



Legislative Update

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The 2018 General Assembly adjourned, Sine Die, just after midnight on Friday, March 30. The Georgia OBGyn Society (GOGS) had a very successful session. The top two priorities, funding for the prevention of maternal mortality and funding for OBGyn residency slots, were achieved. Our success this session would not have been realized without the expert attention of Skin Edge and partners at the Department of Public Health (DPH), March of Dimes and Patient-Centered Physician Coalition.

In addition, the Society would like to thank the following people for their support during the session:

Representative Terry England, Chairman, House Appropriations
Representative Butch Parrish, Chairman, House Health Subcommittee of Appropriations
Speaker Pro-Tem Jan Jones
Representative Sharon Cooper, Chairman, House Health and Human Services Committee
Representative Deborah Silcox
Senator Jack Hill, Chairman, Senate Appropriations
Senator Dean Burke, Vice-Chair, Appropriations
Senator Renee Unterman, Vice-Chair, Appropriations
Senate President Pro-Tem Butch Miller
Senator Bill Cowser, Senate Majority Leader
Senator Chuck Hufstetler
House and Senate Budget Staff

I would also like to thank Drs. Jane Ellis and Cindy Mercer for taking time out of their day to come to the Capitol to lend their voice on specific issues, as well as everyone who attended Primary Care Legislative Day at the Capitol.

Below is a brief summary of the measures GOGS supported this year:

Maternal Mortality Prevention Funding:

The FY 2019 state budget includes \$2 million, directed to DPH, for maternal mortality prevention. GOGS advocated for this funding during the session, supported by DPH and March of Dimes. GOGS is working closely with DPH in planning for the implementation of the funding, which will be used to implement AIM hemorrhage and hypertension quality improvement bundles.

Funding for OBGyn Resident Positions:

The General Assembly appropriated \$306,600, continued funding from the FY 2018 budget, for 20 OBGyn residency positions at 5 training programs (4 positions at each program). The OBGyn Society requested \$459,900. This is the same amount of funding that was received in the FY 2018 budget. GOGS will request additional funding in the FY 2020 budget next year.

Group Prenatal Care Funding:

The FY 2019 state budget includes \$500,000 in state funds for reimbursement for group prenatal care. This funding is in the Department of Community Health (DCH) Low-Income Medicaid budget. GOGS supported this request, which was led by the March of Dimes. GOGS will monitor the implementation of this reimbursement.

Increased reimbursement for delivery in rural counties:

Also in the DCH Low-income Medicaid budget is the inclusion of a \$250 increase in reimbursement for newborn deliveries that occur in counties with fewer than 35,000 people. GOGS has been successful in previous years in obtaining support for this increase in the state budget.

Levels of Perinatal Care Hospital Designation:

HB 909, sponsored by Representative Deborah Silcox (R-Sandy Springs), gained final passage by the Senate on March 14 and was sent to the governor. The OBGyn Society supported HB 909 that establishes a voluntary program for hospitals to designate a level of neonatal and/or maternal care. Currently, hospitals can self-designate their levels of care. GOGS is working closely with the Regional Perinatal Center medical directors and DPH on the implementation of the bill.

“The Health Act”

SB 357, sponsored by Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), gained final passage on Sine Die. SB 357 encompasses recommendations that were released by the Health Reform Task Force led by Lt. Governor Casey Cagle that convened in 2017. The measure establishes the Health Coordination and Innovation Council and creates the position of state director of health policy. SB 357 also establishes an advisory board to assist the council in developing recommendations. SB 357 directs the Maternal Mortality Review Committee to submit a report to the council annually. GOGS will be closely monitoring the implementation of SB 357 to ensure improving the quality of women’s health in Georgia is a priority.

Rural Health System Innovation Center

HB 769 by Representative Rick Jasperse (R-Jasper), establishes the Rural Health System Innovation Center within the State Office of Rural Health. The purpose of this center is to study and recommend new approaches for financing and delivering healthcare in rural settings in Georgia. The center will be located within an academic health center, which will be determined by DCH after issuing a request for proposals.

Joint Study Commission on Low THC Medical Oil Access

HB 65, sponsored by retiring Representative Allen Peake (R-Macon), establishes a House and Senate Study Commission to evaluate low THC medical oil and its potential to improve health outcomes in Georgia. On Sine Die, language was added to include “post-traumatic stress disorder” and “intractable pain” as conditions for which low THC medical oil can be prescribed after certain conditions are met.

Measures that were not given passage:

- Expansion of scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses
- Medicaid expansion
- Surprise billing
- Step Therapy
- Licensure for genetic counselors
- Perinatal hospice (never introduced)

Once again, it’s an honor and a privilege to serve as your GOGS legislative chair. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any issues/questions you may have regarding legislative topics.