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**\*\*Conference committee met Monday, March 30 late in the day: check out this issue's Budget 101 section to see the status of ICWP rate increase and number of NOW/COMP waivers!**

**\*\*Medical cannabis bill (HB 1), known as Haleigh's Hope, passes the House 160-1 last week. It is now on its way to the Governor to sign!**

**\*\*Last week it was announced that the autism insurance bill (SB 1) would be amended to HB 429 when the House and Senate insurance committees reached an agreement.**

### **Insider Highlights**

In the last couple weeks, there has been a flurry of work to get as many bills as possible through the bill process and passed in the final countdown to the end of session. Be sure to read the Bills section to get more details.

Late in the day Monday, March 30, the conference committee met to announce the compromises they had reached in the FY 2016 budget. The result of the Unlock requests are as follows: an agreement to keep \$.75 per hour increase for Personal Support Services. Since the Senate had agreed with the House, thankfully the 75 new NOW/COMP waivers were left in the budget!! See the **Budget 101** section for more details.

**Don't forget!** Be on the lookout for our legislative wrap-up edition of this newsletter late next week to get the final outcome from this session!!

### **Advocacy of the Week**

We need YOU to get involved TODAY. Here are some things that you can do this week:

1. Mark your calendar to join us for the GCDD Public Policy wrap-up call Monday, April 6 at 9:30 a.m. Dial 1-888-355-1249 and enter 232357 at the prompt.
2. Please email or call each conference committee member to thank them for their support regarding the Unlock the Waiting Lists budget ASKS. The message is simple: **"Thank you so much for supporting Unlock the Waiting Lists and keeping the 75 additional NOW/COMP waiver slots in the DBHDD budget and for keeping a \$0.75 increase for Personal Support Services for the ICWP waiver in the DCH budget."** Be sure to give your name, complete mailing address, and contact information.  
Be sure to cc: [unlockthewaitinglists@gmail.com](mailto:unlockthewaitinglists@gmail.com) on each note.

**Senator Shafer** - [david.shafer@senate.ga.gov](mailto:david.shafer@senate.ga.gov); 404.656.0048

**Senator Cowsert** - [bill.cowsert@senate.ga.gov](mailto:bill.cowsert@senate.ga.gov); 404.463.1366

**Senator Hill** - [jack.hill@senate.ga.gov](mailto:jack.hill@senate.ga.gov); 404.463.2247

**Representative Jones** - [jan.jones@house.ga.gov](mailto:jan.jones@house.ga.gov); 404.656.5072

**Representative Powell** - [jay.powell@house.ga.gov](mailto:jay.powell@house.ga.gov); 404.656.5103

**Representative England** - [englandhomeport2@windstream.net](mailto:englandhomeport2@windstream.net); 404.463.2247

## Advocacy Corner

As the 2015 Georgia General Assembly nears the cries of "Sine Die," we look back at the amazing advocacy that we have done during this session. Without you raising your voice alongside us, we could not have accomplished the great things we did.

GCDD held five separate advocacy days leading up to our annual Disability Day at the Capitol: We Need Waivers Day; ICWP Raise the Rate Day; Kids Need Real Homes, Not Nursing Homes Day; Employment First Day; and Youth Day. These five advocacy days and our Disability Day at the Capitol were a huge success!

*"People begin to recognize their own power when they join with others and work together to bring about change in their communities" - Bob Kafka*

Take a look back at some of the great moments from this session.



Advocates braved the rain and cold to have their voices heard during the 17th Annual Disability Day at the Capitol.



Left: Advocates on the steps after successful Capitol visits with legislators; Right: Advocates training before going on legislative visits.



Caroline Dempsey, seen with Representatives Katie Dempsey and Tom Kirby, working as a House page.

If you know someone 12 or older that would like to serve as a House or Senate page, please click the links below. Pages will be paid \$10 per day, and have the opportunity to learn what goes on behind the scenes at the Georgia General Assembly.

[House Page Program](#)

[Senate Page Program](#)

"The youth are the hope of our future" - Jose Rizal

## Budget 101

This section of the newsletter highlights the activities and information regarding **Amended FY2015** (July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015) and **FY2016** (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016) budgets.

Both the House and Senate have passed their versions of the FY 2016 Budget. As of the publication cut-off for this issue, Monday, March 30, the conference committee, which consists of members of both chambers, met late in the day to disclose the compromises to which they have agreed for the FY 2016 budget. The budget document that elaborates on these agreements of the conference committee is not available as of the release of this newsletter. To see a comprehensive list of differences between the House and Senate budgets, please click on the following link:

[House and Senate Differences Document](#)

The table below progress of the specific Unlock asks through the budget process in the 2015 Georgia General Assembly.

<b>Unlock Original ASK for ICWP:</b>	Gradually raise the ICWP Personal Support Services rate to \$20/hr. beginning with a \$3/hr. increase for FY 2016	\$7,975,490
<b>Governor's FY 2016 recommendation:</b>	No new ICWP increase	\$0
<b>House budget version:</b>	\$.50 per hour rate increase for Personal Support Services covered under the ICWP	\$1,329,428
<b>Senate budget version:</b>	\$1.00 per hour rate increase for Personal Support Services covered under the ICWP for Direct Support Professionals	\$2,658,856
<b>Conference committee:</b>	\$0.75 per hour rate increase for Personal Support Services covered under ICWP	Not available as of newsletter release
<b>Unlock Original ASK for NOW/COMP:</b>	1,000 new NOW/COMP waivers for Georgians most in need	\$16,493,000
<b>Governor's FY 2016 recommendation:</b>	No new DD waivers	\$0
<b>House budget version:</b>	Increase funds for 75 additional slots for the NOW and COMP waivers	\$1,124,226
<b>Senate budget version:</b>	Senate agreed with House	\$1,124,226
<b>Conference committee:</b>	No changes from conference committee - 75 slot for NOW and	\$1,124,226

Check out the Unlock website for the most current budget information.

<http://unlockthewaitinglists.com/>

## Bills

### 2015 Georgia Legislative Bills

As we approach the end of session, keep in mind that any bills that do not make it this year are still alive for consideration next year during the second session of this two-year cycle. Bills that do pass both chambers of the Georgia General Assembly will move on to the Governor. He will have 40 days in which to sign the bill into law or veto it. If he does not act on a bill within that time frame, it will become law.

Note that in the [legislative report](#), both the House and Senate bills will be listed by Bill Number, Sponsor, Title Summary, and the most current activity followed by Comments and Summary of the Bill. **Please note that the second line of each bill will reflect the date of the most recent action and what action was taken on this bill.** You can also click on the bill number within the report to link to the actual bill language itself and get even more detailed information.

**Bill and Resolution Highlights:** below are the statuses of some bills of interest to the disability community

**HR 642:** This resolution, which creates a House study committee on Employment First and Post-secondary Education options for people with disabilities, has been passed by the House. We anticipate a study committee will be appointed after session ends, and are exploring ways to get the Senate involved. For more information on Employment First or to join the Employment First Coalition, please contact Employment First Co-coordinator D'Arcy Robb at [darcy.t.robb@gmail.com](mailto:darcy.t.robb@gmail.com).

**HB 1:** This legislation sponsored by Rep. Allen Peake (R-141) allows the limited use of medical cannabis oil (no more than 5% THC, to possess no more than 20 fl. oz.) to treat eight disorders: cancer, Crohn's disease, Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), mitochondrial disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, seizure disorders, and sickle cell. Before Georgians can begin using CBD oil, the state will still have to set up the Low THC Oil Patient Registry. The Department of Public Health is charged with establishing procedures, rules, and regulations to assist doctors in making the certifications that a patient has a qualifying condition.

**HB 91:** Monday, March 30, Governor Deal signed HB 91 into law. This bill eliminates the Georgia High School Graduation Test as a requirement. Up to 8,000 students that were unable to pass the Graduation Test but performed satisfactorily in their classes will now have the opportunity to receive their high school diplomas.

**HB 92 and SB 242:** This legislation would allow individuals whose employers provide sick days the option of using up to five days to care for family members. The lobbying efforts for this are led by the Georgia Job Family Collaborative (<http://www.gaworkingfamilies.org/>). HB 92, sponsored by Rep. Tommy Benton (R-31) stalled in the House Industry and Labor Committee. Lead sponsor Sen. Mike Williams "dropped" SB 242 which will allow for a decision in 2016.

**HB 86:** House Bill 86, which transfers the Division of Aging Services (DAS) from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Georgia Adult and Aging Services Agency, was passed by both chambers.

**SB 1 and HB 429:** It was announced during a press conference that SB 1, the autism insurance bill known as Ava's Law, sponsored by Sen. Charlie Bethel (R-54), would be attached to HB 429 with some modifications. Prior to attaching the autism bill language, HB 429, sponsored by Rep. Ron Stephens (R-

164), prevents health benefit plans from restricting coverage for prescribed treatment based upon an insured's diagnosis with a terminal condition. This announcement comes after an agreement was reached between the chairmen of the House and Senate insurance committees that will allow some children with autism to be covered by insurance. Both chairmen expect that the combined bill will easily pass the Senate, and the modified bill should be accepted by the House. Many disability advocates are passionate supporters of Ava's law and the therapies it would cover, but there are other advocates who object to the bill, particularly its inclusion of ABA therapy.

For more information about the process a bill must take to become law in Georgia, click on the link below.  
[Tracking a Bill through the General Assembly](#)

For more information about how a bill is passed in the Georgia Legislature, click below:  
<http://www.senate.ga.gov/sos/Documents/habbal.pdf>

## Dates to Remember

**The last two days of the legislative session:** Tuesday, March 31 and Thursday, April 2.

***The Final GCDD Legislative Wrap-up call of the session:*** Monday, April 6 at 9:30 a.m. Dial 1-888-355-1249 and enter passcode 232357 at the prompt.

**Department of Community Health Board Meeting:** Thursday, April 9

**Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Board Meeting:** Thursday, April 23

<http://dbhdd.georgia.gov/2015-dbhdd-board-meetings>

## Resources/Quick Links

[Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities 2015 Legislative Agenda](#)

For more One Pagers for Advocates, click below:  
<http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/actionsalerts.html>

[Golden Rules of Legislative Visits](#)

[Webinar - Tips on How to Talk to Your Legislator](#)

[Accessibility on Capitol Hill](#)

[House committee meeting calendar](#)

[Senate committee meeting calendar](#)

[Watch the Session Live!](#)

[Find Your Senator and Representative](#)

**Thank you from the GCDD Public Policy Team**

**Dawn Alford: Acting Public Policy Director**

**D'Arcy Robb: Public Policy Contractor - Employment First**

**Nick Perry: Public Policy Intern**

[Join our Advocacy Network Today!](#)



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ON BEHALF OF PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

