

## **Welfare Watch - January 29, 2009 - Legislation to Restructure the Department of Human Resources Introduced**

Legislation long expected to restructure the Department of Human Resource has been introduced. [HB228](#) is the product of the Governor's Health and Human Service Task Force. This legislation would dismantle DHR to create two new departments, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Behavioral Health. B.J. Walker would lead the new Department of Human Services. The Commissioner for the new Department of Behavioral Health has not been named. Many mental health advocates hope that Gwen Skinner, the current director of the DMHADDD, will lead in the role of Commissioner in the transition to this new Department.

Stakeholders are divided about the need to restructure the Department. One advocate said, "Once we thought that we had too many silos, now we are looking at too many farms. At least in the current system, the silos are on the same farm." Some believe that the "farm" is too big and in need of dividing.

### **The Governor's Press Release if found below:**

ATLANTA ♦ Governor Sonny Perdue announced today that Rep. Mark Butler has introduced [HB228](#), the Governor's legislation to restructure the Department of Human Resources (DHR). "This legislation reorients our approach to healthcare from inputs to results", Governor Perdue said. "Georgia spends \$3.8 billion within DHR every year on an agency that hasn't undergone major change since it was formed over three decades ago."

The legislation would form a new Department of Behavioral Health to oversee the mental health and addictive disease programs currently housed in DHR. The new department would report directly to the Governor and increase fiscal transparency.

The reorganization plan would also merge the Department of Community Health with the public health and health regulation programs of DHR to create the Department of Health. Current DCH Commissioner Dr. Rhonda Medows would lead the new Department of Health. Merging the two departments will streamline the health related activities currently residing in two separate departments and establish a lead agency to focus on improving Georgians' health.

The remaining social services under DHR would become the Department of Human Services. Programs included in this department include Developmental Disabilities, Aging, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Support. Current DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker would lead the new Department of Human Services.

The legislation is based on recommendations by the Health and Human Service Task Force. Governor Perdue appointed five members of the task force who were joined by Senators Jack Hill and Renee Unterman, and Representatives Ben Harbin and Mark Butler. If the legislation is adopted, the transition to the new agencies would begin on July 1, 2009.

"This is a move in the right direction toward correcting our mental and public health systems," Rep. Butler said. "It is a huge step for this administration to pull these fragile lives out of this larger mix to get them the help and attention they need and deserve. I truly believe that this reorganization will lead to greater efficiencies and more accountability to the taxpayers of this state."