

From: Representative Don Parsons

March 19, 2016

The House reconvened on Monday, March 14 for day 36 of the 2016 legislative session and an extremely busy week, as sine die is just days away. We had a busy legislative agenda for the week, both on the House floor and in committee meetings to continue to vote on and review legislation. With day 40 right around the corner next, many more House and Senate bills received final passage this week and are now on their way to Governor Deal's desk for consideration.

This week, the House unanimously passed Senate Bill 364, the "Quality Based Education Act," to revise annual performance evaluations for public school teachers and state mandated testing. SB 364 would revise evaluations so that student growth would account for 30 percent of a teacher's evaluation, down from the current 50 percent. Additionally, professional growth would account for 20 percent, and the test component of teacher evaluations is lowered from 70 percent to 40 percent. The bill would also reduce the number of state mandated tests from 32 to 24 for students in grades K-12 by removing social studies and science milestone tests in grades 3, 4, 6, and 7. SB 364 would also ask local school systems to move all testing as close to the end of the school year as possible to ensure the students have received maximum exposure to the material prior to testing. SB 364 also adds formative testing in 1st and 2nd grades to measure progress and early learning to guarantee that all students are proficient in reading by 3rd

grade and proficient in math by 5th grade. The bill is the result of multiple meetings with teachers, administrators, parents, and advocacy groups from across the state who gave input and opinions on what should be revised in the current evaluation and testing systems. This legislation will give our teachers more freedom to teach Georgia's students and will take the burden off both students and teachers. Our teachers greatly influence the youth in our state, and as such, we want to provide them with the resources to have the best opportunity to succeed in the classroom so that our students have the best opportunity to succeed in the future.

Another bill that received unanimous passage in the House this week was Senate Bill 402, legislation that would place a moratorium on new applications for licensure of narcotic treatment programs and create a commission to study the current licensure requirements in Georgia. While current license holders would be eligible to renew their license during the moratorium, SB 402 would put a temporary freeze on issuing new narcotic treatment facility licenses through June 30, 2017. During this time, the State Commission on Narcotic Treatment Programs, established under this bill, would study the need for any changes to the licensure requirements for these programs to ensure the safety of Georgia's citizens. The commission would be tasked with examining the current narcotic treatment program licensure requirements for adequacy; assessing how the current licensure requirements and enforcement of the requirements provide adequate medical, counseling, vocational, educational, mental health assessment, and social services to patients enrolled in these programs and how these programs can be

assessed for achieving recovery; determining if the geographic service areas are reasonable and balanced between population density and service proximity; determining the cause and effect of hospital admittance for overdose and incidents of suicide, if any, in relation to the adequate licensure and oversight of these programs; and hearing expert testimony on the effectiveness of nonnarcotic, medically assisted treatments for narcotic dependence and determining what legislative changes, if any, need to be made to address the commission's findings. The commission would be comprised of three members from both the House and the Senate, appointed by the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor, and five members appointed by the Governor, including the commissioner of the Department of Community Health and the commissioner of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. Georgia ranks third in the nation for the highest number of narcotic treatment clinics with 62 clinics, despite the fact that we are eighth in total population. I am hopeful that this legislation will provide a solution to the increasing number of drug abuse and overdoses we see each year and ultimately save lives. There is a vital need for these treatment centers, but we must also get to the root of the issue and find out why there are so many of these facilities in Georgia.

We also passed Senate Bill 350 and Senate Resolution 558 this week, which would allocate funds from firework sales in our state to Georgia trauma centers, fire services, and local public safety purposes. SB 350 would allocate 55 percent of the excise tax revenues from all fireworks sales in Georgia to the Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission, which was created in 2007 to maintain a trauma

center network, coordinate existing trauma facilities and direct patients to the best available facility for their needs. Additionally, 40 percent of the excise tax revenues collected from firework sales would go to the Georgia Firefighter Standards and Training Commission, which provides certification standards for all firefighters, fire inspectors, fire investigators and fire and life safety educators. The funds would be used to implement a grant program to improve the equipping and training of firefighters and the rating of fire departments by the Insurance Services Office. Finally, five percent of the tax revenues would go to local governments to be used for public safety purposes and the operation of 9-1-1 systems. Senate Resolution 558 is the companion legislation to SB 350 and would amend the Georgia Constitution in order to allocate the excise tax funds, if approved by voter referendum on the November ballot. During the 2015 legislative session, the General Assembly passed legislation allowing the commercial sale and use of fireworks in Georgia. Should these measures receive final passage through the General Assembly and passage from Georgia voters in November, we would be able to provide a beneficial and much needed funding to the trauma, fire, and local government networks in our state by granting them the flexibility to improve and continue providing exceptional service to all Georgians.

The House also passed a measure this week to toughen the penalties for criminals who commit domestic violence in Georgia. Senate Bill 193 would make it a felony if a person commits family violence and has a previous conviction for family violence battery in Georgia, or in any other state. Prosecutors would be able to issue repeat family violence offenders a felony instead of another

misdemeanor, closing a loophole that previously allowed some offenders to receive misdemeanor charges upon their second family battery conviction. The bill would also make the crime punishable by one to five years in prison. This legislation would strengthen our judicial system and punish violent, serial criminals, while also protecting those who they seek to harm.

This week we passed another bill to keep Georgians safe in Senate Bill 367, a comprehensive update to Georgia's criminal justice reform legislation. SB 367 would expand Georgia's accountability courts to include "operating under the influence" court divisions as an alternative to the traditional justice system with the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism rates. Any court with jurisdiction over DUI or boating under the influence cases would be able to create a division of their courts to handle those cases. Similarly, any juvenile court would be able to create a "family treatment" court division to address issues within families through court intervention and the reduction of dependency. The goal of a family treatment court would be to reduce alcohol or drug abuse and addiction in child dependency proceedings; improve outcomes for families when dependency is based on alcohol or drug use and addiction; increase the personal, familial and societal accountability of defendants in child dependency proceedings; and promote effective intervention and use of resources among child welfare personnel, law enforcement, treatment providers, community agencies, and the courts. SB 367 would also allow the Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice to operate charter schools within state juvenile justice facilities under the control of the State Charter School Commission to allow children who are

incarcerated to continue to receive an education. Furthermore, individuals who have a suspended license as a result of a criminal conviction would be able to receive their license sooner under SB 367 by allowing time spent in prison to count toward license suspension time. The bill would also add court-mandated activities such as attending programs, treatment, and accountability court to the list of limited driving exemptions for drivers with limited driving permits. SB 367 would change the Georgia First Offender Statute to allow courts to set a date at when a defendant would be exonerated of guilt and have their criminal record restricted as long as the defendant successfully complies with the sentence and does not receive future convictions. The bill also updates probation stipulations if an individual fails to pay a fine or report to their probation officer and will now include a scheduled hearing in court. The legislation would also let inmates who have served sentences for certain drug-related offenses or repeat offenders of non-violent felonies be eligible for parole if they had no convictions for violent felonies; completed at least six years of their total sentence; were considered a low risk for recidivism; earned a high school diploma; and had no serious disciplinary violations in the past 12 months in jail. Those convicted of felony drug convictions would now be allowed to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits upon their release to help ease the transition to re-entry. Finally, the bill would prohibit professional licensing boards from refusing to license an individual because of an arrest or conviction of a felony unless it directly related to the occupation they were attempting to be licensed. Legislative efforts over the past several

years have made Georgia a national leader in criminal justice reform, and the modifications in SB 367 are a further example of how we can continue to be smart on crime, keep the citizens of Georgia safe, and help those who re-enter to become productive members of society. Providing alternatives to incarceration in the form of education and treatment not only allow our non-violent offenders to have a second chance at life, but will decrease recidivism rates. These efforts serve to make Georgia a safer place for all of our citizens, and I am proud of this body and the work we have done to offer those protections to our state.

This week, we also had a special guest stop by the House. On Monday, we were honored to have Atlanta Braves legend Henry "Hank" Aaron and his wife Billye join us on the House floor, where we recognized the couple for their work in the community. Hank Aaron played 21 seasons with the Milwaukee/Atlanta Braves and completed his career with two seasons with the Milwaukee Brewers. During his 23 year career, Aaron was an MLB All-Star for 21 seasons, still holding many records for most All-Star selections, a three-time Golden Glove right fielder, and the 1957 National League Most Valuable Player. Despite receiving many awards throughout his long career, Aaron is probably best remembered for his 715th homerun on April 8, 1974 which broke the previous home run record held by Babe Ruth. Since his retirement from baseball, Hank and Billye Aaron have been very active in their community, working with the Andrew Young Foundation and the Morehouse School of Medicine to advance the education of African-American citizens. Their commitment to the community is inspiring, and it was an honor to meet such a legendary couple.

Next week will be the final week of the 2016 legislative session. On Thursday, March 24 we will convene one final time this session for legislative day 40, or "sine die," the last day we have to pass any legislation this year. While the end is near, there is still work to be done and many issues to be considered, and your input on these issues is very important to me. My colleagues and I will work long hours every day next week to ensure that we are doing what is best for Georgia and its citizens. If you are following legislation that you would like to see passed, or if you have any questions about the bills that the General Assembly has considered this session, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Your input will help guide my decisions during this crucial time, and I appreciate all of your feedback. You can reach me at my Capitol office at (404) 656-9198 or by email at repdon@gmail.com.

As always, thank you for allowing be to be your representative.