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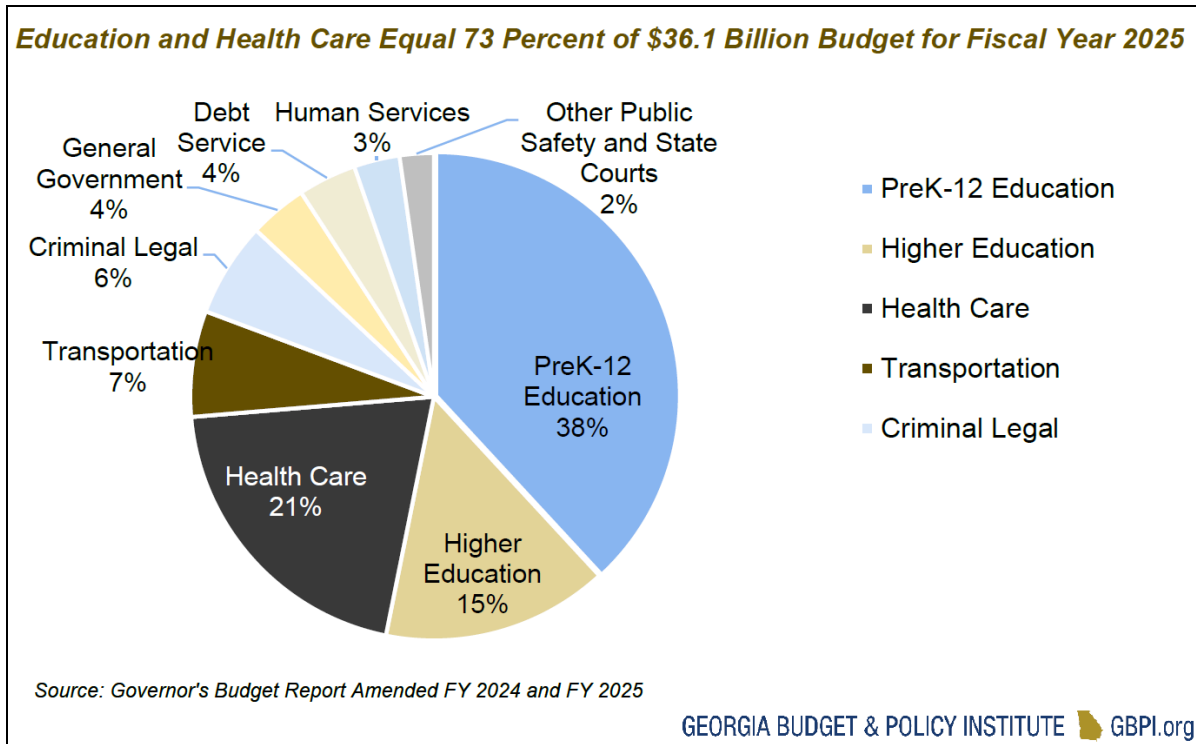
While we spend a lot of time passing a variety of bills and debating policy, the Georgia Legislature actually has only one Constitutional responsibility, and that is to **pass a balanced budget for the state.**

This week, we did just that in the House, passing [HB 916](#), the state budget for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2024. The bill now heads over to our colleagues in the Senate.

Let's take a look at what's in the budget as of this week.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS, FY 2025

The state budget of Georgia has been set at **\$36.1 billion** for FY 2025, and it's worth it to discuss how this money is appropriated.



Source: [The Georgia Budget & Policy Institute](#)

Every year, the governor proposes two distinct budgets. The first is the **amended budget for the current fiscal year** (in this case FY 2024, ending June 30, 2024) that adjusts the budget we passed the previous year based on any changes in revenue and spending we've experienced. (Sometimes this amended budget is called the "little budget.")

The second is the **full budget for the upcoming fiscal year** (in this case FY 2025, starting July 1, 2024) that lays out a new spending plan for the next fiscal year. (We call this one the "big budget.")

Under Georgia law, **the governor has the authority to set the revenue estimate, which caps spending.** The job of the state's General Assembly is to allocate the funds and to pass a bill outlining the appropriations for this annual state budget.



This is obviously a tremendous undertaking, and I first would like to commend [Chairman Matt Hatchett](#) and the entire team at the [House Appropriations](#) office for doing what we all can acknowledge is an **incredibly difficult job**. (There's a reason he needs a bottle of water when he's presenting the bill.)

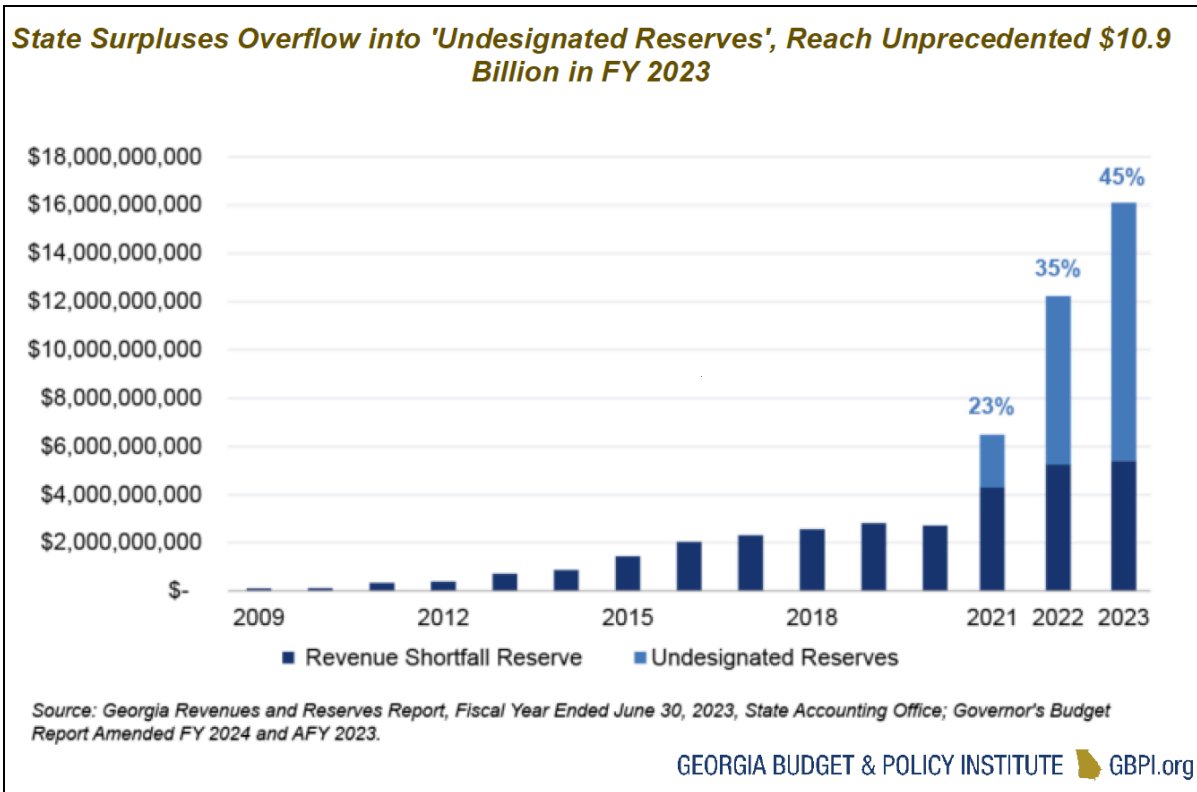
There is a lot of good in the state budget, some of which I'd like to highlight here.

- **\$373.6 million to increase the state base salary schedule for certified teachers** and employees by \$2500, for a total adjustment to the state base salary schedule of \$9,500 since FY 2020. (At present [Georgia ranks 19th nationally](#) for average teacher pay.)
- An additional **\$6.3 million to provide for the cost of breakfast and lunch for reduced-paying students**. (During the pandemic, the federal government provided [reimbursement for all students](#), regardless of free and reduced meal status.)
- **\$750,000 through the Department of Community Health for start-up grants for three Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)** to support primary care in Union County, behavioral health in

Cobb County, and a mobile dental care unit in southwest Georgia.

- **\$2 million in funding for the creation of 105 new residency slots in graduate medical education**, with the intent of attracting and retaining young physicians to practice in Georgia, particularly in rural medicine, pediatrics, and maternal/fetal medicine.
- **\$1.5 million for the creation of the David Ralston Center for Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities at the University of Georgia**, which will address needs and gaps with regard to our state behavioral health workforce.
- **\$1 million to the Georgia Veterans Service** to support active-duty military members and veterans with behavioral health services.
- Creation of the **Accountable Housing Initiative**, which, under the State Housing Trust Fund, provides money for organizations who help homeless individuals obtain stable, immediate housing in the short-term and achieve affordable housing in the long term.
- **\$9.5 million** in lottery funds for the first of a four-year phase-in to **reduce the Pre-Kindergarten class size from 22 to 20 students**, with the intent to add 96 new classrooms for four years to total 382 new classrooms.

That said, **Georgia has generated [record budget surpluses](#) over the last three years**. Further, if state revenues continue to perform at the current pace, Georgia will end FY 2024 with another significant surplus.



Source: [The Georgia Budget & Policy Institute](#)

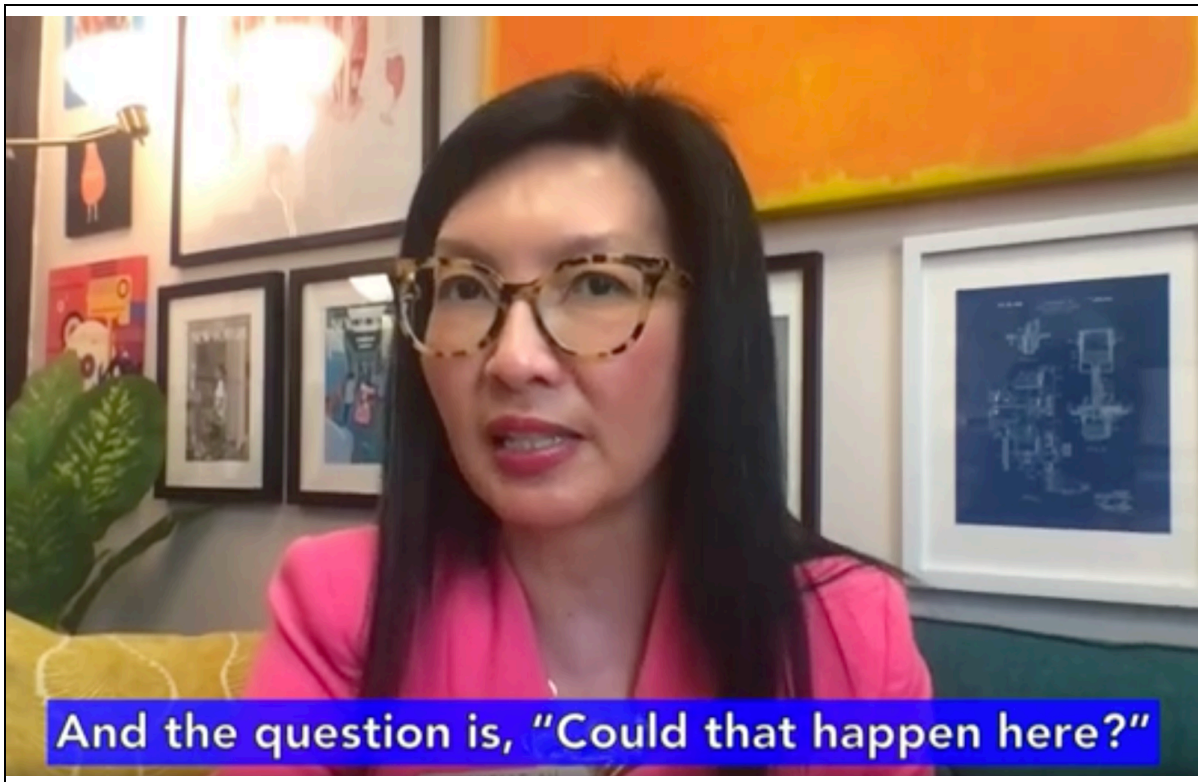
How we treat these funds, and how we approach the budget, is a statement of our priorities as a state. Remember, the term “surplus” should only apply to funds in excess of the needs that have already been met. And I’d argue that the state still has significant needs that could be covered by these funds.

How we choose to spend these funds is an investment in the future of our state. And investments pay dividends. Some of what I personally have been advocating for is an expansion of the [HOPE Scholarship program](#) to include **needs-based tuition assistance**, adjustment of the [Quality Basic Education \(QBE\)](#) funding formula to **adjust for schools with a high percentage of families living in poverty**, and, of course, **fully expanding Medicaid in the state of Georgia.**

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE

Earlier this week I joined the [Democratic Party of Georgia](#) for a press event to discuss the **Alabama Supreme Court Ruling** which has paralyzed the practice of in vitro fertilization in the state and sent shockwaves through the nation.

Georgians, like residents of other states with extreme abortion bans, now wonder, ***“could that happen here?”***



[Watch full video of my remarks here](#)

The short answer, unfortunately, is, “I don’t know.” But I think one thing is clear. **For some extremist Republicans, a six week abortion ban is not enough.**

We’ve already seen bills aiming to even [further roll back access to medication abortion](#) in this state, and we’ve seen bills seeking to define [“personhood” from the moment of conception](#), which would have **essentially the same effect on IVF as we’re seeing in Alabama**, calling into question how frozen one, two, four, and eight-cell blastocysts can be handled, treated, and disposed.

So make no mistake, **IVF is not safe in Georgia.**

Because the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade only came down about a year and a half ago, and for some Republicans, this has only just begun.

Therefore, **never has it been more important to elect pro-choice Democrats to the state legislature**, the forum where the fight for reproductive rights is waged and won.

TEAM AU IN ACTION



This week I was proud to **qualify for reelection** to continue to serve HD 50 in the Georgia House of Representatives.

It's no secret that **HD 50 is one of the few swing districts left in Georgia**, and every year I run, it's going to be a fight. Governor Kemp has already pledged a significant amount of money to defeat me through his leadership PAC, which can collect unlimited contributions from donors and coordinate directly with candidates and their campaigns.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

POLITICAL INSIDER

The Jolt: Kemp deploys political machine for 2024 legislative battle

News and analysis from the politics team at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Credit: Arvin Temkar/AJC

Created by a Kemp-backed law, the committees can collect unlimited contributions from donors and coordinate directly with candidates and their campaigns.

Kemp's initiative is designed to protect six state House Republicans: [Scott Hilton](#) of Peachtree Corners, [Deborah Silcox](#) of Sandy Springs, [Matt Reeves](#) of Duluth, [Lauren Daniel](#) of Locust Grove, [Mike Cheokas](#) of Americus and [Gerald Greene](#) of Cuthbert.

And it takes aim at these five Democratic incumbents: State Rep. [Michelle Au](#) of Johns Creek, state Rep. [Farooq Mughal](#) of Dacula, state Rep. [Jasmine Clark](#) of Lilburn; state Sen. [Nabilah Islam](#) of Lawrenceville and state Sen. [Josh McLaurin](#) of Sandy Springs.

[Click here to read full article](#)

Make no mistake, this will be a tough race, but one I have no intention of losing.

* * *

Georgia is a vibrant and rapidly diversifying state.

So is our legislature.

Leaders of Georgia’s Legislative Black, Asian American Pacific Islander, and Hispanic Caucuses are therefore proud to announce our first ever Tri-Caucus Town Hall.

TRI-CAUCUS TOWN HALL
TUESDAY 3/19 6:30PM
2750 BUFORD HIGHWAY NE

Rep. Carl Gilliard
Chair, GA Legislative Black Caucus

Rep. Michelle Au
Chair, GA Legislative AAPI Caucus

Sen. Jason Esteves
Georgia Legislative Hispanic Caucus

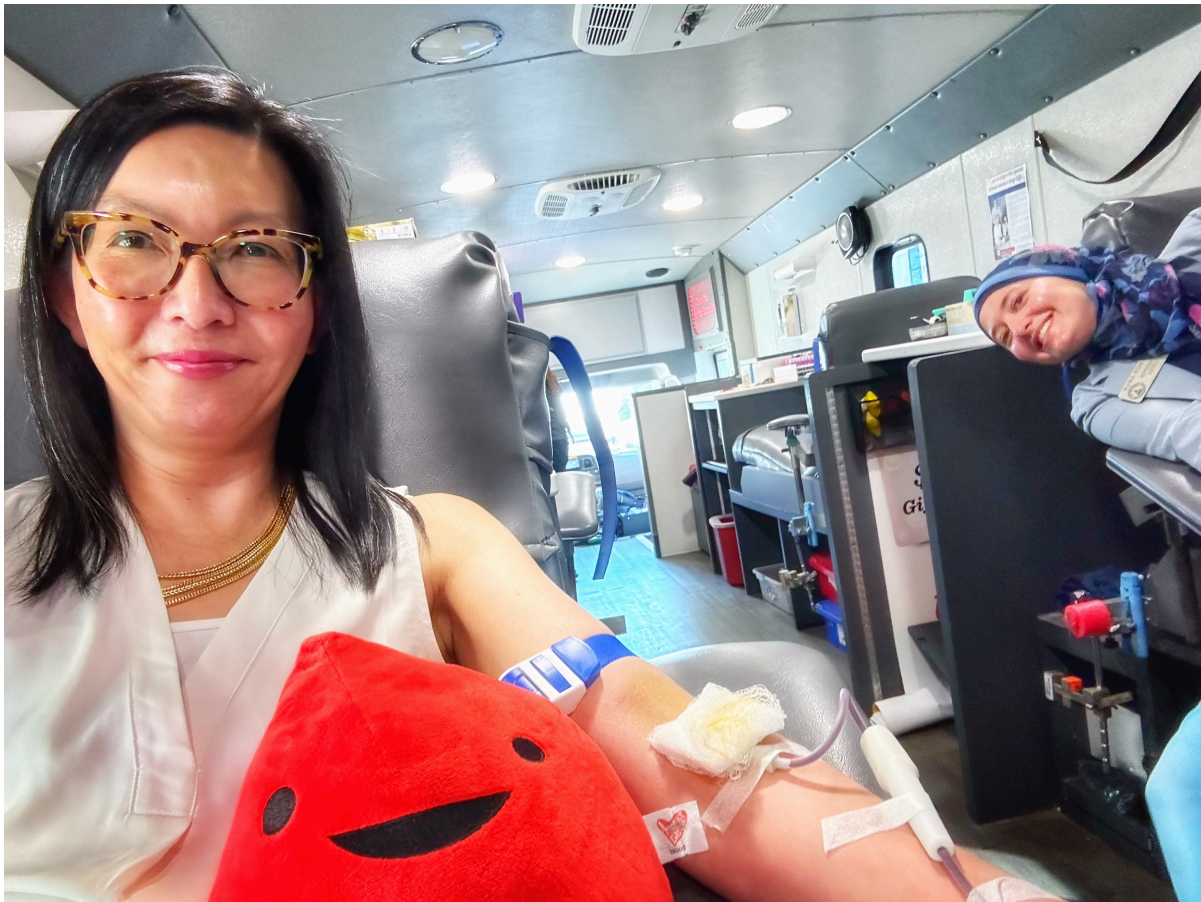
[Click here to read full article](#)

Join us **Tuesday, March 19th, 6:30pm, at the Latin American Association (2750 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, GA 30324)**. There, leaders from all three Caucuses will discuss coalition building, priorities, and discuss what it means to be a leader in a multicultural state like Georgia.

[RSVP here for more information](#). Please note that **all three legislative Caucuses are bipartisan—all are welcome!**

* * *

We are coming up fast on our next **Gold Dome Blood Drive**, which my team traditionally organizes at least twice a year to make it easy for people to donate blood at the Capitol!



GOLD DOME BLOOD DRIVE
Thursday, March 21st
8:00am - 5:00pm
Mitchell Street (between the Capitol and the CLOB)

The nation is undergoing one of the worst blood shortages in a decade, and the effort we make here truly helps a large number of patients requiring blood transfusions in Georgia. *Every unit of whole blood donated, spun into its component parts, can help up to three patients.*

The wonderful thing about our blood drive is it is something that across party lines, roles at the Capitol, and branches of government, we can all work on together. Thank you to our friends **Mayor Andre Dickens** and **Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper** for helping to get the word out this week!



* * *

Thanks to your votes, I have made it into the “**Final Four**” bracket for the **Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s Fan Favorite Best Dressed Legislator** competition.



Forget about my medical career, my legislative work, my three children. THIS IS WITHOUT A DOUBT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED TO ME IN MY LIFE. Also, being in the Final Four makes it sound like I am awesome at basketball, which...you know, is plausible.

It's down to a good old-fashioned House vs. Senate showdown at this point, so if you're inclined to vault me into the finals, **please feel free to vote for me [here](#) (via Google Forms) and [here](#) (via Twitter).**

Added plus: if I win this thing, it's really going to perplex my parents.

* * *



As we move into the final three weeks of the 2024 legislative session, we're happy to hear from constituents about priorities, projects, or if you'd just like to come visit us at the Capitol. As always, please **do not hesitate to [reach out to our office](#)** should you need any assistance, or if you have any concerns you'd like me to address on your behalf.

It is my honor to be your voice in the Georgia House of Representatives.

In Service,



Paid for by Au for Georgia Inc.

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