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Howard: Week One Under the Gold Dome

By: Sen. Jaha Howard (D-Smyrna)



The 2026 Legislative Session is off to a busy start, and despite it being my first legislative session, I'm feeling right at home. Senate Democrats have already begun tackling the issues that directly affect your daily life and our community's future. I am also proud to be serving on the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Government Oversight, Higher Education, and State and Local Government Operations committees. I'll be sure to keep you all up to date on legislation as we move through this session together.

On Monday, I was met with such sincerity alongside my colleague, Sen. Dickerson, for our first legislative day, which was greatly appreciated. We also elected our new President Pro Tempore, Sen. Walker, and I extend my congratulations to him. I'm looking forward to working with all my fellow legislators to deliver results for the hardworking people of our state.

On Tuesday, Senate and House Democrats stood together in the fight against unlawful ICE operations in our state and around the country. My Senate colleagues introduced four separate bills addressing legal accountability for federal agents, civil protections for our citizens and guardrails against the deployment of out-of-state troops. Tackling the affordability crisis is not possible without first ensuring that our people are protected and can move through daily life without fear.

[Senate Bill 389](#) will require ICE agents to be unmasked and clearly identify themselves to their appropriate federal agency. [Senate Bill 390](#) will prevent the deployment of any state military force in Georgia without the Governor's express permission. [Senate Bill 391](#) will prohibit immigration enforcement operations in sanctuary locations, such as schools, churches, and hospitals. Finally, [Senate Bill 397](#) will ensure that no Georgians can be deprived of their civil liberties during interactions with ICE personnel.

I am proud to be cosponsoring Senate Bill 381, introduced by my colleague Sen. Kemp. It creates a grant program that gives school districts extra funding based on how many students live in poverty, such as kids in foster care or without stable housing, and ensures the vast majority of that money goes directly to programs and services that support those students. Our children are struggling to read, and this bill will open the door for them to achieve their goals and chart their deserved path through life. SB 381, along with funding for public education and other literacy initiatives, will help grow our literacy rate and help our students thrive.

On Thursday, Governor Brian Kemp delivered his final State of the State address, centering much of his agenda on affordability. While he highlighted a one-time \$2,000 pay supplement for state employees and a \$325 million investment in the University System of Georgia's DREAMS Scholarship program, his remarks overlooked some of the biggest pressures driving up the cost of living for everyday Georgians. The address made no mention of Medicaid expansion or rising health insurance costs, even as families, seniors and small businesses continue to shoulder increasing medical expenses. If my time as an elected member of the Cobb County Board of Education taught me anything, it's that affordability cannot be addressed through one-time investments alone. Our schools and other public institutions need sustained funding to succeed, so we need to keep building upon the investments that have already been made.

Starting next week, state agencies will present their needs and priorities for the Amended FY 2026 Budget to carry us through the remainder of the fiscal year. This process is critical to further support the most vulnerable in our communities and ensure that state resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact.

I am incredibly thankful for your trust and for the opportunity to serve. I've already heard from so many of you, and I encourage everyone to continue holding me accountable. It is a great privilege to be in this position, and I assure you that I will not take it for granted. Thank you for your support, and let's keep fighting together for an affordable and prosperous Georgia.

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