



For Immediate Release

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Georgia Seeks to Expand Parental Choice with Educational Savings Accounts

Atlanta, GA (February 4, 2015) — Today Georgia State Representative Mark Hamilton (R-HD24) will introduce the **Educational Savings Account Act of 2015**. The bill seeks to significantly expand school choice by unlocking public school funds on a per child basis so that parents can apply them to individualized education solutions. The proposed legislation provides for state oversight, but will allow parents to control and manage how the funds already allocated for their child will be used during the K-12 years.

Georgia's approach to Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) would operate similarly to the popular Flexible Spending Accounts that many people already use to pay for healthcare. Parents will be able to meet the specific needs of children who do not qualify under existing programs such as students with learning challenges, extraordinarily high achieving students, elite student athletes and artists, chronically ill children or those facing bullies or other unhealthy peer relationships. ESAs can also ease the burden of rural students who live a long distance from their county schools by providing real alternatives.

"Each of my children are different, and accordingly each had different educational needs. As parents, we made decisions about the best path to meet their specific individual educational needs, which for our family, included a mix of public and private schools, plus occasional private tutoring when needed," said Rep. Hamilton. "All parents should be given maximum flexibility to meet their child's academic needs and that is what HB 243 does."

Hamilton's proposed legislation stipulates that ESA funds may be used for contracted public school courses and programs, textbooks and curricula, online learning programs, qualified tutoring, fees for specialized or advanced courses or testing, fees for college entrance exams and even dual enrollment in Georgia colleges and universities.

Strong oversight has been built into the ESA legislation in order to serve the needs of students without creating instability for the public school system. Year one participation is capped at one-half of one percent of the public school student population, increasing to one percent in year two. Students can qualify if they already attend public schools, and parents must sign a compliance agreement for the proper use of funds and agree to

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state oversight. Parents face suspension for failure to comply and any misuse of funds could be reported to law enforcement agencies.

“We have a big job readiness gap,” said Hamilton. “The University System of Georgia reports that employers need 250,000 students to graduate from Georgia colleges or technical schools over the next six years but our current drop-out rates in those institutions are staggeringly high because our kids are not getting what they need in K-12. Providing ESAs will make a big difference.”

Hamilton expressed appreciation to the Georgia Center for Opportunity, the Foundation for Excellence in Education and the American Federation for Children for their support and leadership in the pursuit of school choice for Georgians.

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