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**2025 Week 4 Legislative Update**

This week legislators were back under the Gold Dome Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 10 through 13. Committee activity picked up considerably this week, and the House and Senate both considered a handful of bills on the floor, including the Amended Fiscal Year 2025 budget. House and Senate members will be back in session next week Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 14 through 17.

**Amended Fiscal Year 2025 Budget**

On Thursday morning the House passed its version of the Amended Fiscal Year 2025 budget by a vote of 166 to 3. In his presentation of [House Bill 67](https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/document/docs/default-source/house-budget-and-research-office-document-library/2025-fiscal-year/amended_fy_2025_bill_house_version_(hb_67).pdf?sfvrsn=6421659d_2), Appropriations Chairman Matt Hatchett (R-Dublin) noted that that the budget is set by a revenue estimate of $40.5 billion. In addition to the traditional revenue growth, the governor’s revenue estimate for AFY25 includes $2.7 billion in surplus funds, for a total infusion of $4.4 billion, which reflects an increase of 12.2 percent of the original FY25 budget. Chairman Hatchett noted the House agreed with the governor’s recommendations for one-time investments in technology, economic development projects, and investments in public safety at the Department of Corrections as well as hurricane relief, which he noted were two top priorities for the House.

Highlights from the House’s AFY25 budget recommendations that Chairman Hatchett reviewed include:

* $500 million to improve the long-term viability of the State Employees’ Retirement System;
* $750 million to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority for water and wastewater infrastructure;
  + $500 million to support the development and construction of additional surface water resources for Georgia's coastal region to meet growth in demand;
  + $250 million to support water and wastewater infrastructure development through low-interest loans to local communities;
* $530 million in new funds to the Georgia Department of Transportation for freight infrastructure projects;
* $58 million to the Georgia Technology Authority to continue updating IT systems for state agencies;
* $225 million to the Department of Administrative Services to reduce outstanding obligations to the state's liability insurance program;
* $114 million to fully fund K-12 enrollment growth;
* $50 million for additional school safety grants and an additional $3 million to GEMA for a school threat assessment tracking system;
* $22 million to the Department of Human Services for growth in utilization and increased cost of out-of-home care;
* $1.7 million for new special victim unit to rescue exploited foster youth;
* An additional $197 million in Hurricane Helene relief and recovery efforts, including more than $35 million for rural hospitals affected by the storm and an additional $150 million in aid to farmers and timber producers affected by the storm, bringing the total House recommendation for hurricane relief to $811 million;
* $333 million in new funds to the Department of Corrections to increase staff positions and staff salaries, invest in facilities, and address safety through additional body cameras, tasers, and monitoring systems; and
* $5 million for Next Generation 911.

Next the Senate will review the House’s recommendations for the AFY25 budget, and the House will shift its focus to the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

**School Safety**

In a press conference this week, Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington) unveiled his comprehensive school safety plan. His plan mandates statewide participation in a new student information sharing and safety database, requires threat assessment teams to be implemented in schools, requires schools to utilize an anonymous reporting app that meets certain standards, addresses physical security infrastructure needs, increases penalties for individuals who make terroristic threats, and incentivizes responsible firearm ownership practices.

In conjunction with the press conference, Representative Holt Persinger (R-Winder) introduced [House Bill 268](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69929). The bill would enhance requirements for sharing student records between schools, law enforcement, and other agencies. It would also establish grants for school systems to hire mental health coordinators, require schools to provide youth violence and suicide prevention training, and require schools to update safety plans with behavioral threat assessment protocols.

The bill would also create the Office of Safe Schools within GEMA to oversee school safety initiatives, as well as a statewide School and Student Safety Database to track any potential threats. Schools would also be required to have threat management teams and processes and immediately suspend and provide counseling to students accused of making credible threats. The bill has been assigned to the Education Committee for consideration.

**Data Privacy**

This week Senator John Albers (R-Roswell) introduced [Senate Bill 111](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69990), the ‘Georgia Consumer Privacy Protection Act.’ The legislation lays out consumers’ rights when it comes to their data, including the right to access, correct, delete, and obtain a copy of their data, and to opt out of the sale and the processing of their data for targeted advertising or profiling. Businesses covered under the legislation must limit data collection, implement security measures, and obtain consent for sensitive data. Certain entities and types of data are excluded from the provisions of the bill, including entities covered by HIPAA or financial regulations. The bill specifies that a violation cannot serve as the basis for a private right of action.

**Senate Majority Caucus Priorities**

On Monday the Senate Republican Caucus introduced their 2025 legislative priorities:

* **Disaster relief**: In addition to the disaster relief funds included in the budget, Senators Russ Goodman, Sam Watson, and Larry Walker will explore legislative remedies to provide relief to timber owners, farmers, and consumers in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene.
* **Lawsuit reform**: Senate Republicans will work to stabilize insurance rates for small businesses and employers by curbing frivolous lawsuits.
* **School safety**: This year’s budget will include another round of robust school safety grants. The majority caucus is also proposing two pieces of legislation: Senator Jason Anavitarte’s Senate Bill 17, ‘Ricky and Alyssa’s Law,’ and Senators Clint Dixon and Greg Dolezal are working on legislation that would ensure the timely and accurate transfer of documents when a troubled student changes schools.
* **Literacy**: This is a multi-year priority for the Senate Majority Caucus that will continue this session under the leadership of new Senate Education Chairman Billy Hickman.
* **Women’s sports**: Senator Greg Dolezal’s ‘Fair and Safe Athletic Opportunities Act,’ Senate Bill 1, bans biological males from participating in women’s sports in Georgia’s middle schools, high schools, and colleges.

**Childcare Tax Credit**

This week Senator Brian Strickland (R-McDonough) introduced [Senate Bill 89](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69886), which would create a new child tax credit and expand childcare tax programs. The bill is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. Under the legislation, the Georgia income tax credit for qualified child and dependent care expenses, which is based on a percentage of the federal credit allowed under Section 21 of the federal tax code, would be increased from the current 30 percent to 40 percent. The legislation would also create a new Georgia Child Tax Credit, allowing taxpayers a credit of $250 per child under the age of 7. Additionally, Georgia’s employer-sponsored childcare tax credit granted to an employer who sponsors or provides childcare for employees, would be increased to 90% of the cost of operation to the employer, up from 75% under current law. The measure has been assigned to the Finance Committee for consideration.

**Transgender Athletes**

At a press conference on Tuesday, Speaker Jon Burns announced one of his legislative priorities for the session, the Riley Gaines Act. [House Bill 267](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69927), sponsored by Representative Josh Bonner (R-Fayetteville), would prohibit biological males from competing on sports teams designated for girls and women at every level. Separate changing facilities, bathrooms and/or locker rooms would be required for athletic events, and athletic scholarships designated for women could not be awarded to biological males. Under the bill, private schools that compete against public schools would also be required to adhere to the standards set forth in the bill. The measure has been assigned to the Education Committee.

On the other side of the building, a similar bill, the ‘Fair and Safe Athletic Opportunities’ Act, was considered on the Senate floor on Thursday. [Senate Bill 1](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69274), which is sponsored by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming), is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. After a lengthy debate, the measure passed 35 to 17. It now heads to the House for consideration.

Both Speaker Burns and Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones attended President Trump’s signing of the “Keeping Men Out of Women’s Sports” Executive Order in Washington, D.C. this week.

**Sports Betting**

This week Senator Carden Summers (R-Cordele) introduced [Senate Resolution 131](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69932), which proposes amending Georgia’s constitution to legalize sports betting and casino gaming in Georgia. Under the resolution, the legislature would create a gaming commission that would regulate and tax sports betting and casino gambling activities. The General Assembly would create a system for issuing at least eight casino gaming licenses. Sports betting and casino gambling would be taxed at a rate of 20 percent of gross income, and the tax revenue would be deposited into the newly created Georgia Gaming Proceeds Fund. The first $2 billion would be evenly distributed to Georgia’s county governments, and at least 5 percent of the proceeds above that amount would go to addiction prevention and treatment programs.

Because this proposes an amendment to Georgia’s constitution, it will require approval by two-thirds of both the House and Senate before it could be put on the ballot for the voters to decide.

**‘Fentanyl Eradication and Removal Act’**

This week Senator Russ Goodman (R-Cogdell) introduced [Senate Bill 79](https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/69811), the ‘Fentanyl Eradication and Removal Act.’ The bill, which is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, would establish stiffer criminal penalties for fentanyl-related offenses. The measure would remove fentanyl from Georgia’s current statutes relating to possessing, selling, distributing, manufacturing, and trafficking opiates and create a separate schedule of offenses specific to fentanyl and its related substances. The bill would go into effect on July 1, 2025 and would apply to criminal offenses committed on or after that date.