



The Child Protection and Public Safety Act Gains Commitment for Action in 2012

Atlanta, March 29, 2011 – This week, the Child Protection and Public Safety Act (Children’s Code Rewrite) received commitments from Governor Nathan Deal, as well as the Georgia House and Senate leadership, to ready the measure for a vote in 2012. The bill, sponsored by Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Bill Hamrick (District 30), and co-sponsored by a variety of Senators from both parties, is a sweeping revision of Georgia’s 40-year-old juvenile law.

The current code has evolved into a highly amended body of laws that govern the way the state handles children and families who are pulled into the child welfare and juvenile justice system. Stakeholders involved in juvenile justice proceedings agree that the current law is difficult to administer and in great need of an update. The Child Protection and Public Safety Act, based on data-driven “best practices,” with an eye to timeliness and fiscal responsibility, is the culmination of more than four years of research and consensus-building to solve dilemmas faced by children, families, courts, detention facilities and taxpayers.

Stakeholders involved in the revision believe that Georgia can no longer afford to disregard research which shows that failing to redirect juvenile offenders and their families increases the likelihood that the children will become career criminals. “The time has come for us to rethink how our state is responding to children who have found themselves in trouble with the law,” said Governor Deal. “I applaud the careful thinking and inclusive engagement that has gone into developing the Child Protection and Public Safety Act.”

Since the Act was first introduced in April 2009, there have been 11 public hearings to educate the legislature and the public about the proposed changes, as well as numerous stakeholder meetings to resolve those issues where disagreement existed.

“From the beginning, this process has been a great example of how to build good, thoughtful and effective legislation,” said Senator Hamrick. “We have had buy-in from all the players: from the courts to the prosecutors, defense attorneys, service providers, youth and families; pretty much every interested party.”

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JUSTGeorgia, a coalition advocating for improvement to Georgia’s juvenile laws and the underlying social service systems, has led this effort and includes Georgia Applesseed, the Barton Child Law and Policy Center of the Emory School of Law, and Voices for Georgia’s Children.

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