

## **Arise legislative update 4-11-13**

# **Lawmakers OK bills to extend higher court fees, restore property tax break for disabled Alabamians**

Disabled Alabama homeowners would receive a full homestead exemption, regardless of their income, under a bill that the House [passed 101-0](#) Thursday. Also this week, the Senate [voted 27-3](#) Wednesday to make last year's temporary court fee increases permanent. The measures await consideration by the other chamber with 10 meeting days left in this year's regular session.

### **House backs property tax break for disabled Alabamians**

The House voted overwhelmingly Thursday to restore a full homestead exemption for all disabled Alabamians. Lawmakers last year enacted a measure – sponsored by Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills – that removed the full exemption for disabled people who are under age 65 and who live in households with more than \$12,000 a year in taxable income.

HB 19, also sponsored by Williams, would erase that income limit. The bill would apply retroactively to prevent a tax increase on affected residents. The measure would not change the portion of last year's law that increased the income limit for a full homestead exemption for non-disabled seniors from \$7,500 to \$12,000. The bill now will go to the Senate's education budget committee. The Senate's General Fund (GF) budget committee [approved a similar plan – SB 27, sponsored by Sen. Marc Keahey, D-Grove Hill](#) – in February.

### **Senate OKs plan to extend court fee increases**

State senators gave strong support Wednesday to a proposal to make [last year's court fee increases](#) permanent. SB 361, sponsored by Sen. Jimmy Holley, R-Elba, would remove the September 2015 expiration date for temporary fees on court filings and bail bonds. The vote came after the Senate stripped away provisions that would directed a share of the fees to the Office of Prosecution Services. The higher fees, projected to raise more than \$40 million a year for Alabama's court system, have fallen about \$15 million below expectations, [Chief Justice Roy Moore told lawmakers in February](#).

The House's GF budget committee [voted 7-5 last month](#) to amend a similar House proposal – HB 143, sponsored by Rep. Mike Hill, R-Columbiana – to preserve the fees' expiration date. Holley's bill will go not to that panel but to the House State Government Committee.

### **House panel signs off on transfer of Children First money to General Fund**

About \$22 million that ordinarily would go to the Children First Trust Fund (CFTF) would be sent to the GF instead next year under a bill that the House's GF budget committee approved Wednesday on a

voice vote. The funds would result from the resolution of a dispute over whether Alabama was upholding its obligations under the national tobacco settlement reached in the late 1990s. The state will learn later this month if the money will materialize, but those funds already are built into the Senate's version of next year's GF budget. The bill – SB 287, sponsored by Sen. Phil Williams, R-Rainbow City – has cleared the Senate and will move to the full House.

Committee members were not persuaded by several children's advocates who testified Wednesday to urge them to keep the money in the CFTF. The fund supports a range of children's programs, including child abuse prevention, juvenile probation services, and ALL Kids, which insures tens of thousands of Alabama children whose low- and middle-income families do not qualify for Medicaid. For more on the hearing and the committee's decision, read [this AL.com report](#).

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