



Legislative Update

January 15, 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. We are closely monitoring this issue, but no legislation has been introduced at this point.

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

On Monday legislators from all corners of the state donned their masks and headed to the Capitol for the convening of the 156th General Assembly. The legislature convened for Legislative Days One through Four this week while adhering to new COVID protocols, which include COVID tests twice a week. Members will not be in session next week so that the House and Senate can take up the budget, which is a top priority for the legislature each year.

The first week of the session typically does not see much legislative action; this is especially true every two years at the beginning of a new two-year term. All members were formally sworn in and took the oath of office. Speaker of the House David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge), Speaker Pro Tempore Jan Jones (R-Milton), and Senate President Pro Tempore Butch Miller (R-Gainesville) were all officially re-elected by their respective chambers for the upcoming term. House and Senate Leadership also announced new committee chairmanships and committee assignments for the next two years.

Governor Kemp’s annual State of the State Address, which he gave on Thursday morning, provided a great deal of insight into his legislative and budgetary priorities for the upcoming year. In his remarks,

Kemp told legislators that, unlike many other states, Georgia will not be facing budget cuts for the upcoming fiscal year and that Georgia has once again maintained its AAA bond rating.

The governor focused a significant portion of his remarks on K-12 education in Georgia; he announced for this year's amended budget he is recommending \$647 million to restore funding to school systems across our state. To support Georgia's rural communities, the governor's budget recommendations include \$40 million to establish the Rural Innovation Fund, half of which will boost access to rural broadband through grants. The governor also included \$76 million to fund his Georgia Pathway and Georgia Access programs that were authorized by the 2019 Patients First Act and the federal waivers, as well as a \$329 million increase in Medicaid spending to assist low-income and disabled Georgians.

Other legislative priorities for the governor this session include reforming Georgia's citizen's arrest statute, continuing the fight against human trafficking, and expanding the PPE tax credit to include pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacturers.

While we expect the budget and election reform to be the top legislative focuses this year, several bills worth noting were introduced this week. Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge) introduced [Senate Bill 1](#), which would require self-insured employers to provide the state with health claims data or to risk their tax credits if they do not comply. Senator John Albers this week reintroduced [Senate Bill 6](#), the "Tax Credit Return on Investment Act of 2021," which would allow the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance chairmen to request economic analyses of state tax credits.

On Monday Speaker David Ralston announced the creation of a new standing committee, Creative Arts and Entertainment. Last year Representative Matt Dollar (R-Marietta) chaired a working group with the same name that examined the state's film tax credit program. Ralston's creation of this new standing committee is consistent with the support he expressed for Georgia's film industry during his remarks at Wednesday morning's Eggs and Issues Breakfast.

The legislature will reconvene for Legislative Day 5 on Tuesday, January 26.