



apple bytes

Justice at Our Core Since 2005

March | 2025



Appleseed at the Capitol

The last day of Georgia's legislative session is April 4, just a few days away. Georgia Appleseed's policy team is working hard with lawmakers from both parties to push through important reforms to make schools safer, expand mental health care, and ensure stable housing for Georgia's children and families. Our team is busy responding to requests for advice from state leaders, drafting legislation, organizing partners, and testifying at hearings.

Here are some of the session's most important bills:

School Justice

We have supported the thoughtful approach to **school safety and climate in HB 268 (Persinger)**. After the tragic school shooting at Apalachee High School, we partnered with House leaders to include evidence-based school

In the News:

Executive Director Michael Waller's **op-ed on school safety**, first published in *James Magazine*, opposes Senate Bill 61 which would send children to

safety solutions in this comprehensive bill (see In the News). We are concerned, however, about recent additions to HB 268 from SB 61, which we oppose. **SB 61 would impose harmful zero tolerance discipline policies** that criminalize students and do not make schools safe. We are still working to make HB 268 the best bill possible for kids.

We love that SB 123 (Kennedy) passed out of legislature, to improve student attendance and school climate across the state. This law will ensure that every county in Georgia has a Student Attendance and School Climate Committee - a **long-time priority of ours** - that can help detect and address problems at schools before they pose a risk to the school community. Also heading to the Governor for signature is **SB 85 (Brass)** to expand access to higher education for youth aging out of foster care.

Other good bills we have been supporting include **SB 233 (Brass)** to extend the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission for two years; **HB 291 (Taylor)** to expand health care access for children in underserved communities; and **SR 310 (Kirkpatrick)** to create a study committee on supports for transition age youth.

Housing Justice

We support HB 399 (Oliver) to bring accountability to out-of-state slumlords buying up Georgia rental properties, contributing to housing shortages and poor housing conditions. It would require those who own 25 or more single-family homes to

have an in-state representative (see In the News).

Learn more about these and our other [Policy Priorities >>](#)

adult court when they make certain threats at school. **“Piling on felonies for childish missteps won’t prevent the next tragedy—and it could instead destroy young lives in the process.”**

In the News:

Luci Ruiz, Policy Counsel, was quoted in the *AJC*'s front-page article, **[Legislators bemoan crisis for rent-paying Georgians.](#)** "We are very excited to see that both sides of the aisle are spearheading this effort" to address the effect of out-of-state investors - with little accountability - who are driving up rent costs.

FAIR

Fairness
Advocacy
Individualized
Representation

FACTOID

In more than 1/3 of our cases where students are accused of "threats" against schools, the students have autism or other disabilities and the child did not understand the alleged threat they made. After the school shooting last year, we have seen a surge in schools seeking to expel children with disabilities for minor infractions that did not pose an actual threat.

We can provide legal assistance to students and families. Please refer school discipline and special education cases to us at ReferralGAA.org or Disciplinehelp.org.

Bringing Behavioral Health to Students

Recent estimates show that up to **22% of school-age youth have a diagnosable behavioral health disorder and nearly 40% of high school students experienced poor behavioral health**, including anxiety and depression. Our Collaborative - with The Carter Center, Voices for Georgia's Children, and Resilient Georgia - is sharing resources to expand programs and services across Georgia to address this crisis.

Visit our SchoolBasedBehavioralHealth.org! You'll find a new **table showing the variety of SBBH resources and services** schools can offer. Everyone - parents, educators, counselors, providers, students and community members - are part of the solution.

Let's make behavioral health in schools as common as the school lunch.



**The
Need**



**Benefits
of SBBH**



**Targeted
Supports**



**SBBH
Examples**

Pro Bono Spotlight

We are grateful to **Arnall Golden Gregory** and Associate **Avery E. Carter** for their invaluable pro bono support. Avery conducted in-depth research and drafted a legal memo analyzing the due process right to equal language access in school tribunal hearings and special education meetings for non-English speaking parents and students. Her work directly strengthens what we are doing in School Justice, equipping families with critical resources to navigate these high-stakes proceedings.



Thank you, Avery, for your dedication to justice for Georgia's children.

In 2025 Georgia Appleseed celebrates 20 years of driving change and advancing justice across Georgia.

**ROARING
FOR JUSTICE**

SAVE THE DATE
Friday • April 25 • 2025
THE FOUNDRY | PURITAN MILL

Fundraiser celebrating 20 years of justice
and policy for Georgia youth

20
YEARS
**GEORGIA
APPLESEED**
ESTABLISHED 2005
Center for Law & Justice

[Get Roaring Tickets Now!](#)

Step into a night of inspiration and celebration at *Roaring for Justice*, Georgia Appleseed's 20th-anniversary fundraiser! We'll honor our 2025 Good Apple Awardees, share powerful stories, and come together to champion Georgia's children.

A heartfelt thanks to our **Pillar of Justice** sponsors:



What's Your Favorite Georgia Appleseed Memory?

Have you seen our #ThrowbackThursday and #ImpactFriday posts on social media? To celebrate our 20th anniversary, we're looking back to people, projects, and partners who've helped build and support Georgia Appleseed.

This milestone belongs to all of us - whether you're new to our work or have been with us since the beginning as a staff member, board member, pro bono partner, supporter, or volunteer. We want to hear your stories! Email us at 20years@gaappleseed.org to share your memories and help us build a 20-year timeline that honors key moments and special contributors.



Stay tuned for more ways to celebrate, including **Roaring for Justice on April 25**. Let's reflect on the past, connect in the present, and look ahead to the future - together.

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