney failure patients, do not have the opportunity to purchase Medicare covering deductibles," Sen. Thomas said Tuesday.

People who have disabilities or kidney failure are eligible for Medicare regardless of their age, but those under 65 cannot get private secondary coverage under current law. The bill will now go to the Senate floor.

Co-insurance, deductibles and copayments are not included in Medicare coverage, and those under 65 often cannot afford kidney transplants and medications. About 2,000 patients in Georgia would be eligible for supplemental Medicare policies under Senate Bill 316.

State board orders investigations into cheating suspicions

The state school board Thursday ordered immediate investigations of 191 Georgia schools facing questions of tampering with last spring's standardized tests.

Lawmakers, meanwhile, began work on a proposal to make test cheating a crime. And in Atlanta, where the state's analysis raised suspicions about 69 percent of the city's elementary and middle schools, Superintendent Beverly Hall promised a thorough review.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement released a report Wednesday about a statewide analysis of erasure marks on student answer sheets, cautioning the public to wait for further investigative results before forming an opinion. On Thursday, however, educators and lawmakers alike worried damage had already been done.

The board's unanimous vote required local systems to investigate schools deemed by the state to have test results of "moderate" or "severe" concern for erasures on the state's Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests. The tests are used to help determine whether schools met federal benchmarks. Schools of moderate concern had 11 percent to 24 percent of their classrooms exhibiting suspicious erasures. "Severe" schools had suspicious erasures in 25 percent or more of classrooms -- with some stretching beyond 75 percent.

Results are due back to the state before the end of the school year in late May and could come as early as April 1. State officials said they could accept those results or investigate further.

A hearing could be held next week that would make it unlawful to tamper with state tests or help others cheat on them. No law in Georgia currently makes it a crime to cheat.

Emergency Shelter Grant for Persons with AIDS

DCA will be holding thirteen (13) application workshops on the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) and Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) and the Balance of State Continuum of Care. The statewide workshops will be held from February 15 - 23. These programs are designed to deliver supportive housing and related services to persons strictly defined as either "homeless" under the ESG and HUD Continuum of Care programs, or as an "eligible person" (generally lower income persons with AIDS or related diseases) under the HOPWA program.

Eligible ESG programs include a broad range of activities related to the provision of shelter, transitional housing and (limited) supportive services targeted specifically to persons experiencing homelessness. The overarching outcome for each ESG-assisted program is stable housing at program exit for each person served. Eligible HOPWA activities include community residential housing and services of any type, as well as short- and long-term rent and utility assistance. The deadline for application submission is April 5, 2010.

In addition, during these workshops, DCA will be seeking input on regional housing and associated service needs for individuals who are homeless. Information will be used as part of the Balance of State Continuum of Care plan submitted as part of HUD's national Continuum of Care competition for resources targeted to the homeless. For more information about these workshops, please visit our web site at:

<http://www.dca.ga.gov/housing/specialneeds/programs/emergencysHELTERgrants.asp>

Stop Unwanted Calls!

The national "do not call" registry has been around for quite awhile, but many citizens are still not aware of the service that it provides. The following information has been provided by the National Fraud Information Center in an attempt to assist persons from receiving unwanted sales calls.

- Signing up for the national "do not call" registry is easy and FREE. Just call (888) 382-1222 from the phone number that you want to register. A person may also register on line at www.donotcall.gov as well.
- Registration does not last forever - it expires in five years. If your phone number changes or is disconnected, you need to re-register. A person may take their number off the registry at any time via the previously noted toll-free number or website.
- Some callers are not covered - those include: Non-profit groups, charities, political organizations and survey companies.

Take a Personal Tour of your State Capitol



Call today and make arrangements for your Church, Community Organization, Family, School, or Senior Facility to
– Tour your State Capitol –
404.656.0323

Students residing in House District 44

SERVE AS A PAGE for Representative Jones at the State Capitol

Students must be at least
12 years old.

Students will receive: an excused absence from school, a certificate, lunch, a photo taken of them with their Representative and the House Speaker, and \$10.

For an application: call the office of
Rep. Jones – 404.656.0323