



Legislative Update

January 29, 2021

GRA Legislative Agenda Items

Truck Size and Weight: Oppose any legislation that increases the allowable size and weight of truck carrying freight. Typically, advocates seek to revise O.C.G.A. 32-6-26 (g) (1), which allows for a weight increase and various radius distance increases for forest products, live poultry, cotton, feed, granite, raw ore or minerals, solid waste concrete or poultry. We are closely monitoring this issue, but no legislation has been introduced at this point.

Two Man Crew: Oppose any legislation which would seek to require a train that is in use for the movement of freight to operate with at least two crew members. Similar legislation was introduced in the 2019 session. We are closely monitoring this issue, but no legislation has been introduced at this point.

Blocked Crossing: Oppose any bills that would prevent a railroad common carrier from authorizing the operation of a train that causes a road to be blocked for longer than 15 minutes. Similar legislation has been introduced in recent years. This week, freshman Representative Mesha Mainor (D-Atlanta) introduced [House Bill 139](#), which prohibits a train from blocking any street, road, or highway grade crossing for longer than 15 minutes, except under certain circumstances. This bill was assigned to the House Transportation Committee this week. We will continue to keep you updated on it.

Georgia 811: Oppose any legislation which would remove the Georgia 811 exemption for railroads, thereby requiring them to join Georgia 811, “call before you dig.” Georgia code currently exempts railroads from mandatory Georgia 811 membership. Any attempts to change the law to make Georgia 811 membership compulsory for railroads would be harmful to the industry, as it would slow railroads down. We are closely monitoring this issue, but no legislation has been introduced at this point.

Overview of General Assembly

Following Joint Appropriations hearings last week, this week House and Senate members resumed the legislative calendar, convening for Legislative Days Five through Eight. Several House and Senate committees held their first meetings of the year this week, many of them to ratify the committee’s rules and procedures. One notable exception was the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome), which favorably passed out Senate Bill 6. Senate Bill 6, sponsored by Senator John Albers (R-Roswell), the “Tax Credit Return on Investment Act of 2021,” would allow the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance chairmen to request economic analyses of state tax credits. SB 6 was selected by the Rules Committee to move to the Senate floor on Monday.

Budget

After the House Appropriations committee approved the Amended Fiscal Year 2021 budget, House Bill 80, on Wednesday, it went on to the full House for a vote on Thursday. After passing the House on Thursday by a vote of 149 to 20, the AFY21 budget, which runs through June 30, was immediately

transmitted to the Senate, where, following a thorough review by the Senate, it will likely pass relatively quickly as legislators remain prepared for the possibility of having to take a break from the legislative session due to COVID-19. Senate Appropriations subcommittees began meeting on Friday morning at 6:30 AM. The passage of a balanced budget is the only constitutionally required piece of business for the Georgia General Assembly each year.

Gambling

The contentious topics of legalizing casinos, horse racing, and sports betting are back for the 2021 session. Representative Ron Stephens (R- Savannah), who chairs the House Tourism and Economic Development Committee, filed House Resolution 30 this week. If passed, Georgians would be asked on the 2022 ballot whether they support allowing casinos in the state. Chairman Stephens filed House Bill 86 earlier this session, which would legalize sports betting in Georgia. He said he also plans to file a piece of legislation which would legalize horse racing. Stephens filed similar pieces of legislation last session, but after failing to pass out of the House by the necessary date, the bills were effectively killed and required refiling this year to begin the legislative process all over again.

Election Law

Governor Kemp, House Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge), and Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan have all expressed support for passing some form of election reform legislation this session. Several proposals have been introduced in these first few weeks by both Republicans and Democrats. One garnering a great deal of attention this week comes from freshman Senator Jason Anavitarte (R-Dallas). Senate Bill 29 would require Georgians to submit a copy of their photo ID both when applying for an absentee ballot as well as when submitting the absentee ballot.

Human Trafficking

Governor Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp held a press conference this week to discuss one of the administration's ongoing legislative priorities, combating human trafficking. The first lady serves as Co-Chair of the GRACE (Georgians for Refuge, Action, Compassion, and Education) Commission along with Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, Jan Jones (R- Milton). One of the commission's bills this session would allow trafficking survivors to privately petition their local Superior Court for a legal name change to protect their identities. Another proposed piece of legislation being supported by the commission would allow survivors to sue their traffickers and their accomplices, which includes anyone who profits from the trafficking, for civil damages.

Paid Family Leave

Representative Houston Gaines (R- Athens) refiled House Bill 146, which would make both male and female state employees eligible for parental leave after six months of full-time employment. An identical piece of legislation overwhelmingly passed the House last session, but it stalled in the Senate in the final moments of the session.

Legislative Calendar

Despite rumors that the legislature would take a several-week break following this week to allow for heightened COVID-19 numbers to subside and more individuals to be vaccinated, the General Assembly met Tuesday through Friday this week. House and Senate leadership agreed to a busy legislative calendar for the next several weeks, convening as follows:

Monday, February 1..... Legislative Day 9
Tuesday, February 2..... Legislative Day 10

Wednesday, February 3.....	Legislative Day 11
Thursday, February 4.....	Legislative Day 12
Monday, February 8.....	Legislative Day 13