



Georgia HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRESS RELEASE

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Georgia House Democratic Caucus COVID-19 Subcommittee Opposes FY 2021 Budget Proposal

ATLANTA – Members of the Georgia House Democratic Caucus (GHDC) COVID-19 Subcommittee recently announced their opposition to the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY 2021) budget and released an action plan in response to the FY 2021 budget. House Minority Caucus Chairman James Beverly (D-Macon), along State Representatives Viola Davis (D-Stone Mountain), Sandra Scott (D-Rex), Kim Schofield (D-Atlanta), Deborah Bazemore (D-South Fulton), Mary Robichaux (D-Roswell), Donna McLeod (D-Lawrenceville), Rhonda Burnough (D-Riverdale) and Shelly Hutchinson (D-Snellville), recently drafted an independent FY 2021 funding proposal in response to COVID-19.

“The 2021 budget is bad for Georgians,” said Rep. Scott. “At a time like this, how can Republicans be happy about cutting the education budget by \$970 million? Cutting teacher’s retirement pay from 21.4 percent to 19.06 percent, raising pay for teachers, the differentiated pay for newly certified math and science teachers and cutting our children’s hopes and dreams is beyond egregious while the budget increases funding for State Commission Charter Schools and Charter School System grants.”

The GHDC COVID-19 Subcommittee identified additional funding opportunities to protect public education and health care. The subcommittee worked to research the budgets of the top ten state departments, which make up 90 percent of the state budget, to identify ways to minimize the governor’s call for across the board cuts of 11 percent. This subcommittee sought to mitigate such budgetary reductions for public education and behavioral health services by

leveraging revenue, repurposing tax credits, closing “corporate welfare” loopholes and utilizing federal CARES Act funding.

The GHDC COVID-19 Subcommittee’s funding opportunities were found in areas such as corporate welfare and loopholes, rural tax credit, tobacco tax and the Department of Corrections. The GHDC found savings regarding “corporate welfare loopholes,” such as life insurance tax breaks, insurance abatements and car trade-in exemptions and manufacturing company tax breaks; the GHDC has estimated these savings would generate approximately \$568 million. Additionally, their independent budget proposal would repeal the Rural Hospital Tax Credit to reallocate \$60 million in favor of direct investment in the state’s health care programs and expansion of Medicaid. Under the GHDC’s budget proposal, this \$60 million expansion of Medicaid would result in \$540 million through a nine to one federal match.

“The FY 2021 budget underscores the real priorities of Georgia,” said Rep. Schofield. “It is clearly not in the investment of our public schools, educators, the uninsured and underinsured, senior adults, social services, mental health and worker protections. It is no surprise that I voted against this budget when there was an alternative funding opportunity submitted by the GHDC COVID-19 Subcommittee that provided additional revenue which was a game changer for the people of Georgia.”

The GHDC’s FY 2021 budget proposal would also increase the state’s tobacco tax from 37 cents per pack to the national average of \$1.81, as well as include a tax of vaping products that at an equal level could produce over \$600 million in additional revenue. The proposal also highlights that reductions for the Georgia Department of Corrections (DOC) have been identified, and cuts for this department would not have a negative impact, such as paying instructional personnel a six-figure salary to teach the DOC’s GED program.

“Tobacco Settlement Funding has increased from the House and Senate recommended amount of \$160,559,061 to the governor’s revised recommendation amount of \$210,559,061,” said Rep. Davis. “A well-respected conservative publication reported the overall tobacco moneys for Georgia was \$385.6 million in 2018 and \$393.3 million in 2019. There is a difference of approximately \$175 million to \$200 million. Where is this money? Is there any additional money in this budget that we are not aware of to stop these critical cuts?”

“Although the state budget is not as dire as expected, it still devastates citizens across the state of Georgia,” said Rep. Bazemore. “This will be especially difficult, as well as add insult to

injury during this pandemic where people have lost or are on the verge of losing their homes and cars or are unable to feed their family. The Georgia House Democratic Caucus located billions of dollars that would make any cuts to the budget unnecessary, but it was ignored.”

“The FY 2021 budget will reduce much needed funding currently given to our rural health care providers who are taking care of COVID-19 patients while leaving over a billion dollars on the table,” said Rep. Robichaux. “We need to fully expand Medicaid now to make sure that every Georgian can receive care in this pandemic.”

“I cannot in good faith vote for the budget that will not consider funding opportunities that have been identified from corporate loopholes,” said Rep. McLeod. “Most importantly, I cannot morally support a budget after watching our children protest in the streets day after day to say ‘Black Lives Matter’ who are now seeing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in their age demographics. I cannot then turn around and vote for a budget that gives over \$127 million of taxpayer dollars to private prisons that encourages the school to prison pipeline. ‘Black Lives Matter’ is not just a slogan, it is a fundamental belief that must be realized hopefully in my lifetime.”

“I voted against the FY 2021 budget because the cuts affect our educators, children and the health of our community,” said Rep. Burnough.

“Mental health and social services is shouldering a disproportionate percentage of state budget cuts,” said Rep. Hutchinson. “This will mean a death sentence for the lives and futures of Georgia citizens.”

For more information on this topic, please contact Kimberly Romaine at (404) 656-0220 or kimberly.romaine@house.ga.gov.

Representative James Beverly represents the citizens of District 143, which includes portions of Bibb County. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 2011 and currently serves as House Minority Caucus Chairman. He also serves on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and on the Ethics, Health & Human Services, Retirement, Rules, Small Business Development and Special Rules committees.

Representative Debra Bazemore represents the citizens of District 63, which includes portions of Clayton, Fayette and Fulton counties. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2016 and currently serves on the Human Relations & Aging, Intragovernmental Coordination, Natural Resources & Environment and State Planning & Community Affairs committees.

Representative Rhonda Burnough represents the citizens of District 77, which includes portions of Clayton County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2016 and currently serves on the Economic Development & Tourism, Governmental Affairs, Higher Education and Small Business Development committees.

Representative Viola Davis represents the citizens of District 87, which includes portions of DeKalb County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 and currently serves on the Insurance, Interstate Cooperation and Science and Technology committees.

Representative Shelly Hutchinson represents the citizens of District 107, which includes portions of Gwinnett County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 and currently serves on the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight, Health & Human Services and Juvenile Justice committees.

Representative Kim Schofield represents the citizens of District 60, which includes portions of Clayton and Fulton counties. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2017 and currently serves on the Health & Human Services, Interstate Cooperation and Small Business Development committees.

Representative Sandra Scott represents the citizens of District 76, which includes portions of Clayton and Henry counties. She was first elected to the House Representatives in 2010 and currently serves on the Defense & Veterans Affairs, Human Relations & Aging, Legislative & Congressional Reapportionment, Science and Technology and Special Rules committees.

Representative Mary Robichaux represents the citizens of District 48, which includes portions of Fulton County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 and currently serves on the Human Relations & Aging, Small Business Development and Special Rules committees.

Representative Donna McLeod represents the citizens of District 105, which includes portions of Gwinnett County. She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2018 and currently serves on the Code Revision, Human Relations & Aging, Interstate Cooperation and Science and Technology committees.

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