

# SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS



## 2016 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

### Economy

**Raise the Minimum Wage:** Expanding on last year's efforts, the Senate Democratic Caucus will introduce legislation to raise Georgia's minimum wage to \$15/hour. This will strengthen Georgia's families by ensuring that all working people are able to make a living wage, decrease the burden on the state's social programs, and grow the state's economy and create jobs as more people are able to purchase goods and services from Georgia businesses.

**Paid Family Leave:** Senate Democrats will introduce legislation to create a paid family leave system based on the extremely successful model used in California. This legislation will create a fund paid for by a small payroll tax to provide workers with up to six weeks of partial pay to care for sick family members or care for a newborn child.

### Education

**Community Schools Grant Program:** Senate Democrats will work to create a state block grant program to enable schools to partner with community, business, faith-based, and other groups to implement wraparound services such as after school programs, job training, nutrition programs, and community engagement activities to better serve the needs of high poverty students and their communities. This program is based on programs implemented elsewhere that have dramatically increased academic performance at minimal cost to the state.

**Fund Georgia's Schools:** Georgia has failed to meet the school funding requirements of its Quality Basic Education law since 2003. These Austerity cuts, which have exceeded a billion dollars in some years, has left an educational deficit and shifted the school funding burden onto local governments, many of which don't have the tax base to pay for state cuts. Senate Democrats will continue to push for full funding of Georgia's schools, to eliminate loopholes allowing the General Assembly to underfund schools, and to fight attempts to make funding cuts permanent.

## Health Care

**Expand Medicaid:** The Senate Democratic Caucus will continue to support legislation to provide health care to over 650,000 Georgians by expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Medicaid expansion will save about 650 lives a year while bringing \$8.2 billion/year into Georgia's economy and creating over 70,000 jobs, many in the most economically disadvantaged parts of the state.

**Protect Women's Reproductive Rights:** Senate Democrats will continue to fight new restrictions on reproductive rights and push to roll back existing burdens. They will also continue to support the creation of a Georgia Family Planning Initiative to solicit public and private funds to improve family planning options and reduce unintended pregnancy by providing effective birth control and other women's health services.

## Open and Transparent Government

**Protect the Right to Vote:** The Senate Democratic Caucus will continue its long tradition of working to ensure that all Georgians have access to the fundamental right to vote. It will push to make voter registration easier and more transparent, expand early voting to make voting as accessible as possible, and roll back discriminatory vote suppression laws such as Voter ID.

**Fight Gerrymandering:** Senate Democrats will continue efforts to stop the practice of politicians choosing their voters instead of voters choosing their politicians by supporting the creation of an independent, bipartisan redistricting commission and a constitutional amendment based on the successful Florida amendment that would allow voters to challenge gerrymandered districts in court.

**Independent Ethics Commission:** Senate Democrats will continue the years long effort to create an independent Ethics Commission that is actually able to enforce ethics laws in the state. They will continue to support legislation to establish an independent commission appointed by the judiciary instead of the Governor and legislature as well as to fix the commission funding as a fixed portion of the state budget to prevent financial retaliation for conducting investigations.