

# Governor Brian P. Kemp's 2022 State of the State Address

**JANUARY 13, 2022**

Lt. Governor Duncan, Speaker Ralston, President Pro Tempore Miller, Speaker Pro Tempore Jones, members of the General Assembly, members of the judiciary, and my fellow Georgians.

Three years ago, when I stood before this body and the people of our state for the first time as your governor, I said, “I know there will be adversity... those who want to tear us down. There will be difficult days and dark nights. But together, we will overcome. Like Coach Henderson said, ‘It can be done’.”

Standing before all of you today in the final year of my first term in office, I didn’t know then how true these words would become. But, just like I saw firsthand all those years ago under the Friday night lights at Clarke Central High School, legendary football Coach Billy Henderson was right again.

Despite the divisive politics, the pandemic and unforeseen challenges, the tough obstacles that stood in our way, we pulled together and lent a hand to our fellow Georgians, and we proved it could be done.

As Psalm 16:8 says, “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.”

Over the last three years, we built Georgia’s house on a firm foundation. The concrete, the frame, and the roof withstood the storms. We emerged resilient. We boldly seized the opportunity to plant seeds for the future in good soil, so a bountiful harvest would bring our state to brighter, more prosperous days ahead.

Thanks to that approach and our work together, our state has celebrated unprecedented success. By keeping our state open for business, bringing record levels of jobs and investment, and fighting to put hardworking Georgians first, we

now have the opportunity to build a safer, stronger Georgia for all who call the Peach State home.

In September of 2018, I unveiled my plan to raise teacher pay in our state by 5,000 dollars. At the time, Georgia ranked 23rd in the nation in annual salary for our educators, and a statewide survey showed that 44 percent of the hardworking Georgians leading our classrooms would leave the profession within the first five years.

Today, three years after we came together and passed a 3,000 dollar down payment on that promise, educators and students face a challenging future. Parents, teachers, and administrators across our state are doing their best to help students overcome learning loss due to the pandemic. Students from all walks of life are confronted with mental health struggles. Teachers are asked to do more and more every year. And the need for a world-class K-12 education to prepare our children for an ever-changing workforce has never been greater.

Throughout my first term, I've had the honor of attending teacher listening sessions and regular meetings with a group of superintendents and school board members from across the state. In those discussions, I've gotten to know and understand the struggles, the successes, and the needs of different school districts in every corner of Georgia.

Hardworking Georgians in our schools - the school staff, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and teachers - all do a terrific job keeping our kids safe and investing in their futures. To support their heroic efforts day in and day out, I believe we as state leaders must continue to do everything we can to ensure they have the resources necessary to fulfill their mission and prepare the next generation of leaders for successful lives and careers.

That's why my Fiscal Year 2023 budget proposal will include a final installment of 2,000 dollars to finish out the largest teacher pay raise in state history - a total of 5,000 dollars since 2019! This 2,000-dollar raise will impact K-12 teachers, assistant teachers, and pre-k teachers – who I think we can all agree have gone above and beyond for their students throughout the pandemic.

In addition, my Amended Fiscal Year 2022 budget will recommend a one-time pay supplement of 2,000 dollars for full-time, state-funded instructional staff, school support staff, and school administration and a 1,000-dollar, one-time supplement for school bus drivers, nurses, nutrition workers, and part-time employees.

Let's take a moment to thank them for all they have done for our students... and our state!

Additionally, a priority for conservative leaders under the Gold Dome, including myself, for many years, has been to appropriately fund the state school funding formula. These dollars are sent directly to schools in every corner of Georgia to hire more teachers, reduce class sizes, and ensure every child receives a quality education.

My Fiscal Year 2023 budget proposal will recommend adding 425 million dollars to fully fund our schools and completely restore all austerity cuts to education funding in our state that were made during the pandemic.

This key priority will collectively provide an additional 1.4 billion dollars in direct funding for our K-12 schools and invest more per K-12 student than ever before.

When it comes to education in our state, it's about a lot more than just money and resources. As the parents of three daughters, one who is a public-school teacher, Marty and I are also concerned about what we are seeing across the country. From the classroom to the ball field, there are those who want to divide our kids along political lines, push partisan agendas, and indoctrinate students from all walks of life.

This is wrong, it's dangerous, and as long as I'm governor, it will not take root in Georgia.

That's why I look forward to working with members of the General Assembly this legislative session to protect our students from divisive ideologies - like critical race theory – that pit kids against each other. I also look forward to working with the House and Senate to pass, and sign, a parental bill of rights in our education

system and other pieces of legislation that I strongly support to ensure fairness in school sports and address obscene materials online and in our school libraries.

I believe, by working together, this legislative session will be a historic one for education in our state.

Because building a safer, stronger Georgia starts with putting students and parents first.

During my campaign for governor, I told Georgians I would focus on bringing innovative solutions to our many healthcare challenges - not just expand a one-size-fits-all, broken government program.

That's why I worked alongside members of this body to craft Georgia-centric solutions through the Patients First Act that would increase access to coverage for our most vulnerable, while also lowering costs for millions of Georgia families.

Today, we are seeing the benefits of our plan across the state.

When I signed the bipartisan Patients First Act in 2019, Georgia had only four health insurance carriers offering plans in the individual market. Today, we have nearly tripled that number with eleven carriers offering plans for 2022.

In 2019, only 26 percent of Georgia's counties had more than one carrier offering insurance on the individual market. Now, in 2022, 98 percent of all counties have more than one carrier – which means expanded choice and lowered costs for hardworking Georgians.

Overall, the state's 139 million dollar investment in Georgia Access included in my budget proposal this year has helped reduce premiums by an average of 12 percent statewide. That's 850 dollars in annual savings for Georgians on the marketplace today. And in rural counties where premium prices were highest, choices in coverage were few, and options for care were limited, the reinsurance program has contributed to premium reductions from 25 percent to over 30 percent in some counties.

For a 50-year old Georgian buying a silver plan on the marketplace, that translates into an annual savings from 2,500 dollars to over 4,300 dollars a year.

I'd like to thank Insurance Commissioner General John King for his work alongside my office to implement these reforms and deliver results for Georgia patients.

While the Biden administration plays politics, in Georgia, we're making healthcare more affordable for millions of our citizens.

As we lower insurance premiums, it's equally vital that we have doctors for Georgians to see for care. Physicians and nurses are in short supply across the country, but especially in rural Georgia.

That's why my budget proposals include an initial 1 million dollars for the University System of Georgia to expand nursing programs up to 500 students annually over 5 years and funding for our Technical College System to grow their partnership with Allied Health to serve up to 700 additional students annually.

My proposal will also invest 2.5 million dollars for 136 residency slots and allocate 1 million dollars to Mercer University to address rural physician shortages.

With these key investments, we hope to add 1,300 additional healthcare practitioners in our state!

Before I go on, let's pause and take a moment to thank all our healthcare heroes in Georgia for their tireless dedication over the last two years!

In Fiscal Year 2021, my office worked alongside members of the House on an important priority of theirs to expand Medicaid coverage for new mothers to six months. Building on that success, my budget proposal includes a priority of members of the Senate to extend that coverage to a full year to ensure these new moms are able to receive medical care at a critical time for their health and long-term wellbeing.

And to continue Georgia's protection and celebration of life at all stages, I believe it is vitally important that we continue our work together to strengthen our state's

foster care and adoption systems.

My budget proposal will include nearly 28 million dollars to allocate a 10 percent provider rate increase for all foster parents, relative caregivers, child caring institutions, and child placing agencies.

This has been one of the most rewarding issues my office has tackled with members of both chambers, and I wanted to take a moment and thank the members here today - and those who are no longer serving - for their bipartisan efforts to put Georgia's children first.

To build a safer, stronger Georgia, we must ensure every Georgian feels safe and secure in their communities.

As I announced last week, I believe that starts with fully recognizing the constitutional rights granted to law-abiding Georgians in our founding documents, and I look forward to supporting constitutional carry legislation this session.

Together, we made wise investments in public safety over the last three years. By creating the anti-gang task force within the GBI, passing bipartisan human trafficking legislation to hold criminals accountable and support victims, and funding the crime suppression unit, we have shown our state's commitment to reducing crime and ridding our streets of gangs.

The anti-gang task force in particular has been hard at work. I'm very proud of the brave men and women of the GBI and all they have accomplished under the leadership of Director Vic Reynolds.

But in too many jurisdictions across our state, soft-on-crime local governments and prosecutors have been unwilling to join our fight to rid their communities of these criminal networks.

With many urban - and some rural - counties facing alarming levels of violent crime, we have the responsibility to act. To provide additional assistance for GBI's efforts to dismantle criminal street gangs, my budget proposal will include funding

for a new anti-gang unit in the Attorney General's office which will allow Attorney General Carr to direct more resources in prosecuting gangs statewide.

And my office will also be supporting enabling legislation that gives the Attorney General the authority to partner with the GBI and local law enforcement officials in investigating and prosecuting these dangerous criminals.

To streamline case backlogs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure prosecutors can obtain evidence as quickly as possible, my proposals will recommend over 7 million dollars to upgrade GBI crime lab equipment, begin improvements to GBI headquarters, and provide an additional 32 staff in the crime lab and medical examiner's office to address their increased volume.

This investment follows 110 million dollars in federal funds that my office allocated to the judicial system back in October of this year to swiftly address delayed cases.

Justice delayed is justice denied, and we will provide every resource necessary to ensure courts and prosecutors have the information they need. Because safer communities lead to stronger communities, and, together, I know we can build on our significant progress over the last three years.

On the frontlines of our mission to build a safer, stronger Georgia is the Department of Public Safety and our brave men and women in blue and gray.

One of the greatest honors of holding this office is seeing these heroes work each and every day to protect our communities and patrol our roadways. From ensuring peaceful protesters were kept safe and restoring order to our capital city in the summer of 2020 to hunkering down through a global pandemic and serving as the tip of the spear in our crime suppression efforts here in metro-Atlanta, the Department went above and beyond the call of duty every time.

To bolster their critically important efforts, my budget proposal will include 3 million dollars to support an additional trooper school class of 75 cadets this coming year.

I'd like to thank Colonel Wright and his team for all that they continue to do for our state.

I think most of you in this chamber would agree, it has never been harder to wear the uniform. Unfortunately, in the face of some local government and activist opposition to law enforcement across the country, I believe some hardworking Georgians may be hesitant to enter the workforce wearing blue.

To ensure we recruit Georgia's finest to protect our communities, my office has asked Commissioner Greg Dozier of the Technical College System of Georgia to add law enforcement and criminal justice degrees to our high-demand career initiatives.

This aims to provide free tuition to over 1,000 Georgians looking to obtain those degrees at our technical colleges.

As you all know, at the end of last year, I was proud to join many of you in allocating a 1,000-dollar bonus to our law enforcement and first responders across the state. As my office released last week, I'm also proud to say that my budget proposal will include a 5,000 dollar raise for state law enforcement and other state employees.

These brave men and women have been on the front lines of a truly unprecedented time in our state's history – from civil unrest to a global pandemic – and we couldn't be more appreciative of all they do to keep our families and communities safe.

As long as I'm Governor, Georgia will always back the blue! At this time, I'd like to recognize their efforts and say thank you!

No issue to improve the safety and wellbeing of Georgians has had more bipartisan support than the top priority of our First Lady. Would you all join me in thanking Marty, the girls, and the GRACE Commission for their great work to end human trafficking in our state.



Under Marty's leadership alongside co-chairs Speaker Pro-Tem Jan Jones and GBI Director Reynolds, the GRACE Commission has changed the conversation around human trafficking by reminding Georgians that the men and women trapped in this evil industry need our help and our compassion – not another blind eye turned.

With the strong support of members of the General Assembly, and state law enforcement – including Attorney General Chris Carr – they've championed reforms that now give survivors a fighting chance, a place to shelter, and a path back to the life they wish to lead.

The GRACE Commission has also pushed for tougher penalties for those who break our laws and enslave others into a life in the shadows.

I'd like to thank every member - Republican and Democrat - for their votes in support of these new laws.

Our work here is not yet finished. Unfortunately, many criminals who make their living destroying the lives of others are able to quickly get back out onto the streets and begin preying upon young women - and men - within hours of their initial arrest.

That's why our First Lady and the GRACE Commission will be bringing forward legislation to add human trafficking to the list of serious violent and sexual offenses that require a superior court judge to grant bail.

Making these common-sense, bipartisan reforms to our criminal justice system to protect our most vulnerable is yet another way we can work together to build a safer, stronger state for generations to come.

Nearly two years after the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Georgia, millions are vaccinated, and Georgia's economy is roaring back faster and stronger than other states across the country.

In fact, the Peach State is leading the nation in economic recovery. Because Georgia protected both lives and livelihoods, our best and most prosperous days are

ahead. Our unemployment rate is at record lows - outpacing most of the country – including our fellow states in the southeast.

Job and investment numbers are through the roof. Companies from around the world have Georgia on their minds. Small businesses are bouncing back, and we just celebrated the largest single economic development project in state history.

These achievements did not happen by accident. Georgia is on the move because we chose freedom over government shutdowns. We trusted our citizens to be a part of the solution - instead of part of the problem. We continue to fight unconstitutional federal mandates that force hardworking Georgians to choose between their livelihoods or a COVID vaccine.

We stood up for our job creators - and their employees - and ignored the partisan attacks from the left, the national media, and those who seek to divide us for financial or political gain. We made the tough decisions because they were the right ones. We put hardworking Georgians and their families first, because that's what we were all elected to do.

Nearly five years ago when I announced my campaign for governor, I made Georgians this promise: that I would run on an agenda that would put them first ahead of the status quo.

I would tell voters what I wanted to do as their governor, and if they chose me and my family to serve them for four years, we would go to work for them every day and do exactly that. Marty, the girls, and I are deeply honored by the trust a record number of Georgians placed in us back in November of 2018.

With the Lord before us, we set out to do the job you all hired us for. And whether you voted for me or not, I have fought hard to live up to the commitments I made on the campaign trail and ultimately do the right thing, even when no one was watching.

The bold, conservative agenda I've outlined over the last few days prioritizes education, healthcare, and public safety.

It invests historic levels of resources in our students and educators. It keeps politics out of the classroom and ensures parents have the final say in their kids' education.

It reduces the cost of health insurance for Georgia families, recruits 1,300 new nurses and doctors into communities where they're needed the most, and gives new mothers expanded access to medical care.

It incentivizes more Georgians to enter a career in law enforcement, redoubles our efforts to dismantle violent street gangs and combat human trafficking, and strengthens Georgians' constitutional rights to protect themselves and their families.

It turns promises made into promises kept.

This plan for a safer, stronger Georgia puts hardworking Georgians first and ensures our state will continue to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family for generations to come.

Over the last three years, we've shown what this team can accomplish even when enormous obstacles stood in our way. By working together throughout this legislative session, I know it can be done – again.

Thank you, may God bless you, and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!