



Governor Sonny Perdue
Office of the Governor


[PRINT](#)
[CLOSE](#)


Governor Signs Legislation to Restructure the Department of Human Resources

Monday, May 4, 2009

Contact: Office of Communications 404-651-7774

ATLANTA – Governor Sonny Perdue today signed House Bill 228, reorganizing the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and the Department of Community Health (DCH) and creating a new Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. HB 228 was introduced in the House by Rep. Mark Butler and carried in the Senate by Sen. Renee Unterman.

“Signing HB 228 will allow us to deliver greater value for Georgians’ healthcare dollars,” said Governor Perdue. “The legislation reorients our approach to healthcare by shifting the focus from inputs to results.”

The bill will result in three agencies reorganized to provide more focused results – the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Community Health and the Department of Human Services. The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities will be responsible for all mental health, developmental disability and addictive disease programs currently under DHR. The department will report directly to the Governor, increasing transparency.

The Governor announced that Dr. Frank Shelp will serve as the new agency’s commissioner. Dr. Shelp currently works as the Clinical Director at Georgia Regional Hospital in Savannah. The Governor also appointed Dr. Bill McDonald to serve as Special Advisor to the Governor on Mental Health. Dr. McDonald currently serves as professor of psychiatry at Emory University. He is the chair for late life depression and chief of the Division of Geriatric Psychiatry. Gwen Skinner, who has been an integral part of DHR’s mental health service delivery, will serve as a Deputy Commissioner for the new agency during the transition until her retirement later this year.

DCH will be reorganized to include all the public health and long-term care regulation programs of DHR. This change establishes one lead agency to focus on improving Georgia’s health and streamlines health related activities currently in two separate departments. This agency will be led by current DCH Commissioner Dr. Rhonda Medows.

DHR’s remaining services will be housed under the Department of Human Services. Programs included in this department include Aging, Division of Family and Children Services and Child Support. Commissioner B.J. Walker will head the Agency.

The bill largely resembles the recommendations made by the Health and Human Services Task Force, which convened last year and studied these issues at length. Sen. Renee Unterman, Sen. Jack Hill, Rep. Ben Harbin and Rep. Mark Butler all served on the Health and Human Services Task Force.

Rep. Pat Gardner and Sen. Johnny Grant also worked for passage of the bill and joined the Governor at today’s bill signing.

"Today we begin building a new stronger foundation for health and human services in the state of Georgia," said Rep. Butler. "This foundation is just a beginning, and the real work lies ahead. We must continue to strive and make our public and mental health systems the best and most efficient in the nation. I want to thank the Governor and the leadership of the House and Senate for making this new day a reality."

"This is a great day for Georgia and the many citizens that receive healthcare services from the state," said Sen. Renee Unterman. "I am confident that these changes will result in improved care for our state's most vulnerable residents."

###