



Legislative Update

February 19, 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.

Last 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 anticipating SB 118 will be heard in the committee this week, which meets Tuesday and Thursday. GRA and its members will be testifying in opposition to the bill along with other groups we are working closely with who also oppose increased truck weights, including the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), AAA, and the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety.

This week Representative James Burchett (R-Waycross) introduced [House Bill 496](#), which also seeks to increase the allowable weight for trucks carrying forest products. We will be continuing to track this legislation and actively work with other groups opposed to increased truck weights to ensure this legislation does not pass.

Short Line Tax Credit: This week House Transportation Chairman Rick Jasperse (R-Jasper) introduced [House Bill 452](#), which will extend the sunset for the short line income tax credit by five years from December 30, 2023 to December 30, 2028. The bill has been assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee for consideration. We will be actively working to get the bill passed out of its respective subcommittee once it is assigned, and then out of the full Ways and Means Committee so that it may be voted on by the full House and sent over to the Senate for consideration.

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 it 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

This week legislators convened Tuesday through Thursday for Legislative Days 17 through 19. Legislators are quickly running out of time to introduce new bills that would be eligible for passage this year. Committee activity has also significantly picked up as Crossover Day gets 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 would allow 13 legislative days for House bills to be passed by the Senate and Senate bills to be passed by the House.

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

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 Monday, Governor Kemp signed [House Bill 80](#), the Amended Fiscal Year 2021 budget or “little budget,” after the House and Senate came to an agreement on it last week. Like any other piece of legislation in Georgia, the budget is required to go through a very specific process, which includes a final agreement between House and Senate versions of the bill before it can be sent to the governor’s desk for consideration.

In the signing ceremony in the Capitol, Governor Kemp noted he was proud to approve budget which includes “no new cuts to state agencies, no furloughs, no layoffs, and no new taxes to pay for it all.” Last week Governor Kemp and House and Senate leaders also announced that 57,000 state employees making under \$80,000 who have served on the frontlines during the pandemic will now be receiving a \$1,000 bonus this year. House and Senate leaders next turn their attention to the “big budget,” the Fiscal Year 2022 budget. The new fiscal year begins July 1.

Citizen’s Arrest

In his State of the State Address during the first week of the session, Governor Kemp outlined several of his legislative priorities for the session, one of which was an overhaul of Georgia’s roughly 150-year-old citizen’s arrest law. This week, flanked by a bipartisan group of legislators, Attorney General Chris Carr, and GBI Director Vic Reynolds, Kemp announced a new piece of legislation that will be carried by Governor’s Floor Leader, Representative Bert Reeves (R-Marietta).

[House Bill 479](#) would repeal Georgia’s citizen’s arrest law, which Kemp described as “vague and outdated,” by eliminating any potential legal loopholes and clarifying when a citizen, business owner, or

law officer may reasonably detain an individual. The proposed legislation, for example, would allow an owner of a retail establishment or restaurant to detain an individual who is attempting to steal, a provision which has been widely supported by Georgia's business community. The bill was assigned by the House Judiciary Committee and must be considered and approved by the committee before it can be voted on by the full House.

Election Reform Bills

Legislators from both sides of the aisle have introduced dozens of pieces of legislation in the first several weeks of the session which seek to amend Georgia's elections laws. On Thursday morning, the Senate Ethics Committee, chaired by Max Burns (R-Sylvania), met to consider several election-related proposals, all of which received a "do pass" recommendation from the committee.

[Senate Bill 67](#), by Senator Larry Walker (R-Perry), would require voters to include a copy of their photo ID when requesting an absentee ballot. [Senate Bill 89](#), by President Pro Tempore Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), would create the position of chief elections assistance officer and election assistance coaches and would identify low-performing county elections superintendents. [Senate Bill 188](#), by Senator Bill Cowsert (R-Athens), would require the Secretary of State to maintain an election results reporting system. [Senate Bill 184](#), also by Senator Cowsert, decreases the time allowed for inputting voting data. The committee also passed [Senate Bill 40](#), by Senator Jen Jordan (D-Atlanta), which revises the time and method for opening and tabulating absentee ballots. All of these bills will be eligible for selection by the Rules Committee when the legislature reconvenes next week.

Additional elections-related measures introduced this week include, but are not limited to, [Senate Bill 202](#), sponsored by Ethics Chairman Max Burns, which would ensure that only eligible registered voters are mailed absentee ballot applications; [House Bill 493](#), by House Ways and Means Chairman Shaw Blackmon, which would allow the State Elections Board to assume temporary control over local election and voter registration administration; and [House Bill 512](#), by House Transportation Chairman Rick Jasperse, which would revise the times for advanced voting.

Teacher Pipeline

Another legislative priority Governor Kemp identified early in the session is strengthening the teacher pipeline in Georgia. Governor Kemp said [Senate Bill 88](#), carried by Governor's Floor Leader Senator Russ Goodman (R-Cogdell), is designed to "recruit, prepare, mentor, and retain the best educators across the Peach state."

The bill seeks to address the teacher shortage in Georgia, which has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, by strengthening the pathways by which armed forces veterans and retired teacher teachers could become teachers. It also proposes having the Georgia Teacher of the Year serve as an advisor ex officio to the State Board of Education. The Senate passed the measure unanimously on Wednesday; it now heads across the hall to the House for consideration.