

{{FirstName or 'Friends'}} --

The 2023 session of the Georgia General Assembly is officially underway, and we are already hard at work making sure HD 50 is well represented under the Gold Dome.

This week we swore in legislators for the 2023-2024 biennium, with a huge amount of turnover in both the Senate and the House. While I served in the state Senate last term, after the last redistricting cycle I'm proud to represent Johns Creek and a portion of Alpharetta in the Georgia House of Representatives.



Many people have asked how this will change my role in the legislature. The short answer is: *not much*. While the size and outlines of my district are

different, legislators in either chamber can write and pass bills, work on legislative committees, form caucuses, and represent the issues more important to their constituents at the Capitol.

I will continue to focus on health policy as a key piece of my mission, and I feel honored to be able to keep doing this vital work.

LEGISLATION AND ISSUES TO WATCH

While the first year of a biennium usually starts off slow, we've already had some legislation move through our chamber that could have some major implications for Georgia's future.

This week the House voted on its "**Rules, Ethics, and Decorum for the 2023-2024 Biennium.**" While this might sound like a *pro forma* piece of housekeeping, the Rules are tremendously important, and in the past have been engineered to suppress the power of the Minority party and weaken our ability to pass good legislation for our constituents, while allowing the Majority to more easily push through harmful legislation (like the 6 week abortion ban, permitless carry, and draconian voter suppression laws).



Some of the most problematic amendments to the Rules this session have the potential to **chill free speech, limit accountability of legislators to the public, and significantly undermine local control.** The new Rules could particularly have implications for [testimony in the probe against former President Trump](#) seeking to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

Though the amended Rules package was ultimately passed, I was proud to see that **every Democratic lawmaker (and one Republican!) [voted against it.](#)**



On our end, my office filed our first two bills at the end of the first week. They are both **gun safety bills**. The first would extend **background checks** to cover all private gun sales and transfers, thereby closing a loophole in federal law. The second would require a **three day waiting period** for all firearm purchases, which builds in a “cooling off” buffer that could mitigate gun impulse acts of gun violence including mass shootings, domestic violence, and suicide.

I have also dropped a House Resolution proposing a **ballot referendum question** asking voters whether Georgia’s **redistricting commission**, tasked with drawing our Congressional, state, and local electoral maps, should be **independent** from the legislature. I strongly believe that voters should choose their elected officials, rather than elected officials cherry-picking their voters by gerrymandering their own maps, and it seems only fair to put that question to the voters themselves.



I was also proud to cosponsor two House Democratic Caucus priority bills, both of which addressed the issue of increasing healthcare coverage in Georgia.

Healthcare is an economic issue, it's a workforce issue, and it's a moral issue. I am proud to work with House Democratic leadership on the health policy arm of their ambitious and people-centered platform.

All these pieces of legislation will have bill numbers by next week, check our newsletter then for updates to track these bills as they move through the committee process.

Interested in a **Georgia Politics 101 tutorial** on how to keep up with floor sessions, committee meetings, bills, votes, and your elected officials? [Check out my thread on Twitter](#) that can walk you through step-by-step!

HEALTHCARE UNSCRAMBLED

Tuesday I was honored to speak on the legislative panel at the **Georgians for a Healthy Future's** annual "Healthcare Unscrambled" event, where we discussed a number of wide-ranging healthcare issues from [expansion of coverage](#), to operationalizing the goals set forth in last session's [Mental Health Parity Act](#), to addressing healthcare workforce shortages, to the impending catastrophe that could result from [Medicaid Unwinding](#).



I also spoke about one of my priority bills this session which aims to [raise the state tobacco tax](#) up to the national average. Not only would this provide **revenue** that the state could reinvest into our public health system, it would ultimately **decrease healthcare spending and improve quality of life** by disincentivizing smoking and vaping.

I was pleased to speak with Georgia Public Broadcasting about my tobacco tax bill. **You can listen to our conversation [here](#).**



Lawmaker says raising tax on cigarettes will boost economy and Georgians' health

January 11, 2023 2:40 PM

By: [Ellen Eldridge](#)



HEALTHCARE FRONT AND CENTER FOR BUDGET WEEK

Next week is **Budget Week** under the Gold Dome, where legislators take a first stab at drafting the state's budget for the next fiscal year. **A state's budget is a statement of its priorities**, and it is my hope that a key focus will be increasing

access for our most vulnerable populations, including patients lacking healthcare coverage.

Part of my work this week was highlighting the importance of these priorities for those we serve.

Legislative Field Trip to Mercy Care

My office organized a legislative field trip to a clinic just five minutes from the capitol run by [Mercy Care](#), an organization which has been serving vulnerable patients in Atlanta for more than a century.



The dedicated administrators and staff at Mercy Care gave lawmakers a detailed review of the organization's mission to provide compassionate, high quality **physical and mental health care for indigent patients and the homeless in the Atlanta metro area**. They also shared some of the challenges they continue to face, and possibilities for accommodating escalating patient needs, particularly in light of a shortage of mental health providers and safety net services with the recent closure of the Atlanta Medical Center.



Lawmakers came away with a much deeper understanding of community needs, and it is my hope that we can address some of these needs in the process of helping to draft the state budget, particularly when it comes to budgeting for community and behavioral health.

Healthcare as an Economic Issue

Our office was also pleased to host a forum with [Leah Chan](#) and [Danny Kanso](#) from the non-partisan [Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#), to take legislators through the current healthcare access landscape as it stands in Georgia, opportunities for extending coverage in **a state with one of the highest uninsured rates in the country**, and the fiscal arguments for covering more patients.



The graphic features a blue background with a network-like pattern. At the top, three circular portraits of speakers are shown. Below each portrait is a grey box with their names and titles. The central text is in a white box with a blue border. At the bottom left is the Seal of the State of Georgia, and at the bottom right is a red box with white text.

DR. MICHELLE AU
Georgia State Representative
House District 50

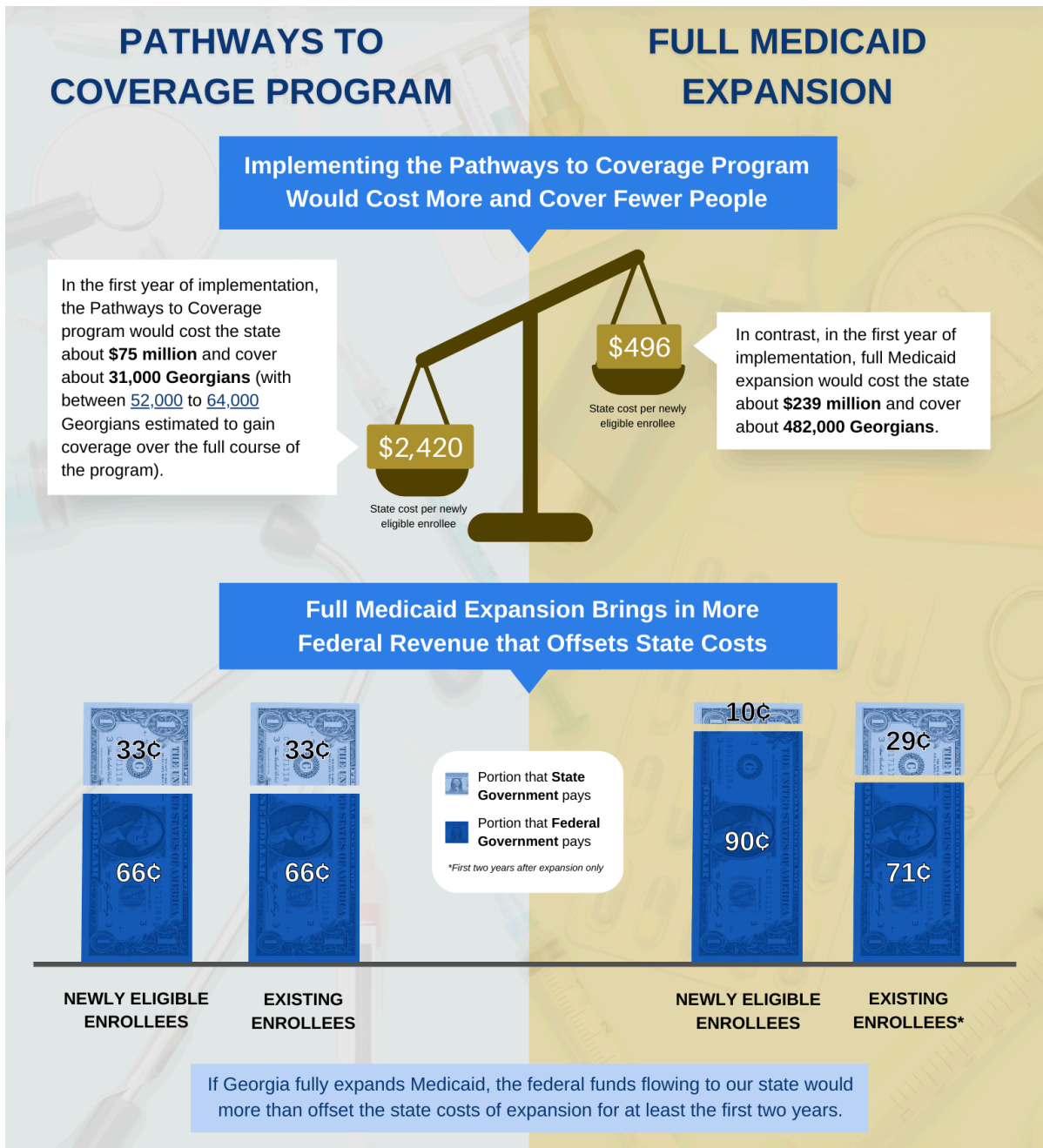
LEAH CHAN
Senior Health Analyst
GA Budget and Policy Institute

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*

WEBINAR FRIDAY 1/13 @ 12:00PM
Register below or join via Facebook Live @AUFORGA

You can rewatch our conversation [here](#), or review [this article](#) comparing the cost of full Medicaid Expansion to the Governor’s “Pathways to Coverage” program, a **Medicaid waiver** plan which includes a work requirement for patients and **covers hundreds of thousands fewer patients while costing the state in excess of \$150 million more.**



Source: [Prior GBPI analysis by L. Harker](#) of data from [state fiscal note](#) and from [Pathways to Coverage application and approval](#); [Kaiser Family Foundation](#); [Pathways to Coverage approval from CMS](#).

GEORGIA'S FIRST LEGISLATIVE AAPI CAUCUS

I am honored to have been elected Chair of **Georgia's inaugural Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Caucus**, one of the largest AAPI state legislative caucuses in the country.

The Caucus had its first meeting this Monday, where we approved our bylaws and clarified some of our legislative priorities. Broadly speaking, these include

increasing AAPI voter outreach and investments in our immigrant communities to ensure that access to education, jobs, and economic opportunity are available to all.



L to R: Rep. Saira Draper, Rep. Ruwa Romman, Rep. Farooq Mughal (Vice Chair), Rep. Sam Park, Rep. Michelle Au (Chair), Rep. Soo Hong (Secretary), Rep. Long Tran (Treasurer), Sen. Nabilah Islam, Rep. Marvin Lim. Not pictured: Sen. Sheikh Rahman, Rep. Charlice Byrd. Emeritus members: Former Rep. BJay Pak, Former Sen. Zahra Karinshak, Former Rep. Bee Nguyen



I was pleased to be invited back to [GPB Lawmakers](#) with Donna Lowry this week to talk about the AAPI Caucus, the reason behind our formation, and some of our legislative priorities for the upcoming session. You can watch the full episode [here](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

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. **A single donor's gift could save up to 3 lives!**

I'm so pleased to have the support not just of legislators on both sides of the aisle, but from our colleagues at the Secretary of State's office, on the Georgia Supreme Court, partners working at Atlanta City Hall, journalists, lobbyists, and countless staffers, all who work near the Capitol. This blood drive will also be open to the public, and I have every confidence that we will be able to break last year's donation record and help patients all over the state of Georgia!

Interested in donating blood? Sign up [HERE](#). Walk in appointments will also be available!



As always, please do not hesitate to [reach out to our office](#) should you need any assistance, would like to drop by to visit the Capitol, 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Michelle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Paid for by Au for Georgia Inc.

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