



Legislative Update

February 5, 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. Last 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 for consideration, but has not received a hearing.

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 a full legislative week last week, House and Senate members reconvened this week for Legislative Days Nine through Twelve. The beginning of the two-year legislative term typically starts relatively slowly, but this week legislative action picked up substantially as an increasing number of committees met to pass out bills and a large number of new bills were introduced in the House and Senate. Members will return for Legislative Day Thirteen on Monday, February 8.

Budget

Last Thursday, House Bill 80, the Amended Fiscal Year 2021 budget, passed the House by a vote of 149 to 20 and was immediately transmitted to the Senate for its consideration. Senate Appropriations subcommittees began meeting at 6:30 AM the following morning and continued meeting throughout this week as the Senate worked to craft its budget recommendations for the remainder of the fiscal year. The full Senate Appropriations Committee met Thursday morning and recommended that the bill do pass by substitute. The budget, like any other bill going through the legislative process in Georgia, must next be

voted on by the full Senate. A conference committee made up of House and Senate members will then likely be appointed by the Speaker and Lieutenant Governor for the two chambers to reconcile their different versions of the bill.

COVID-19 Liability Protection

When lawmakers reconvened for session last summer following an extended recess due to COVID-19, one of the most widely discussed issues was protecting businesses from COVID-19-related lawsuits to allow them to remain open and to operate in a safe manner during the pandemic. The bill providing those legal protections that passed and was signed by Governor Kemp last session expires in July of this year. House Bill 112, by House Majority Whip Trey Kelley (R-Cedartown), would extend the sunset of these protections through July of 2022. The bill was favorably reported by the House Special Committee on Access to the Civil Justice System this week.

Tax Credit Bills

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. Following its favorable passage out of the Senate Finance Committee last week and its selection by the Senate Rules Committee, on Monday Senate Bill 6 was voted on by the full Senate. Bills that come out of the Finance Committee are typically engrossed, meaning that, if a sufficient number of senators agree, no amendments to the bill can be proposed on the floor. After engrossment, the bill passed unanimously and will next head to the House for consideration.

Senate Bill 1, sponsored by Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), would require self-insured employers to provide the state with health claims data or risk their tax credits if they do not comply. The bill received a hearing only in the Senate Finance Committee this week to allow interested parties more time to work out their concerns with the bill. It will need to be favorably reported by the committee before it can be voted on by the full Senate.

Election Reform Bills

The focus on election reform under the Gold Dome could easily be reflected by the large number of election-related bills introduced this week. Governor Kemp has identified election reform as a top legislative priority for his administration this year; he has expressed the importance of Georgians trusting their election system and that it should be “easy to vote and hard to cheat.”

Election reform-related proposals from this week include, but are not limited to, Senate Bill 89 by President Pro Tempore Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), that would create the position of chief elections assistance officer and election assistance coaches and would identify low-performing county elections superintendents; Senate Bill 68 by Senate Rules Chairman Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga), that would revise the delivery method for voted absentee ballots; Senate Bill 71, by Chairman Mullis, that would require voters to provide a valid reason for requesting an absentee ballot; Senate Bill 72, by Chairman Mullis, that would provide county registrars with monthly updates on the individuals who died in the county in the previous month; and House Bill 227, by Chairman Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville), that would require a voter’s application for an absentee ballot to include a copy of his or her photo identification.

Gambling

Last week Representative Ron Stephens (R- Savannah) filed House Resolution 30, which would ask Georgians on the 2022 ballot whether they support allowing casinos in the state. House Bill 86, also by Representative Stephens, seeks to legalize sports betting in Georgia. It was favorably reported out of the House Economic and Development and Tourism Committee this week and must next be selected by the Rules Committee before it can be considered by the full House.

This week Senator Brandon Beach (R-Alpharetta) filed Senate Resolution 53, which proposes an amendment to the Georgia Constitution that, if approved by Georgia voters, would allow for horseracing in Georgia. The resolution would create a gaming commission to oversee the regulation of pari-mutuel betting and would require 75 percent of net proceeds to go towards education, and the other 25 percent to go to rural health care services and health insurance coverage.