



Legislative Update

February 12, 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. This week Senator Tyler Harper (R-Ocilla) introduced Senate Bill 118, which seeks to increase the maximum weight allowed for trucks carrying forest products. It has been assigned to the Senate Transportation Committee for consideration. We are actively working with a coalition of other groups at the Capitol to oppose this 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. 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. 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

House and Senate members had another busy week, convening for Legislative Days 13 through 16. This week also saw another flurry of new bills introduced as Crossover Day gets increasingly closer. Crossover Day is the deadline by which a bill must pass out of its respective chamber and be sent to the other chamber for continued consideration this year. Crossover Day has been moved up several times in past years; this year the Senate is calling for it to be scheduled for Legislative Day 27. That would be the earliest it has ever been scheduled in the 40-day session, and it will allow 13 legislative days for House bills to be passed by the Senate and Senate bills to be passed by the House.

This week House and Senate leaders agreed to a legislative calendar which will take us through March, 1, as follows:

Tuesday, February 16.....	Legislative Day 17
Wednesday, February 17	Legislative Day 18
Thursday, February 18.....	Legislative Day 19
Monday, February 22.....	Legislative Day 20
Tuesday, February 23.....	Legislative Day 21
Wednesday, February 24.....	Legislative Day 22
Thursday, February 25.....	Legislative Day 23
Friday, February 26.....	Legislative Day 24
Monday, March 1.....	Legislative Day 25

Budget

On Thursday, the House and Senate came to an agreement on changes made to [House Bill 80](#), the Amended Fiscal Year 2021 budget. Like any other bill, the budget must go through the legislative process and be agreed upon by both chambers before it can be sent to the governor for his signature. The budget typically requires long rounds of negotiations between the House and Senate through a conference committee, but Senate Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) credited the great working relationship between the House and Senate and between Republicans and Democrats for the smooth budget process this year so far.

Tillery explained to his Senate colleagues the few changes between the final version of the budget and the version that they had approved earlier in the week, including the state employee pay raise announced by Governor Kemp and House and Senate leadership this week. More than 57,000 state employees making under \$80,000 who have served on the frontlines during the pandemic are now slated to receive a \$1,000 bonus this year. After its unanimous approval the by the Senate, the AFY21 budget was immediately transmitted to the governor for his consideration.

Following the passage of the AFY21 budget, budget writers immediately turned their attention to the Fiscal Year 2022 budget, and House Appropriations Subcommittees began meeting to work on crafting the state’s budget for the next fiscal year that begins July 1.

Election Reform Bills

This week saw the introduction of several new pieces of legislation which seek to reform election law. [Senate Bill 141](#), introduced this week by Senator Jason Anavitarte (R-Dallas), would require the immediate counting and tabulation of ballots after polls close and would require that the process is continued until it is completed. [House Bill 406](#), sponsored by Representative Will Wade (R-Dawsonville), would require the Secretary of State to audit the 20 most populous counties and 20 other randomly selected counties following each general primary, generally primary runoff, general election, and general election runoff.

Additionally, this week Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan (R-Carrollton) announced that he will be introducing an omnibus election reform bill next week, which has been carefully crafted after reviewing election code from all 50 states.

COVID-19 Liability Protection

[House Bill 112](#), by House Majority Whip Trey Kelley (R-Cedartown), would extend the sunset for COVID-19 liability protection for Georgia businesses through July of 2022. This week it passed the House by a vote of 99 to 68 along party lines, with Republicans arguing that businesses need these legal protections in order to operate, and Democrats saying that it would prevent employees from seeking legal relief if they are forced to work in unsafe conditions. The measure will next be considered by the Senate, beginning with the Judiciary Committee.

Governor's Legislative Priorities

One of the governor's continued legislative priorities is the fight against human trafficking. On Thursday, freshman Senator Clint Dixon (R-Buford), who serves as a Governor's Floor Leader, presented [Senate Bill 33](#), which would allow survivors of human trafficking to sue their traffickers and their accomplices, which includes anyone who profits from the trafficking, for civil damages. [Senate Bill 34](#), also presented by Dixon on Thursday, would allow trafficking survivors to privately petition their local Superior Court for a legal name change to protect their identities. Both bills had dozens of bipartisan cosponsors and passed the Senate unanimously.

Another legislative priority for the Kemp administration that he mentioned in his State of the State Address several weeks ago is the reform of Georgia's citizen's arrest law. We know that the governor's office has been hard at work on this issue, and we expect to see a bill introduced next week by Representative Chuck Efration (R-Dacula), who also introduced the hate crimes law that passed last session.

Sports Betting

Several bills which would legalize casinos, horse racing, and sports betting are floating around this session. This week Senate Rules Chairman Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga) introduced an additional measure, [Senate Bill 142](#). If passed, it would legalize online sports betting, which would be overseen by the Georgia Lottery Corporation. Net proceeds collected from sports betting would be used for educational programs in Georgia.

Term Length

This week Senate President Pro Tempore Butch Miller (R-Gainesville) introduced [Senate Resolution 83](#), which seeks to change the length of terms for members of the General Assembly to four years for state representatives and six years for state senators beginning in 2024. Under current law, all legislators serve for terms of two years. It is a proposed amendment to the Georgia Constitution, so it would need approval by two thirds of both chambers and would then be on the 2022 ballot for Georgia voters. This legislation does not set a limit on the number of years or terms that can be served by legislators.