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May 11, 2011



DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

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Governor Deal to Sign “Good Behavior Bill”

Decatur, GA –Today, Governor Nathan Deal signed HB 373, also known as the “Good Behavior Bill” in a ceremony in the Governor’s Office.

The bill, which was sponsored by Representative B.J. Pak and Senator Joshua McKoon, allows juvenile court judges to modify the sentences of designated felons committed to the department. Currently, there is no provision for judges to modify sentences regardless of a youth’s behavior, academic achievement or rehabilitation while in custody.

“House Bill 373 will give youth in secure facilities an incentive to work on their attitude, education and behavior while they are in our custody,” said Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner Amy Howell. “Getting youth to place their energy into achievement and reform creates a safer environment for DJJ staff, the youth and the community.”

The bill will put more discretion in the hands of juvenile court judges, who are currently limited in their options regarding designated felons. Designated felons are youth who must, by law, spend between 12 and 60 months in a secure Youth Development Campus (YDC). They must serve the entire length of their sentence. Designated felons account for most long-term bed placements, and occupy a significant number of beds in short-term Regional Youth Detention Centers (RYDCs). HB 373, however, is not a space management measure. Out of DJJ’s current designated felon population, very few are qualified for good behavior recommendations to juvenile court.

“This bill provides juvenile court judges the opportunity to ensure lasting public safety by transitioning successful youth into the community with oversight,” stated Commissioner Howell. “We appreciate the hard work of Representative Pak and Senator McKoon in helping get this very important bill passed.”

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