

{{FirstName or 'Friends'}} --

Hard to believe that we are moving into the last week of the 2023 legislative session! That said, the last few days of session are always the most hectic and unpredictable, where bills we thought were dead are resurrected, and where egos, power struggles, and legislative hostage standoffs take center stage.

This year promises to be no different, and there are a few **key bills and issues we're watching particularly closely** as we barrel into Sine Die.

Let's dive in.



LEGISLATION AND ISSUES TO WATCH

First let's discuss some of the more **closely watched legislation** that came before us last week.

SB 233 is a deeply problematic bill that furthers a longstanding Republican goal to **siphon money from our public school systems to divert to private schools**. This legislation would create what the authors call a "Promise Scholarship Account" (essentially a voucher) for families to [pay for private school tuition or qualified education expenses with funds from the state government](#).

The bill would set aside **\$6,500 per academic year** into a "consumer-directed account," and a family's acceptance of these funds would **relinquish their access to federal protections for students with disabilities and state laws for an adequate public education**, such as background checks for teachers. It would also divert public funds from schools serving majority Black students and those with a majority living in poverty.

SB 233 Potentially Diverts Hundreds of Millions Annually

	Projected Switchers (Public to Private)	Diverted State Funds from Switchers	Projected Vouchers to Students Already in Private Schools	Additional State Funding	Total Voucher Amount
Year 1	6,684	\$40,104,000	4,623	\$27,738,000	\$67,842,000
Year 2	6,684	\$40,104,000	6,478	\$38,868,000	\$78,972,000
Year 3	6,684	\$40,104,000	8,358	\$50,148,000	\$90,252,000
Year 4	6,684	\$40,104,000	10,285	\$61,710,000	\$101,814,000
Year 5	6,684	\$40,104,000	12,282	\$73,692,000	\$113,796,000
Year 6	6,684	\$40,104,000	14,361	\$86,166,000	\$126,270,000
Year 7	6,684	\$40,104,000	16,474	\$98,844,000	\$138,948,000
Year 8	6,684	\$40,104,000	18,701	\$112,206,000	\$152,310,000
Year 9	6,684	\$40,104,000	20,693	\$124,158,000	\$164,262,000
Year 10	6,684	\$40,104,000	22,400	\$134,400,000	\$174,504,000
Year 11	6,684	\$40,104,000	23,810	\$142,860,000	\$182,964,000
Year 12	6,684	\$40,104,000	25,064	\$150,384,000	\$190,488,000

Note: "Projected Switchers" are calculated at two percent of current public school enrollment at eligible schools. "Projected Vouchers to Students Already in Private Schools" is an estimate of those who would enter pre-K, Kindergarten or 1st grade but are either already in private education or whose parents/guardians would have enrolled in private school regardless of the passage of SB 233. This estimate is based on research from New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Missouri and Arizona that shows 75 percent of universal voucher recipients are already in private or homeschooling. This number increases annually because as new students take the voucher the state has to continue paying for the education of those who took the voucher in prior years. More notes on the methodology are in the appendix.

GEORGIA BUDGET & POLICY INSTITUTE  GBPI.org

Needless to say, **I stand in strong opposition to this bill.** HD 50 has some of the best public schools in the state, and many families, mind included, have moved to this area specifically because of our high-performing schools and excellent teachers.

Diverting public funds to private schools would not only drain resources from our public school system, the authors of the bill never even obtained a fiscal note for this proposal, which means **they are asking us to pass this bill without even giving a projected estimate of its cost.** (A conservative estimate from the [Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](https://www.gbpi.org/) project this program will cost **\$190.5**

[million annually](#)—\$150.4 million of which would require dollars above current appropriations in the state budget.)

Georgia House Democrats [mounted a robust argument against this bill](#), and managed to hold the floor until **SB 233 was ultimately tabled late Thursday afternoon**. This is great news, though it remains possible that SB 233 may come back to a floor vote in the final two legislative days of the session.



* * *

On Tuesday, [SB 140](#) returned to the Senate for an **Agree/Disagree vote** after it was amended in the [House Public Health Committee](#) and [passed 96-75 in a House floor vote](#).

As you may recall, SB 140 is the latest piece of culture war legislation being advanced by Georgia Republicans to **limit healthcare options for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth**, including banning hormone therapy. It now also **exposes medical professionals to criminal and civil liability** for providing care in keeping with patient care standards and best practices [recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and many other medical societies. During the House floor debate [I called SB 140 “state-mandated malpractice,”](#) because that’s precisely what it is.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Georgia Politics AJC Peachtree Road Race Opinion Sports AJC Live EPaper [Newsletters](#)

Bill to limit health care for transgender kids heads to governor's desk



[Link to article](#)

Despite the best efforts of Democrats in both chambers, SB 140 **passed out of the Senate** after a [final vote of 31-21](#). It then headed to Governor Kemp's desk, where it was quickly [signed into law](#). The [ACLU has already said it plans to sue the state](#) over this law, which amounts to “interfering with the rights of Georgia parents to get life-saving medical treatment for their children and preventing physicians from properly caring for their patients.”

You can find **national and Atlanta-specific resources** in [this guide](#) compiled by members of the [SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW](#) staff and fellows from the [2022 Leading Initiatives for Trans Equity \(LITE\) program](#).

* * *

In 2020, Congress enacted the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which included **a requirement that Medicaid programs keep people continuously enrolled** through the end of the month in which the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) ends, in exchange for enhanced federal funding.

This was **to ensure that no Medicaid patient would lose health insurance coverage during the pandemic.**



Primarily due to the continuous enrollment provision, Medicaid enrollment has grown substantially compared to before the pandemic and the uninsured rate has dropped. But when the continuous enrollment provision ends on March 31st, **hundreds of thousands of people in Georgia could lose coverage, the majority of them children.**

This graduated process of requiring Medicaid re-enrollment is colloquially known as [Medicaid Unwinding](#). I see it more accurately as the “**Medicaid Cliff.**”

You can [watch my conversation](#) from January with Danny Kanso and Leah Chan GPBI on the specifics of Medicaid Unwinding and ways to **mitigate the potential coverage loss** and ensure that Georgians can stay insured and healthy.



If you are currently covered by Medicaid or have a child in your family covered by PeachCare, please visit staycovered.ga.gov to find all the information you need to stay informed on your family’s status. If you prefer, you can [visit an office near you](#) or call 1-877-GA-DHS-GO (1-877-423-4746).

TEAM AU BILL TRACKER

I wanted to give everyone an update on [HB 161](#), the **Pediatric Health Safe Storage Act**, our top priority piece of legislation for the year. As you may recall, HB 161 received a subcommittee hearing one week ago, **the first and only piece of gun safety legislation to be heard** in our Republican majority state legislature this session.

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HEALTH

Firearm safety bill gets rare hearing in GOP-controlled Georgia Legislature

BY: ROSS WILLIAMS - MARCH 16, 2023 2:37 PM



[Link to article](#)

We of course **deeply appreciate that HB 161 was heard**, and are thankful to our colleagues for listening to the important community testimony in favor of the bill. However, it was also made clear that this bill wouldn't advance beyond what the committee chairman deemed "this conversation," and that a safe storage law to address the #1 cause of death in children and teenagers in the country **would receive no further consideration towards passage.**



So we made a reasonable request. **We asked that HB 161, the Pediatric Health Safe Storage Act, be recommitted to the [Public Health Committee](#).**

As the testimony made clear: gun violence is a public health issue. And given that the Public Safety Committee has no interest in the bill, Public Health is where it belongs.



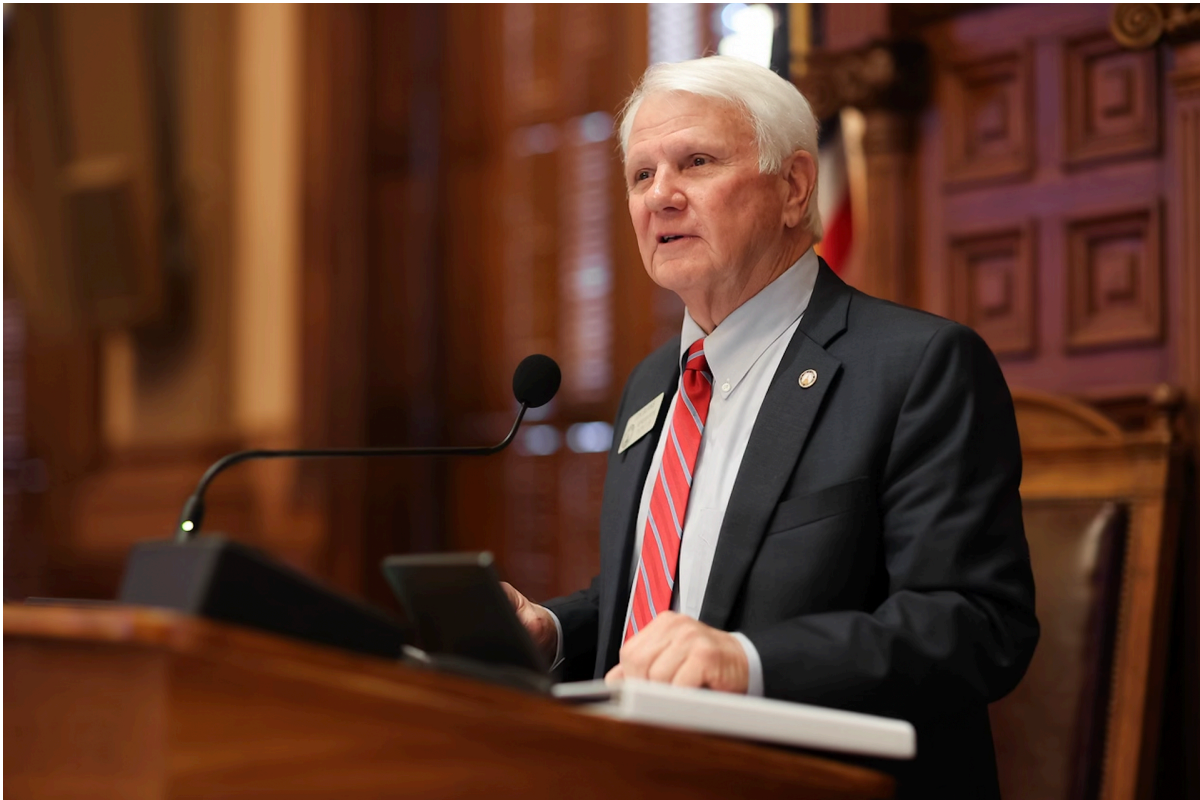
But while Public Safety has no interest in HB 161, and even after the Chair of Public Health personally asked for its recommittal, **the GOP leadership refuses to let it go.**

Because allowing a gun safety bill to be recommitted to the Public Health committee would be a tacit admission that **gun violence is in fact a public health issue**, and to our avidly pro-gun Republican majority, this is anathema. And trapping a common sense gun safety bill in a committee where it cannot be fairly heard, and where the issues cannot be substantively discussed, is just a way to quietly kill it in captivity.

But this isn't over.

We still have a second year to move this bill forward, and that's precisely what we intend to do.

We never would have even gotten HB 161 the committee hearing it did without the **brave, strong, and unflinching support of gun safety advocates from around the state.** Medical professionals, mental health organizations, youth activists, and gun safety groups like [Everytown](#) and [Moms Demand Action](#) stood up, and because of you all, HB 161 was the first piece of gun safety legislation to be heard in the Georgia General Assembly in years. **Public health legislation should be evaluated by the Public Health Committee.** Inch by inch, we're moving this ball. And we can do it again.



The Speaker of the House has the final say on committee assignments. **[Tell Speaker John Burns](#)** to let HB 161, the Pediatric Health Safe Storage Act, be recommitted to the Public Health Committee where it belongs.

[Here is Speaker Burns' legislative contact information, including office phone, email, Capitol address, and home district contacts.](#)

He's a decent man who cares deeply about Georgia's children. *Let's make it happen.*



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ramadan Mubarak to all those observing this month! HD 50 is home to many Muslim Georgians, and it has been my deep honor to be welcomed by your community, to celebrate with you, and to make sure your voices are heard at the state Capitol.

Wishing for a festive and reflective season with your families, filled with health, happiness, and prosperity.



One of the most important aspects of representing voices that are not as frequently seen or heard at the Capitol is making sure we **stand up against ignorance and discrimination**. Earlier this week, during an early morning committee hearing, a Senate member impugned the Georgia Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-Georgia), a Muslim civil rights and

advocacy group, parroting conservative media claims that CAIR is affiliated with a group the U.S. government has designated a terrorist organization.

Members of the Legislative AAPI Caucus—which counts all four Muslim state legislators among our ranks—put out a statement **denouncing Islamophobia**, which can be insidious, pervasive, and too often defended. *“Hate of any kind has no home in Georgia, and that includes hate against our Muslim friends, neighbors, and family.”*



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HOUSE COMMITTEES

Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight
Public Health
Special Rules

*March 24, 2023
Atlanta, GA*

On Thursday March 23rd, during an early morning committee hearing, a Senate member impugned the Georgia Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-Georgia), a Muslim civil rights and advocacy group. This member repeated conservative media claims that CAIR-Georgia is affiliated with a group the U.S. government has designated a terrorist organization.

As members of the Georgia's Legislative Asian American Pacific Islander Caucus, we denounce Islamophobia in all its forms, and find this type of broad smear against Muslim Americans particularly tasteless on the first day of Ramadan, one of the holiest months in the Islamic faith.

Hate of any kind has no home in Georgia, and that includes hate against our Muslim friends, neighbors, and family.

Signed,

Rep. Michelle Au
House District 50

Rep. Marvin Lim
House District 98

Sen. Sheikh Rahman
Senate District 5

Rep. Saira Draper
House District 90

Farooq Mughal
House District 105

Rep. Ruwa Roman
House District 97

Sen. Nabilah Islam
Senate District 7

Rep. Sam Park
House District 107

Rep. Long Tran
House District 80

On a more joyful note, this week the Legislative AAPI Caucus was delighted to welcome **Younghoe Koo** to the Gold Dome! Younghoe is a [South Korean American football player](#) and a [placekicker for the Atlanta Falcons](#). We're very proud of his accomplishments, and for showing that **Asian Americans can excel in every corner of American life**, including in the NFL!



One of the most important parts of my job is to meet with constituents, advocates, and organizations who want to work with me to advance or block legislation that will impact their lives. This week, the [Georgia Youth Justice Coalition](#) stopped by to share their vision for a path to safer and more equitable schools for students.



Lobbyists and student organizers with the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition take a selfie after a meeting with Senator Michelle Au on Thursday.

While they were deeply saddened by the passage of a bill restricting healthcare for trans youth, they were heartened to see the vigorous defense mounted against school vouchers, and pledge to continue working with us on advancing gun safety legislation in Georgia. **I am so proud of the work they continue to do**, and of their continued dedication to fight for the future they deserve.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan to join me for a Post-Sine Die Wrapup in Johns Creek! We'll review what happened in the final days of session, what legislation made it through and what's still on deck for next year, and what #TeamAu plans to work on in the off session before we gavel back in on January 8th, 2024.

DR. MICHELLE
AU
AUonGA.COM

SINE DIE WRAP UP HD 50 TOWN HALL



THURS 4/6, 6:30 - 8:00PM
MAJI TEA BAR, JOHNS CREEK
5725 STATE BRIDGE ROAD

Thursday, April 6th, 6:30 - 8:00pm

[Maji Tea Bar, Johns Creek](#)

5725 State Bridge Rd.
Johns Creek, GA 30022



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.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle".

Paid for by Au for Georgia Inc.

5/14/24, 12:05 PM

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