



Legislative Update

March 17, 2023

GRA Legislative Agenda Items

Oppose Truck Size and Weight Increases: 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.

Representative Steven Meeks (R-Screven) introduced [House Bill 189](#) earlier this session, which seeks to increase maximum allowable truck weights in Georgia. The original version of the bill would have allowed trucks of up to 90,000 pounds (80,000 pounds with a 12.5 percent variance) and removed any reference to specific commodities that could use the variance, so that the heavier weight limits would apply to all trucks.

After a lengthy floor debate on Crossover Day last Monday, a committee substitute version of the bill passed the House by a two-vote margin. The version passed out of the House would allow a 10 percent variance (up to 88,000 pounds) for trucks carrying the specific commodities currently covered in Georgia Code, e.g., forest products, live poultry, granite, concrete, etc.

A new substitute version (attached to this email) considered by the Senate Transportation Committee this week includes additional commodities that would receive the 10 percent variance, including but not limited to, floor coverings, synthetic turf, agricultural inputs, and finished forest products. The Senate committee held a hearing only; no vote was taken. **The bill is now slated for a committee vote on Monday at 1 PM.**

On the Senate side, Senator Russ Goodman (R-Cogdell) introduced [Senate Bill 165](#) earlier this session, which is identical to the original House version that was introduced (90,000 pound maximum for all trucks). Several weeks ago, the Senate Transportation Committee, chaired by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) held a hearing on the measure, but did not take a vote, so the bill was ineligible for floor action on Crossover Day.

Defend the Short Line Tax Credit: Defend the 50 percent short line tax credit of \$3500 per mile that is currently in place until the end of 2026.

- There have been no credible threats to the short line tax credit this session, though there exists a vocal faction of legislators, particularly among Senate Republicans, that opposes

tax credits, generally. We are closely monitoring the Senate Finance Committee to ensure that there are no threats to the tax credit.

Oppose Anti-Industry Legislation:

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. Legislation mandating a two-man crew was introduced in the 2019 session.

- There has not been any legislation introduced this session that addresses the two-man crew.

Blocked Crossings: 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. There were several bills and resolutions introduced during the 2022 session which would address train length and blocked crossings, including [House Resolution 1023](#), [House Resolution 1027](#), [House Bill 1473](#), and [House Resolution 919](#).

- There has not been any legislation introduced this session that addresses blocked crossings.

Freight and Logistics: Following a two-year study on freight and logistics by the House and Senate, House Transportation Chairman Rick Jasperse has introduced [House Bill 617](#), which would provide for the development and maintenance of a statewide freight and logistics implementation plan. The bill passed the House Transportation Committee ahead of Crossover Day, but was never called up for a vote on the House floor.

Broadband Legislation: This week the House unanimously passed [Senate Bill 193](#), which would provide for the Department of Community Affairs to determine locations that are eligible for state or federal funding programs administered by the state for improved broadband services. Since the measure was not amended by the House, the next step is for it to be sent to the governor's desk for his consideration.

Overview of General Assembly

This week the Georgia General Assembly convened Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 32 through 35. The number of bills under consideration by the legislature has narrowed significantly following last week's Crossover Day deadline. Any bills that failed to pass out of the chamber in which they originated by last Monday are effectively dead this session, though it is possible for a bill's language to be tacked on to a related bill later in the legislative process.

A notable example of this from this week came in a Thursday morning Senate Economic Development meeting when committee members voted to add language allowing sports betting under the Georgia Lottery to [House Bill 237](#). Provisions of the original bill, sponsored by Representative Leesa Hagan (R-Lyons), would designate the Southeast Georgia Soap Box Derby as the official soap box derby of the State of Georgia. At the request of Representative Hagan, the language relating to the soap box derby was taken out of the substitute version of the bill

entirely, so the substitute version of the bill only addresses sports betting. Because the bill has been amended on the Senate side, if the measure is passed by the full Senate, it will need to go back to the House for final approval. Unlike some other sports betting measures, this bill does not seek to amend Georgia's constitution, so the bill requires a simple majority rather than a two-thirds majority to pass.

There are still a handful of bills being introduced in each chamber, but for the most part, the bulk of work is being done at the committee level at this point in the session—House committees are now considering Senate bills while Senate committees are taking up House bills. Any bills amended by the other chamber will need to go back to their chamber of origin for that chamber to agree or disagree to the changes made. If both chambers are in agreement on the language of the bill, it is sent to Governor Kemp's desk for consideration.

Next week is the last full week of session, so we anticipate floor action to pick back up substantially next week. The General Assembly will convene Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday for Legislative Days 36 through 38. Wednesday will serve as a committee workday for legislators. The following week, the legislature convenes Monday and Wednesday for the final two days of the 2023 Legislative Session.

After the General Assembly adjourns *Sine Die* at midnight on Day 40, Governor Kemp and his team begin the 40-day bill review process, during which they will assess the legislation that was passed by the General Assembly to determine which measures Governor Kemp will sign and which measures he will veto. If the governor takes no action on a bill, the bill becomes law. A governor's veto of a bill requires a two-thirds majority of both the House and the Senate to override.

Amended Fiscal Year 2023 Budget

On Crossover Day last week, the House and Senate voted to overwhelmingly approve the conference committee report for [House Bill 18](#), the budget for Amended Fiscal Year 2023, which runs through June 30. Flanked by leaders of the General Assembly, on Monday Governor Kemp held a press conference to announce his signature of the AFY 2023 budget. The \$32.5 billion midyear budget includes approximately \$1 billion in taxpayer refunds; about another \$1 billion for a one-time property tax relief grant; \$92 million for the state reinsurance program; \$116 million in school safety grants; and \$36 million for the Rural Workforce Housing Fund.

Senate budget writers are currently working on finalizing their budget recommendations for [House Bill 19](#), the Fiscal Year 2024 budget. Once the Senate approves its version of the 'big budget,' a conference committee will be appointed to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the budget before it can be sent to Governor Kemp's desk for his signature.

Governor Kemp's Priorities

- After it passed the House on Tuesday, [House Bill 162](#) became the second bill this session to receive Governor Kemp's signature; the first was the Amended Fiscal Year 2023 budget, which he signed last Friday. The measure, which was sponsored by Governor's

Floor Leaders Lauren McDonald (R-Cumming) in the House and Mike Hodges (R-Brunswick) in the Senate, provides a one-time tax credit of \$250 for individuals and \$500 for married couples who filed taxes in Georgia in 2021 and 2022.

- [House Bill 147](#), or the ‘Safe Schools Act,’ was introduced earlier this session by Representative Will Wade (R-Dawsonville). It would require school safety plans to be submitted to the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA); require intruder alert drills for all public schools; and would provide for a school safety and anti-gang endorsement for eligible certificated professional personnel issued by the Professional Standards Commission. The bill, which was sponsored by Governor’s Floor Leaders Will Wade (R-Dawsonville) in the House and Mike Hodges (R-Brunswick) in the Senate, passed the Senate this week by a margin of 52 to 3. The bill next heads to the Governor’s desk for his signature.
- On Thursday morning the Senate Economic Development and Tourism Committee considered [House Bill 128](#). The measure, sponsored by Governor’s Floor Leader Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville), would provide for representation of minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses in the procurement of state contracts. The bill was passed by the Economic Development Committee and is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for floor consideration.
- [Senate Bill 42](#), sponsored by Senator Mike Hodges (R-Brunswick), would increase the fines for businesses that fail to comply with model notice requirements for the human trafficking hotline. The bill, which passed out of the Senate earlier this session by a vote of 51 to 1, was favorably reported out of the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee this week. It has been selected by the Rules Committee for a floor vote on Monday and will be carried by Representative Will Wade (R-Dawsonville).
- [Senate Bill 44](#), sponsored by Senator Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia), would impose mandatory minimum sentences for violations of the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act—those convicted of recruiting individuals into a gang would be required to serve five to twenty years in prison on top of sentences for other gang-related crimes. The bill passed the Senate earlier this session 31 to 22 and was passed by the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee this week by substitute. It has been selected by the House Rules Committee for a floor vote on Monday, and it will be presented by Representative Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville).
- [Senate Bill 65](#) by House Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Ben Watson (R-Savannah) would allow Georgia to establish its own health insurance marketplace in place of the federal exchange. Earlier this session the measure passed the Senate 32 to 19 along party lines. On the House side, it has been favorably reported by the Insurance Committee, so it is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for a floor vote. The measure is sponsored in the House by Representative Eddie Lumsden (R-Armuchee), who chairs the Insurance Committee.

Transgender Legislation

On Tuesday the House Health and Human Services Committee considered [Senate Bill 140](#), which is sponsored by Senator Carden Summers (R-Cordele). The legislation would prohibit

doctors from performing sex change operations or providing certain hormones like estrogen and testosterone to minors with gender dysphoria.

The bill passed out of committee earlier this week 12 to 10 along party lines. On Thursday morning the House Rules Committee put the measure on a supplemental calendar for floor consideration. A number of representatives on both sides of the issue took to the well to speak on the bill, which was carried in the House by Representative Josh Bonner (R-Fayetteville). After a lengthy floor debate on Thursday morning, the measure passed 96 to 75. The House also voted to immediately transmit the bill back to the Senate, which must approve the changes made to the bill by the House. If the Senate approves the changes made by the House, the bill will be sent to Governor Kemp's desk.

COVID Passport Legislation

This week the House Public Health Committee, chaired by Representative Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta), considered [Senate Bill 1](#) by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming). The bill would remove the sunset on the prohibition on state and local governments from requiring proof of COVID vaccination for government services. The prohibition is currently set to expire June 30, 2023. There was a tie vote in the committee on the legislation, with Chairman Sharon Cooper serving as the tie-breaking vote to pass the bill out of committee. The measure is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for a House floor vote.

Election Reform

This week the House Governmental Affairs Committee took up [Senate Bill 222](#), sponsored by Senator Max Burns (R-Sylvania), which would require that all costs and expenses relating to election administration be paid for with "lawfully appropriate public funds." The measure would effectively prohibit donations to county election offices from nonprofits like Mark Zuckerberg's Center for Tech and Civic Life, which donated an estimated \$43 million to Georgia counties in Georgia for election administration during the COVID pandemic in 2020. The bill passed out of committee along party lines by a margin of 8 to 6, and it is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for a floor vote.