



Legislative Update

January 22, 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

Following an active first week of the Georgia General Assembly, this week the House and Senate continued their work in joint Appropriations Committee budget hearings as the legislature works to develop its budget following the release of Governor Kemp’s budget recommendations late last week. Generally, the House and Senate do not convene for legislative days during budget week in order to focus their efforts entirely on fiscal planning.

Last year, Governor Kemp asked state agencies to cut four percent from their budgets in response to lagging 2019 tax revenues and warnings from state economists about an impending economic slowdown. Despite the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic this year, Georgia was able to safely reopen its economy before most other states. The first half of the 2021 fiscal year has seen strong state tax collections, which signifies an improving economy.

As a result, Governor Kemp announced in his State of the State Address last week that state agencies would not be facing any budget cuts this year and that Georgia had once again maintained its AAA bond rating.

The House Appropriations Committee is once again chaired by Representative Terry England (R-Auburn), and the Senate Appropriations Committee is chaired by Senator Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia). Tillery was selected during the 2020 Legislative Session to serve as the successor to longtime Senate Appropriations Chairman Jack Hill, who tragically passed away last session.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees convened for three full days of budget hearings, and several Appropriations subcommittees convened on Friday for hearings. Many committee members and agency heads attended the hearings virtually to allow for social distancing. Governor Kemp kicked off the committees' hearings on Tuesday morning; he provided committee members with a more detailed look at his budget proposal after he provided a budget snapshot during last week's State of the State Address. Kemp's budget recommendations include \$647 million to restore funding to K-12 education, an additional \$329 million for Medicaid to aid low-income and disabled Georgians, and \$76 million to fund his Georgia Pathway and Georgia Access programs that were authorized by the 2019 Patients First Act and the federal waivers.

State economist Jeffrey Dorfman provided the committees with an update on economic conditions in Georgia. He reported that the state is poised for a strong recovery from the COVID-19 recession once the pandemic is fully behind us as many Georgians have focused on saving during this period. He added that our job market is about as fully recovered as it could be until we are on the other side of the pandemic.

House and Senate leaders are continuing to monitor the COVID situation and have opted not to create a long-term legislative calendar for the time being. The legislature will reconvene for Legislative Day 5 on Tuesday, January 26.