



{{FirstName or 'Friends'}} --

The 2023 session of the Georgia General Assembly kicks off this Monday, which marks my official transition from Senator to Representative. This newsletter is my last as Senator, but I'm excited to start this new year and a new session in the House! I have ambitious plans for this new session, which includes coalition-building and a robust legislative agenda. Please read more below about what we can expect this session, and upcoming events for you to join us.

Stay tuned for next week's newsletters chronicling my first week as a Representative, introductions to new Team Au members and ways for you to be involved this session. If you are able, please consider making a [contribution](#) before MIDNIGHT on Sunday so Team Au has all the resources needed to work towards our vision for a healthy future for all Georgians.

Donate

Let's get into it!

Heading into the 2023-2024 Session: What Can We Expect?

Many have asked what the status is of **Medicaid expansion** here in Georgia. The answer is that there have been some indications that the GOP could be [softening their stance](#) against full expansion, particularly given the continued burden on our healthcare system (exemplified by not only the many rural hospital closures over the past decade, but also most recently by the closure of the Atlanta

Medical Center. One impediment I see is its continued framing as a political issue rather than as the public health issue it is.)



Further, we face the looming issue of “**Medicaid unwinding.**” What does this term mean? Essentially, during the COVID-related public health emergency (PHE), states were bound to provide continuous coverage for Medicaid patients. When this PHE ends in 2023, hundreds of thousands of Georgians risk losing coverage. And because **69% of Medicaid recipients are children, our pediatric population will bear the brunt of this coverage loss.** You can read more on Medicaid Unwinding [here.](#)

Healthcare access will be a key issue in 2023, and so to make sure we’re ready to hit the ground running, we’ll be **hosting a webinar on Friday, January 13 at 12pm with experts from the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute!** The webinar will review where we currently stand on healthcare access generally in Georgia, continuing and upcoming concerns regarding coverage, and the fiscal and budgetary state policy strategies available to address these issues. **See below for more details and to register.**



DR. MICHELLE AU
Georgia State Representative
House District 50

LEAH CHAN
Senior Health Analyst
GA Budget and Policy Institute

DANNY KANSO
Legislative Strategy Director
GA Budget and Policy Institute

HEALTHCARE ACCESS 101
*Georgia, the ACA, Medicaid Waivers, Coverage Concerns, and
What You Need to Know for the 2023 Legislative Session*

Our Priority Bills

The 2023 session may well be a tumultuous one at the Gold Dome, as the most recent election saw a tremendous amount of turnover in the legislature and a slate of new leaders in the majority caucus.

So while it is not entirely clear how the 2023 session may shape up, **Team Au has been working hard drafting our legislative agenda.** Here are some of our priority bills:

Gun Safety

My top priority Safe Storage bill seeks to address the risk of what has, as of 2020, become the #1 cause of pediatric death in the country.

That cause is guns.



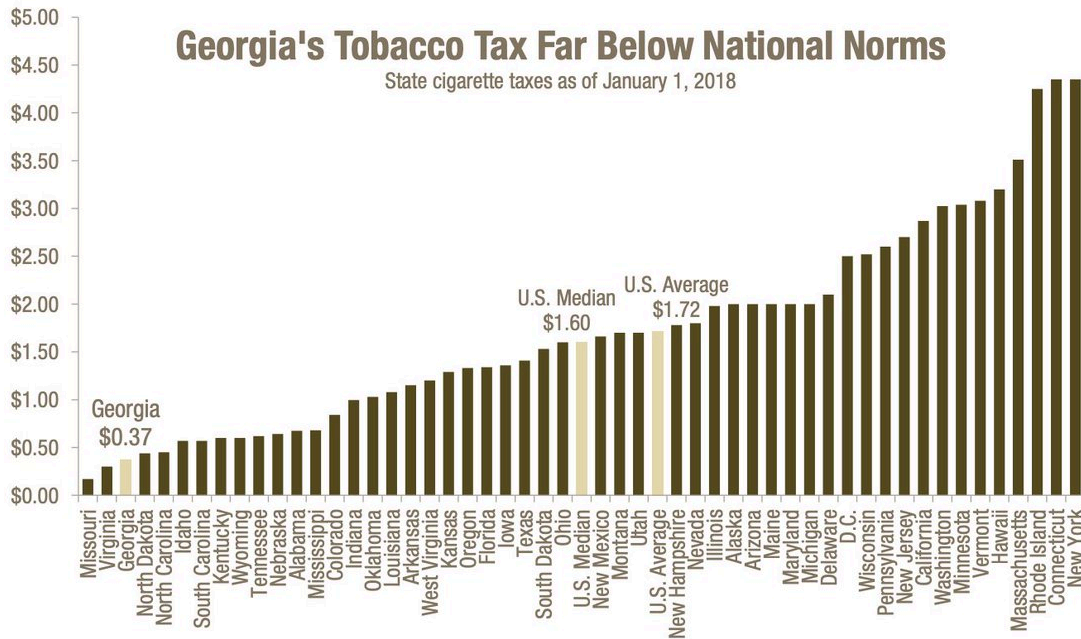
[An average of 146 children and teens die by guns every year in Georgia, and our state has the 9th-highest rate of gun violence in the nation.](#) We cannot afford to treat this crisis as a political issue. **Gun safety is a public health issue**, and we owe it to our children to mount a bipartisan effort to keep our communities safer.

My safe storage bill is simple. The bill would **make it illegal to store, transport, or abandon an unsecured firearm in a place where it can be accessed by a minor.** This change would address not just the issue of accidental injuries or school shootings (which tend to get the most attention) but also mitigate the top cause of gun death in this country, which is suicide. After a prolonged bipartisan focus on mental health during the 2022 legislative session, I see this gun safety bill as a natural extension of that work.

In addition to this safe storage bill, I will be re-introducing two gun safety bills in the 2023 session: **universal background checks** and **mandatory three-day waiting periods** for gun purchases.

Raising Georgia's Tobacco Tax

By raising Georgia's tobacco tax to match the national average, my priority bill aims to increase state revenue while also decreasing our state's health costs.



Source: Federation of Tax Administrators

At present, Georgia's tobacco tax is among the lowest in the nation, at 37 cents per pack. The national average is \$1.91 per pack. Raising the tobacco tax helps Georgia in at least two ways.

First, as noted, it **generates revenue for the state**. [A fiscal analysis from 2018](#) shows that raising the tobacco tax even just up to \$1 or \$1.50/pack could generate between \$416 and \$588 million per year on average—revenue which could be reinvested into our state's under-resourced healthcare system.

Further, **tobacco smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.** It causes nearly 1 in 5 deaths due to a number of chronic diseases affecting nearly every system of the body. Raising the state tobacco tax in other states has been shown to decrease smoking rates, preventable chronic health harms, and death, especially in young people.

Long and Short-Term Insulin Safety Net

With the Biden Administration's passage of the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), Medicare patients are now protected by a \$35/month cap on the cost of insulin. I have two bills that aim to **extend these protections to non-Medicare patients**, providing both a short-term and long-term safety net program, so that patients no

longer have to suffer grave consequences when they cannot afford this century-old, lifesaving medication.



Some [background](#):

- The price of the 4 most popular types of insulin has **TRIPLED** over the past decade.
- People with diabetes account for \$1 of every \$4 spent on healthcare in the U.S.
- While 20 states and D.C. have capped copays on insulin and diabetes devices/supplies, Georgia is not among them.

I've drafted two bills to build an insulin safety net program in Georgia based on Minnesota's [Alec Smith Insulin Affordability Act](#). The first bill is the **Georgia Urgent Insulin Safety Net Program Act**. It creates a system wherein eligible Georgians with an insulin prescription can receive a 30-day supply of insulin immediately at their pharmacy for no more than \$35.

The second bill is the **Georgia Continuing Insulin Safety Net Program Act**. It creates a system wherein eligible Georgians with an insulin prescription can receive up to a year supply of insulin for no more than \$75 per 90-day refill.

The bills require that for eligible patients, pharmacies charge \leq \$35 (Urgent) or \$75 (Continuing) for the insulin prescribed. It then requires the manufacturer to reimburse the pharmacy for its actual acquisition cost, or to send a replacement supply of insulin.

Emergency Ground Transport Pricing Transparency

My next bill addresses a problem many in the community have faced: **surprise medical bills for ground ambulance transfers.**



Example: A patient requires urgent medical care. They call 911. An ambulance is dispatched and takes them to the hospital. Later, the patient receives a \$2,000 bill for the transport. Apparently the ambulance company was "out of network" and not covered by their insurance.

GA passed [HB 888 \(the Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act\)](#) in 2020. This law requires insurers to cover emergency services regardless of whether the provider is in a patient's insurance network. However, this requirement **does not include ground ambulance transport**. Similarly, the federal [No Surprises Act](#) (2020) protects patients from surprise medical bills for most emergency care, but NOT ground ambulance services. **Out-of-network charges are much higher than in-network**, averaging ~\$450 for ground ambulances.

[Several states](#) have implemented surprise billing protections for ground ambulances. For state-regulated plans, 10 states (including our neighbor Florida)

provide some measure of consumer protection for patients needing emergency ground transport.

These protections avert two harms. The first is the burden on patients. The second is patients avoiding emergency care due to fear of incurring these costs. The nature of this bill relates to the first piece of legislation I introduced in 2021, [SB 82](#).

Additional Priorities

In addition to the four priority bills listed above, I am working on:

- A bill to eliminate the sales tax on diapers
- A bill to eliminate the sales tax on menstrual products
- A resolution to amend the state constitution in favor of a bipartisan, non-legislative redistricting committee to draw electoral maps.



Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus Update

This winter, my fellow lawmakers and I were proud to announce Georgia's first ever Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Legislative Caucus. As of the 2023 session, this caucus will have 11 active members and 3 emeritus members. Of note, this makes Georgia's the largest state legislative AAPI Caucus in the nation with the exception of Hawaii.

I was honored to join [“Closer Look with Rose Scott” on WABE](#) to talk about the historic nature of this caucus and our goals to build cross-cultural coalitions and empower minority voices in Georgia. Listen to our conversation [here](#).

Georgia’s Asian American Pacific Islander Caucus gears up for its first legislative session



HD 50: In-District Activities

On Wednesday, January 4th, I hosted my fourth pre-session **office hours** to allow my constituents in HD 50 to chat with me about their priority issues, questions, or concerns. We had a wonderful turnout, and talked about everything from affordable housing to insulin pricing to ranked choice voting to gun safety. **HD 50 is engaged and ready for session!** (Thanks as always to [Six Bridges Brewing](#) for hosting!)






Upcoming Events

JANUARY 11, 3pm-4pm: Legislative Field Trip to Mercy Care Clinic

This event, open to legislators and their staff only, is a field trip to a clinic near the Capitol providing physical and mental health care for the homeless.


It's critical members of our legislature witness first-hand the healthcare access issues that our underserved communities are facing. I'll report back on the visit and I encourage you to read the below fact sheet and consider supporting organizations like Mercy Care, which provide lifesaving treatments to our fellow Georgians.



MERCY CARE


Mission
Furthering the healing ministry of Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Care gives tangible expression to Christ's merciful love by providing compassionate, clinically excellent health care in the spirit of loving service to those in need, with special attention to the poor and vulnerable. In fulfilling our mission, we help to reduce health disparities and improve health outcomes.

History
Mercy Care was established in 1985 and designated as a federally qualified health center (FQHC) in 1989. Today, more than 200 providers and staff and 250 volunteers provide care for thousands of homeless and underserved individuals.



Services

- Comprehensive continuum of patient-centered, compassionate care
- Adult and pediatric primary medical care, psychiatric care, and dentistry; vision care, integrated behavioral health and substance use, and street medicine, health education and HIV prevention
- Physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, psychiatrists, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, licensed behavioral health specialists, certified addiction counselors, care coordinators, certified medical assistants, a clinic supervisor and a chief medical officer
- Fleet of vans and other vehicles and two fully-equipped mobile medical coaches




MERCY CARE

Mercy Care's Recuperative Care Programs

Goal: To break the cycle of repeated hospitalizations of medically fragile adults experiencing homelessness by allowing them to properly heal after a hospital stay.

- These individuals are medically stable enough to be discharged from the hospital, but their recovery would be compromised by the instability of life on the streets or in a traditional shelter.
- Of clients served in recuperative care, 96% are Black or African-American, 2% are Hispanic or Latino, and 2% are White (Non-Hispanic).

Clients are referred by three area health systems: Grady, Emory Midtown, and Northeast Georgia, which serve patients from DeKalb, Fulton, Barrow, Gwinnett, Hall, Jackson and Lumpkin counties.



Key Points:

- A registered nurse assesses and meets weekly with each patient to provide health education and self-care skills related to the patient's chronic and acute illnesses.
- Resource specialists and personal care aides assist with any areas necessary to put a client on a path to self-sufficiency, including:
 - Training in activities of daily living
 - Psychosocial support
 - Transportation to appointments
 - Eligibility assessments for housing and other public services
 - Referrals for supportive services, including outpatient mental health and substance abuse counseling and job training
- Onsite services include meals, laundry facilities, a career center and a veterans affairs center.
- Each client has an individualized care plan to cover medical, social, and post-discharge needs.

OUR REACH

11 fixed and mobile community-based clinic sites in the City of Atlanta and across Fulton, DeKalb, and Cobb counties

1,066,710 Fulton county population

764,382 DeKalb county population

49.1% African American, 32.4% Caucasian, 9.3% Latino

48% male, 52% female

22% < age 18

Percentage of people living in Fulton and DeKalb counties who speak a language other than English in their home: 16% Fulton County, 19% DeKalb County

14% poverty rate

UNINSURED: Fulton County 11%, DeKalb County 14%

\$11.5 million in uncompensated care (fiscal year 2022)

2021 PATIENT IMPACT

16,000+ PATIENTS SERVED

56,836 in-person clinic encounters, 5,160 virtual visits

OF THOSE SERVED

50% Black or African American, 40% White, 8% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Asian

51% Experiencing homelessness, 75% Had incomes below 100% of poverty level, 56% Uninsured, 38% Best served in a language other than English

U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts 2020 and BLS Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, 3rd quarter 2022. Accessed 12/10/2022.

LOCATIONS

Women's Recuperative Care Program
Opened 2018, Located at The City of Refuge, 14 beds

Men's Recuperative Care Program
Opened 2009, Located at Gateway 24/7 Homeless Services Center, 19 beds

IMPACT OF DISCHARGED CLIENTS

Did not have an ER visit during their RCP stay: 70% (Women), 53% (Men)

Were discharged into housing: 90% (Women), 51% (Men)

Were assisted with and received general assistance benefits (e.g., food stamps): 29% (Women), 62% (Men)

Women - FY23-Quarter 1 (7/7/2022 - 9/30/2022)
Men - FY22 (7/1/2021 - 6/30/2022)

JANUARY 13, 12pm-1pm: Healthcare Access 101 Forum





DR. MICHELLE AU
Georgia State Representative
House District 50

LEAH CHAN
Senior Health Analyst
GA Budget and Policy Institute

DANNY KANSO
Legislative Strategy Director
GA Budget and Policy Institute

HEALTHCARE ACCESS 101
Georgia, the ACA, Medicaid Waivers, Coverage Concerns, and What You Need to Know for the 2023 Legislative Session

Join me and healthcare policy experts from the [Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#) to review the state of Georgia's healthcare policy.

This webinar is open to all legislators and staff in the Georgia General Assembly, as well as to the general public. [To join us, register HERE.](#)

JANUARY 26, 9am-5pm: #TeamAu Blood Drive

Join us for our first **#TeamAu Blood Drive** in 2023 down at the Capitol!

There is a national shortage of donated blood. This blood could be life-saving for trauma patients, cancer patients, patients with sickle cell disease, and patients needing surgery, just to name a few. Your donation could save up to 3 lives!

Sign up [HERE!](#)

Walk in appointments will also be available!



Donate

As always, please do not hesitate to [reach out to our office](#) should you need any assistance, would like to drop by to visit during session, or if your school would like to arrange for me to visit with students. It has been my honor to represent you in the State Senate, and I look forward to continuing to fight for you in the State House.

In Service,

Handwritten signature of W. Mitchell

Paid for by Au for Georgia Inc.

5805 State Bridge Road, Suite G238
Johns Creek, Georgia 30097
United States

If you believe you received this message in error or wish to no longer receive email from us, please
(Unsubscribing is not supported in previews).

Paid for by Dr. Michelle Au for State Senate, Inc.
Dr. Michelle Au for State Senate, Inc.
5805 State Bridge Rd, Suite G #237
John's Creek, GA 30097
United States