

Children's Mental Health 2018 & 2019 Legislative Sessions Report



The 2019 legislative session built on the progress made in 2018 by continuing to make appropriations for the recommendations made by The Commission on Children's Mental Health, including additional funding for school-based mental health through the Georgia Apex Program. Governor Kemp also worked with the General Assembly to create the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission, which may have a significant impact on children's mental health services through 2023. This will be a state mental health commission modeled on the criminal justice reform commission created under Governor Nathan Deal.

2019

Increased Funding for School-Based Behavioral Health Services

- **Georgia Apex:** The amended FY 2019 budget included an additional \$8.4 million dollars for the Georgia Apex Program. This increased funding is designed to support placing mental health counselors in every Georgia high school. This is in addition to the \$4.3 million dollars added in the FY 2018 budget.

Additional Funding for Children's Mental Health and Substance Abuse

- **Child Substance Abuse Prevention:** In the amended FY 2019 budget, \$790,801 was transferred to the substance abuse prevention program to prevent children and adolescent opioid abuse, as recommended by the Commission on Children's Mental Health.
- **Supportive employment and education services:** The FY 2020 budget included a \$1.5 million dollar increase to support 500 young adults to receive supported employment and education services, as recommended by the Commission on Children's Mental Health.

Creation of the Georgia Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission (HB 514)

- **Purpose:** The commission is designed to review the conditions, needs, issue, and problems related to behavioral health issues in Georgia and to recommend any action, including proposed changes to rules, regulations, policies and programs.
- **Composition:** The Commission is composed of 24 appointed members and will include psychiatrists, psychologists, health care providers, mental health providers and representatives



from education, law enforcement, the legislature and the judiciary. The commission will last through June 30, 2023.

- **Subcommittees:** There are five subcommittees established, and one is focused on Children and Adolescent Behavioral Health
- **Agency Representation: Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD); Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ); Department of Corrections (DOC); Department of Community Health (DCH); Department of Community Supervision (DCS); Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI); Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)**

Other Legislation

- **Infant and Toddler:** HR 421 created a Joint Study Committee on Infant and Toddler Social and Emotional Health.
- **Cyberbullying:** HR 553 created a House Study Committee on Cyberbullying.
- **Dyslexia:** SB 48 requires schools to screen students in grades K-2 for traits of dyslexia. It would also offer training for teachers in methods used to teach dyslexic children.
- **School Safety:** SB 15 would have added additional monitoring and data sharing about children deemed to be potential threats, but the bill was vetoed by Governor Kemp. Governor Kemp cited the inclusion of over \$69 million in the FY 2019 amended budget as the mechanism that should be used for school security enhancement.

2018

Funding for Recommendations from The Commission on Children's Mental Health

- **Crisis Services:** Increased funds for crisis services in the amount of \$10,316,198 (and additional one-time funds for crisis respite of \$84,000).
- **Georgia Apex Program (School Based Mental Health):** Increased funds for Georgia Apex for an additional 13 grants. Georgia Apex is a three-year pilot project that has developed school-based mental health services in schools across the state. Last year, Georgia Apex had 29 grantees working with 214 of the more than 2,200 schools in Georgia. More information can be found in the Georgia Apex Two Year Evaluation Report at http://gacoeonline.gsu.edu/files/2018/03/Apex-Year-2-Evaluation-Report_Final.pdf
- **Telemedicine:** Provided funds for telemedicine in the amount of \$23,2500 (and additional one-time funds of \$150,000).
- **Suicide Prevention:** Increased funds for suicide prevention in the amount of \$1,092,000.
- **Wrap Around Training:** Increased funds for high fidelity wraparound services training in the amount of \$610,545.
- **Supported Employment Training for Young Adults:** Increased funds for supported employment and education assistance for 500 young adults at the rate of \$6,120 per year in a total amount of \$1,530,000.



- **Mental Health Crisis and Suicide Prevention App:** Provided \$1,416,611 for a statewide application in coordination with the Georgia Crisis and Access hotline related to mental health crisis services and suicide prevention.

Funding for Mental Health Awareness Training in Schools

- **Student Mental Health Awareness Training:** Provided funding for mental health awareness training in schools in the amount of \$1,600,000. The new crisis and access line app will be promoted through the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program and the mental health awareness trainings.

Children’s Suspensions & School Climate

- **Student Attendance and School Climate Committees in Each County (HB 763):** O.C.G.A. § 20-2-690.2 was amended so that Student Attendance Protocol Committees appointed by the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of each county shall now be Student Attendance and School Climate Committees. The purpose of the committees will now also include coordination and cooperation of officials, agencies and programs “to improve the school climate.” The committees “may recommend the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports and response to intervention, **trauma informed care training**, and the optimization of local resources”
- **School Safety Plans Include Mental Health Awareness (HB 763):** O.C.G.A. 20-2-1185 was amended so that juvenile courts shall provide input into school safety plans. School safety plans shall include “[t]raining school administrators, teachers and support staff, including, but not limited to, school resource officers, security officers, secretaries, custodians and bus drivers, on school violence prevention, school security, school threat assessment, **mental health awareness**”
- **Suspensions for Preschool through Third Grade/Multi-Tiered System of Support (HB 740):** Schools will only be allowed to suspend children from preschool through third grade for more than five days after the children are provided a multi-tiered system of support. Depending on how this law is interpreted and implemented, it could encourage additional early behavioral health interventions for young children.

Study Committees on School Safety May Impact Children’s Mental Health

- **House and Senate Study Committees on School Safety:** Both the House and Senate created Study Committees on School Safety. These Study Committees may impact children’s mental health, depending on the recommendations made.



Additional Legislation

School Nurses and Counselors Count: Language in the Appropriations law directs the Department of Education to provide a report on the number of counselors and nurses per school and school system to the General Assembly by September 1, 2018.

House Study Committee on Incorporating Law Enforcement in Pathway to Treatment (HB 913): This Study Committee will examine the potential to expand community behavioral health services available through law enforcement diversion.

Senate Study Committee on Prescribing Patterns for Antidepressants and Other Psychotropic Medications (SR 489): This study committee will examine issues for both adults and children.

