



# 2024 Legislative Priorities

## About Science for Georgia

Science for Georgia is a 501c3 dedicated to bridging the gap between scientists and the public through training, outreach opportunities, and direct contact with the public, policymakers, and the press. Science for Georgia highlights how science can impact people's lives and advocates for the responsible use of science in public policy. We do this by facilitating the process of drafting or evaluating legislation, ensuring that at each step of the legislative process the most relevant and up-to-date science and data are considered.

## 2024 Focus

Science is everywhere and in the 2024 Georgia General Assembly Session we continue to focus on science *levers*, pivot points that are rooted in science and allow us to make meaningful progress in areas such as the environment, public health, and education and workforce.

## Science Note

In alignment with Title 28 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, all bills that significantly impact state expenditures and revenues must be accompanied by a [Fiscal Note](#). We strongly recommend that the Georgia General Assembly adopt a similar policy for any bills that involve scientific principles and evidence-based interventions. These [Science Notes](#) would highlight the strengths and limitations of the up-to-date, nonpartisan research into the science of the proposed policy. Using these [memos](#) would help to guide policies and demonstrate to constituents the commitment of the legislature to science.

Communication with the communities impacted is one of the most important considerations in legislation, and we strive to ensure Georgians have input in the areas that most impact their lives. Science for Georgia has, and will continue to produce, plain-language summaries of the scientific research regarding specific legislation to ensure that scientific facts are part of the legislative conversation.

## Environment

### Environmental Justice

The environment impacts what we eat, drink, and breathe, [shaping our health](#). Marginalized communities have [died of Covid-19 at a higher rate](#). This is due, in part, to living in neighborhoods with dirtier water, less greenspace, reduced access to nutritious food, and higher air pollution.

Georgia should ensure that new legislation addresses the inequitable effects of the environment on health, or at the very least, is not detrimental to the long-term health and wellness of communities. A robust **environmental justice bill** with community input is necessary to ensure equity is reached moving forward.

### Water – Protect the Waterways of Georgia

By protecting the waterways of Georgia from harm, we enable all Georgians to have fresh water for drinking, agriculture, fisheries, and enjoyment.

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1. [Protect the Okefenokee Swamp](#) from external threats, including a proposed mine.
2. Ensure additives applied to the land [add value to the soil](#) by increasing its nutrient value or preventing runoff (good soil amendments increase soil productivity, increasing agricultural productivity and saving money for farmers), instead of [turning Georgia's farmland into open waste fields](#).

## Breakup With Plastic

Georgia's environment is being negatively impacted by plastic waste. Plastic is very difficult to recycle and [only about 5% of plastic that is thrown into recycling bins is actually repurposed](#).

In June – a [non-binding international agreement was reached in Paris to look at plastic on a global scale](#). [The EPA has a draft National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution](#) that aims to reduce pollution during production, improve recycling management, and prevent plastic from entering the environment. We encourage the General Assembly to enable pathways for Georgia to meet the standards of the Paris Agreement.

## Public Health

### Food – Build a Roadmap to Eliminate Food Insecurity

[Build a Food Security Initiative](#) that mimics the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative. Work with our partners on developing a plan that highlights evidence-based solutions that maximize short-term aid and work toward creating a food system that eliminates the need for food assistance.

### Rural Medicine Access

Hospitals in rural Georgia have been [continuing to close](#) in the past decade and growing the urban-rural health divide. To bridge his healthcare gap and increase access to capable providers across the state, the General Assembly should allow [physician assistants and advanced practice registered nurses](#) to practice to the full extent of their training and [expand access to broadband](#).

### Opioid Crisis

Since 2019, the drug overdose rate in Georgia has [increased by 61.9%](#) from 2019 to 2021. The state is set to receive a total of [\\$636 million](#) in pharmaceutical lawsuit settlement funding. According to the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) from the agreement, 25% will be distributed to local governments.

While funds have already started to be allocated to Medicated Assisted Treatment, detox bed space, stigma reduction, and naloxone access, leaders [have yet to divulge](#) long-term plans for the funding that will be distributed over 18 years. [Transparency and data tracking](#) of funding must be set up to ensure that the funding received goes back to the most impacted communities.

### Medicaid Expansion

Medical insurance is essential to ensuring people can access the preventative care, screenings, and medical treatments that they need to live a happy and healthy life. Georgia is one of ten states that have [not approved the expansion of Medicaid](#).

Right now, Pandemic Medicaid access is being slowly unwound, the state is launching the new Pathways coverage program, and is establishing a state-based insurance marketplace. Completing all these goals

at once creates unnecessary risk to the coverage of low-income individuals, and costs Georgia money. [Prioritizing expanding Medicaid](#) would allow the state to utilize federal funding and prevent unnecessary gaps in coverage.

## Education & Workforce

### Early Education and Childcare

[20% of Georgia children live in poverty.](#) Georgia has capacity for only 15% of those children in Head Start. Fully funding Head Start is a win-win - nurturing children's development and enabling parents to work a steady job. This helps [break the cycle of poverty](#). In Georgia, low-income children that [enrolled in preschool had a higher academic achievement and proficiency](#) on 3rd grade test scores.

### Green Jobs

Since the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Georgia has announced over [16,000 new green jobs](#), one of the highest numbers in the country. Incentives should be provided for new green jobs in the [key industries](#) in the state such as agriculture and aerospace. The growth of green jobs will fortify the economic future of Georgia industries by looking at future impacts and an emerging field.

[A comprehensive plan](#) to transition the economy will ensure that all communities can participate in the new workforce, a coordinated strategy is implemented, and workers are treated and paid fairly. Proper workforce development ensures that workers who are in industries being phased out have sufficient resources to join the new green economy.

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