



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE WEEK 4: February 2--6



Fellow Child Advocates!

Thank YOU for making Advocacy Day 2026 a success! Approximately 100 advocates and pediatricians participated in this year's event, and your energy was remarkable!

After hearing from an informative panel of leaders from nearly all of Alabama's child-serving state agencies and two special guests, many of you took the messages those speakers charged you with down the street to the Statehouse. For many of you, this was the first step in your advocacy journey. Because of your bravery and commitment to our state's children and families, we have no doubt they will remain top of mind for state lawmakers.

We thank our panelists, special guests (Representative Anthony Daniels and Representative Rex Reynolds), our co-host, the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Alabama Association of School Boards for providing a wonderful venue. We also thank our sponsors: Children's of Alabama and the Gratitude Foundation. A huge thank you to our volunteers from the Booker T. Washington Law Magnet Program in Montgomery and undergraduates from Auburn University at Montgomery Social Work program for helping the day run smoothly.

What Happened During Week 4?

Lawmakers wrapped up legislative days 9 and 10 last week, completing the first third of the 2026 session.

Budget Hearings Resumed – Education Trust Fund

Budget hearings resumed on February 2, with a focus on the Education Trust Fund (ETF) amid significant challenges in Alabama's education system. Presentations highlighted the rising costs of health insurance through the Public Education Employees' Health Insurance Plan (PEEHIP), a trend mirrored nationwide. While the program requested \$1.089 billion, Governor Kay Ivey's proposed fiscal year 2027 budget allocates \$966.4 million, signaling potential budgetary constraints.

Lawmakers voiced concerns that these escalating expenses are placing considerable strain on the ETF and could lead to difficult financial decisions in the future. Complicating this, federal pandemic-related relief funds that previously supported the education budget are beginning to decline, further complicating planning for the upcoming fiscal year.

In January, Governor Ivey released her proposed fiscal year 2027 budget, which includes a \$570 million increase for the ETF. In contrast, State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey requested \$957.3 million for fiscal year 2027, amounting to \$201.4 million more than the governor's proposal. This request includes \$52 million aimed at expanding the Struggling Readers Beyond Grade 3 program, making it more accessible to struggling students attending higher-performing schools.

As the legislature commenced the session with swift progress on various bills, observers note that ongoing debates about education funding, teacher pay, and health benefits may slow down the legislative process in the weeks ahead. Ultimately, finding a balance among these pressing issues will be crucial as lawmakers navigate a tighter budget environment.

Online Protections for Kids

HB161, sponsored by Representative Chris Sells and carried in the Senate by Senator Clyde Chambliss, passed the Senate as amended. The bill would require app stores to implement age verification for users, aiming to limit minors' access to age-restricted content and services online. The amendment, offered by Minority Leader Bobby Singleton, would delay the bill's implementation from October 2026 to January 2027. Because the bill was amended, it will go back to the House for concurrence or a conference committee. This bill would be one of the first statewide requirements aimed at protecting children online — potentially reducing minors' access to harmful or inappropriate digital content.

HB78 continued momentum, receiving a favorable report from the Senate Education Policy Committee, being read for the second time in the Senate, and being placed on the calendar. As previously reported, the Healthy Early Development & Screen Time Bill supports healthy digital engagement for children from birth through age five. It will provide clear, developmentally appropriate guidance for early childhood settings. Research consistently shows that excessive screen time in early childhood can crowd out what young children need most—responsive adult interaction, hands-on play, movement, and sleep. The bill does not ban technology; rather, it promotes intentional, age-appropriate use that supports learning and development.

Here's your weekly bill tracking update! We're here to keep you in the loop on the latest actions by lawmakers. Remember, reporting on a bill isn't an endorsement; it's about highlighting issues that affect Alabama's children and families. For more details on additional bills, visit us [online!](#)

BILLS ON THE MOVE

HB50 (Rep. Terri Collins): HB50 would make state funding for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library permanent. It would require the Department of Early Childhood Education to create and oversee the Imagination Library of Alabama Program, ensuring it continues to provide free, age-appropriate books to children ages 0-5 monthly. It received a favorable report from the Senate Education Policy Committee, was read for the second time in the Senate, and was placed on the calendar.

HB139 (Rep. Danny Crawford): Current law requires most corn masa food products to be enriched with folic acid, with a few limited exemptions. HB139 would add corn masa flour to the list of products that must be enriched, while also exempting certified organic corn masa flour and related products. The bill passed the House and moves to the Senate.

SB203 (Sen. Vivian Davis Figures): This bill strengthens child safety and sexual offense laws by increasing penalties for indecent exposure to victims under age 12, making it a Class C felony. It raises the age threshold for offenses involving directing minors to engage in sexual acts and expands the prohibition on transmitting obscene material to include electronic devices. Prosecution remains allowed even when the offender believed they were communicating with a child who was actually an undercover officer.

The bill also broadens the crime of traveling to meet a child for unlawful sex to cover cases based on the offender's belief that the person was a child. In addition, it removes an affirmative defense for first-degree kidnapping, adds voyeurism to the list of sex offenses, and creates a new offense for inpatient custodial sexual misconduct in residential treatment facilities.

The bill passed the Senate and heads to the House.

Advocacy Tip of the Week

Time to prepare!

Before you begin advocating, it is important to research your topic. To influence and pressure “decision-makers,” you must be knowledgeable about your topic. This may include doing fieldwork, public opinion polls, or reaching out to other organizations that have done similar work. Once you have your research, it is helpful to compile it into a comprehensive report.

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