

News from under the Golden Dome and Senator Dean Burke

We had yet another busy week here at the Capitol, convening for four more legislative days and making significant progress on an number of legislative priorities. The Senate passed a total of ten bills covering topics ranging from looking after our military veterans and their families, to protecting victims of human trafficking across the state. We also fulfilled one-half of our constitutional obligation and passed the Amended Budget for the 2021 Fiscal Year.



Senator Dean Burke

Of particular note were Senate Bills 33 and 34, which would allow for a victim of human trafficking to claim a civil cause of action against their perpetrator and allow a victim to petition the court to change their name under seal, respectively. These bills were not only a priority of the General Assembly, but also of Gov. Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp. While human trafficking remains a vile and heinous act, these bills ensure that the legal system is looking out for the victims and granting them the resources they need to seek justice and to return to a safe life.

Governor Brian Kemp, Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan, Speaker David Ralston, and other members of House and Senate leadership gathered this week to announce that 57,159 state employees who earn less than \$80,000 will receive a one-time bonus of \$1,000 during the current fiscal year. Leveraging savings from federal assistance, the AFY 2021 budget includes an additional \$59.6 million for these hardworking employees, and the \$80,000 cap aligns with the Teacher Salary Schedule's maximum salary.

To address a more than 90 percent turnover rate, correctional officers will also receive this bonus in addition to a 10 percent salary

increase that is included in this budget. Since the pandemic began almost a year ago, our state employees have worked tirelessly to continue to provide state services to every Georgian and this bonus is a way to thank them for their dedication to our state.

Gov. Kemp, Lt. Gov. Duncan, and Speaker Ralston announced the expansion of rural broadband service across 18 counties in Middle Georgia through a new Electric Membership Cooperation (EMC) partnership. The House has spearheaded initiatives and legislation in recent years to support rural economic development, including broadband expansion.

After weeks of debates and hearings, the Amended Budget for 2021 Fiscal Year (AFY21) officially received final passage and has been sent to the Governor's desk. Completing this task was no small feat and required an unprecedented level of cooperation between General Assembly staff and Georgia's state departments and agencies. While this time last year we were forced to make some difficult finan-

cial decisions based on an expected decline in revenue, we are happy to report that the resiliency of Georgia's businesses buoyed our state's economy, and we are in a much stronger financial position than originally expected.

The Amended Fiscal Year 2021 (AFY 2021) budget, or House Bill 80, also received final passage this week. As passed, the AFY21 budget totals \$25.56 billion and addresses many of the areas where finances were reduced during last year's budget cycle. Some of these are:

K-12 education made up the largest single expenditure in the budget at \$9.6 billion, including a \$567 million restoration of funds initially cut from the original FY21 budget.

\$40 million to procure 520 new school buses, which function not only as transportation for students, but also serve the vital purposes of delivering lunches to children in rural areas and serving as Wi-Fi hotspots.

To assist with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, \$27 million was allocated to the Department of Public Health to revamp and mod-

ernize their IT infrastructure and public health surveillance technology. This funding will not only help speed up research on COVID-19, but will help identify potential future outbreaks.

While these are only a few highlights, I encourage you to take a look at the full budget <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/58910> for more information on how your tax dollars are allocated.

With the supplemental budget officially behind us, we are now prepared to take on our other priorities of the session including election reform, strengthening our healthcare system, and, of course, getting to work on the General Budget for the 2022 Fiscal Year. If you have any question or concerns about the budget or about any of the legislation in this document, I encourage you to reach out to my office.

I remain dedicated to serving your interests as your State Senator.

Please feel free to contact me with your thoughts or concerns on pending issues, or whenever I can be of service.

You can also stay in touch

by visiting <https://www.legis.ga.gov> to watch a live stream of the Senate in action, as well as archived committee meetings, and review legislation that we are considering. I am honored to serve Senate District 11. Thank you for allowing me to be your Senator.

Sincerely,
Senator Dean Burke



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Citizen's arrests in Georgia to face limits in General Assembly bill

State officials unveiled details of a bipartisan bill Tuesday aimed at revising Georgia's citizen's arrest law to limit who can detain someone suspected of a crime.

The first major criminal-justice measure proposed in the 2021 legislative session, sponsored by Rep. Bert Reeves, R-Marietta, would repeal a current Georgia law that broadly allows private citizens to detain someone who commits a crime in their presence or during an escape attempt.

It would still allow owners and employees in businesses including restaurants, as well as security guards and out-of-jurisdiction police officers, to detain those believed to have committed a crime on their property - so long as they're handed over to local authorities within an hour.

The proposed changes would not affect the state's stand-your-ground law or any other legal protections for Georgians who seek to reasonably defend themselves from crimes committed against themselves or others, officials stressed at a news conference Tuesday.

"Our bill to overhaul the citizen's arrest statute is a balanced approach to protecting the lives and livelihoods of ourselves, our friends [and] our neighbors, while also preventing rogue vigilante-ism from threatening the security and God-given potential of all Georgians," said Gov. Brian Kemp.

Kemp, joined by more than a dozen top state lawmakers from both parties, called the state's current Civil War-era citizen's arrest law "an antiquated law that is ripe for abuse."

He said the bill stems from the killing of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man who was jogging in a neighborhood outside Brunswick on Feb. 23, 2020, when two white men who suspected him of robbing a nearby home under construction shot him dead while trying to detain him.

The two men, Travis and Gregory McMichael, were arrested months later after protests over police brutality and racial injustice swept across the country and drew attention to the lack of action in the case by coastal Georgia authorities. They have pleaded not guilty, citing the citizen's arrest law.

Anger over Arbery's death and protests over the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota on May 25, 2020, convinced a bipartisan slate of Georgia lawmakers last June to pass legislation outlawing hate crimes in the state. The citizen's arrest bill follows up on that measure, Kemp said.

"Like the anti-hate crimes legislation, reforming Georgia's citizen's arrest statute is first and foremost about who we are as a state," Kemp said Tuesday. "In Georgia, we value lives ... regardless of race, creed or culture."

The bill comes as Democratic lawmakers push a wide-ranging package of criminal-justice reform proposals including bans on certain police tactics like no-knock warrants and chokeholds, citizen-led oversight of inquiries into officer-involved shootings and stronger standards for use-of-force training.

Republican lawmakers have taken a less-expansive approach to criminal justice this session, so far filing bills to ease employment challenges for people on probation and carrying out Kemp's priority to crack down harder on human trafficking.

So far, Reeves' measure on citizen's arrests faces the best odds for passing in the Republican-controlled General Assembly, despite wariness by some Democratic leaders to accept the proposed legal protections for business owners to detain suspected criminals.

Rep. Calvin Smyre, D-Columbus, who is the legislature's longest-serving member, sought to quell concerns from within his party Tuesday by assuring the bill has backing from criminal-justice advocates and has elicited "excitement" from Arbery's family.

"I think we're on pretty good footing," Smyre said after the news conference. "We assured the [Arbery] family and those in Brunswick that citizen's arrest would be our next move. ... It would have been an abdication of our responsibility if we had not touched citizen's arrest early on in this legislative session."

The bill also has support from James Woodall, the president of Georgia's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, saying he "fully endorses" Reeves' measure.

"We urge members of both parties and in both chambers to do the same," Woodall said.

Bill to block defunding police in Georgia advances in state House

A bill aimed at preventing Georgia city and county governments from making deep cuts in the budgets of their local police agencies advanced in the Georgia House of Representatives Tuesday.

Sponsored by state Rep. Houston Gaines, R-Athens, the bill would limit local governments from reducing funds for police by more than 5% over a 10-year span. It includes exemptions for smaller jurisdictions and for spending on equipment purchases.

Gaines highlighted recent failed attempts by some Athens and Atlanta elected officials to slice millions of dollars from their police budgets amid protests over police brutality and racial injustice that swept across Georgia and the country last Summer.

"These efforts are underway in our state and certainly something I think we need to fight against," Gaines said. "We all recognize that supporting law enforcement is of the utmost importance and, in my

opinion, the most important role that our local governments have."

The bill cleared the House Governmental Affairs General Government Subcommittee and now heads to the full committee for another vote before potentially moving to the House floor.

The bill comes after last Summer's protests following high-profile killings of black men by police officers, including the deaths of George Floyd in Minnesota and Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta.

Property destruction and violence at some of those protests sparked a backlash from conservative leaders over a push by some progressive officials to curb police funding, dubbed "defund the police." The subject took center stage as an issue for both political parties in the 2020 election cycle.

Opposition to the bill came Tuesday from the Georgia Municipal Association and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), which represent

city and county governments. Decisions on police funding should be left to local officials, said Todd Edwards, ACCG's deputy legislative director.

"Police power is one of our inherent or supplemental powers under the constitution," Edwards said. "We'd like to maintain our flexibility to fund and manage police forces how our local elected officials - those accountable to the public - feel is the best use of taxpayer dollars."



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- ❖ Wear a mask when out in public or when you cannot keep distance inside.
- ❖ Practice physical distancing - six feet from those you don't live with.
- ❖ Wash your hands for 20 seconds several times throughout the day with soap and warm water.
- ❖ Follow the Governor's Executive Order and heed the guidance provided by public health officials.



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