



*Legislative Update*

**February 3, 2023**

**GRA Legislative Agenda Items**

**Oppose Truck Size and Weight Increases:** 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 Representative Steven Meeks (R-Screven) introduced [House Bill 189](#), which would increase truck weight limits to 90,000 pounds, remove any reference to a specific commodity, and remove the current mile radius restrictions. Cosponsors of the bill include House Majority Caucus Whip James Burchett (R-Waycross), who carried the truck weight increase bill last year, Representative John Corbett (R-Lake Park), Representative Spencer Frye (D-Athens), Representative Robert Dickey (R-Musella), and Representative Patty Bentley (D-Butler).

The bill will receive a hearing and vote in the House Transportation Committee on Thursday, February 9<sup>th</sup> at 1 PM. We are continuing to meet with members of the committee ahead of Thursday's vote. We also anticipate an identical Senate version of the bill to be introduced in the coming weeks.

**Defend the Short Line Tax Credit:** Defend the 50 percent short line tax credit of \$3500 per mile that is currently in place until the end of 2026.

- There have been no credible threats to the short line tax credit this session, though there exists a vocal faction of legislators, particularly among Senate Republicans, that opposes tax credits, generally. We are closely monitoring the Senate Finance Committee to ensure that there are no threats to the tax credit.

**Oppose Anti-Industry 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. Legislation mandating a two-man crew was introduced in the 2019 session.

- There has not been any legislation introduced this session that addresses the two-man crew.

**Blocked Crossings:** 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. There were several bills and resolutions introduced during the 2022 session which would address train length and blocked crossings, including [House Resolution 1023](#), [House Resolution 1027](#), [House Bill 1473](#), and [House Resolution 919](#).

- There has not been any legislation introduced this session that addresses blocked crossings.

### **Overview of General Assembly**

This week the General Assembly convened Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 9 through 12. Legislative and committee action began to pick up substantially this week, with dozens of bills being introduced in each chamber every day this week. Committees that did not already hold their first meeting to adopt rules did so this week, and those that had already held organizational meetings began hearing and voting on bills.

The pace of the session will likely pick up dramatically in the coming weeks, as legislators now have just over one month to get their bills passed out of their assigned committees and chambers in which they originated—Crossover Day is slated for Monday, March 6. Legislators return to the Capitol next week Monday through Friday for Legislative Days 13 through 16.

### **Supplemental Budget**

The Supplemental Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, which runs from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, [House Bill 18](#), passed the full House Appropriations Committee by substitute on Wednesday. This was the first budget overseen on the House side by Representative Matt Hatchett (R-Dublin), who was appointed Appropriations Chairman in December by then-Speaker Jan Jones. The budget was considered by the full House on Thursday morning, and after passing with just one dissenting vote, it was immediately transmitted to the Senate.

The House-approved Amended FY 2023 budget includes Governor Kemp’s proposed property tax cut, totaling approximately \$1 billion, \$139 million to provide to schools for safety, and bonuses for state government retirees, which was added in by the House. The Senate will now take its turn to review the mid-year budget, while House budget writers will turn their attention to the FY24 budget.

### **Sports Betting**

This week Senator Billy Hickman (R-Statesboro) introduced [Senate Bill 57](#), the ‘Georgia Sports Betting Integrity Act.’ The measure, which has a number of bipartisan cosponsors, would legalize sports betting in Georgia and provide for its regulation and taxation. If passed, sports betting would be governed by the Georgia Sports Commission. The bill has been assigned to the Economic Development and Tourism Committee, which is chaired by Senator Brandon Beach (R-Alpharetta), who is a cosigner on the bill.

### **Governor Kemp’s Legislative Priorities**

This week Governor Kemp's floor leaders in the House and Senate dropped a number of his legislative priorities for the session:

- Tax Refund
  - [House Bill 162](#), introduced this week by Representative Lauren McDonald (R-Cumming), provides a one-time tax credit of \$250 for individuals and \$500 for married couples who filed taxes in Georgia in 2021 and 2022.
- Keeping classrooms safer
  - [House Bill 147](#), or the 'Safe Schools Act,' introduced this week by Representative Will Wade (R-Dawsonville), would require school safety plans to be submitted to the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA); require intruder alert drills for all public schools; and would provide for a school safety and anti-gang endorsement for eligible certificated professional personnel issued by the Professional Standards Commission.
- Expanding eligibility for TANF benefits to pregnant women
  - [House Bill 129](#), introduced this week by Representative Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville), would expand Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits to pregnant women. Cosponsors of the bill include Chairman Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta), who chairs the Public Health Committee, and Chairman Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville), who chairs the Health Committee.
- Peace Officers Service Loan Repayment Program
  - [House Bill 130](#), introduced this week by Representative Matthew Gambill (R-Cartersville), would create a program to repay up to \$20,000 in educational loans for up to 800 officers in exchange for 5 years of service. The bill has been assigned to the Higher Education Committee for consideration.
- Addressing challenges facing minority, women, and veteran-owned businesses
  - [House Bill 128](#), introduced this week by Representative Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville) seeks to increase the representation of businesses owned by minorities, women, and veterans in the procurement of state contracts for construction, services, equipment, and goods. The bill was assigned to the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee for consideration.
- Fighting gang violence
  - [Senate Bill 44](#), introduced this week by Senator Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia), imposes mandatory minimum penalties for violations of the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act. The measure specifically seeks to target those who recruit minors into gangs. The bill has been assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee.
- Fighting human trafficking
  - [Senate Bill 42](#), introduced this week by Senator Mike Hodges (R-Brunswick), would increase the fines for businesses that fail to comply with model notice requirements for the human trafficking hotline. The bill has been assigned to the Public Safety Committee for consideration.

## **Gun Bill**

[Senate Bill 67](#), the ‘Second Amendment Preservation Act,’ was introduced this week by former House member and freshman Senator Colton Moore (R-Trenton). The measure would prohibit the enforcement of certain federal laws relative to firearms and would impose a fine of up to \$50,000 for any city, county, or law enforcement agency that employs an officer who knowingly deprives a citizen of his or her Second Amendment rights. The bill was assigned to the Interstate Cooperation Committee, which is chaired by Senator Moore, but otherwise made up entirely of Democrats.

## **Ranked Choice Voting**

This week Representative Joseph Gullett (R-Dallas) introduced [House Bill 200](#), which would allow cities to opt in to using instant runoff voting for their elections. Under this procedure, voters would be able to use ranked-choice voting to indicate their preferred order of candidates. Georgia is the only state that requires runoffs in the primary and general elections if no candidate reaches the 50 percent plus one threshold, which often leads to lengthy election seasons. The measure has cosponsors on both sides of the aisle, including former Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stacy Evans (D-Atlanta) and Representative Mary Margaret Oliver (D-Decatur).

## **Vaccine Passport Legislation**

Last session [Senate Bill 345](#), sponsored by Senator Jeff Mullis, was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Kemp. The bill prohibits state and local governments from mandating proof of a COVID-19 vaccination for government services. When the measure was under consideration last session, an automatic repeal date of June 30, 2023 was added to allow the legislature to reevaluate the measure this year. [Senate Bill 1](#), authored by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming), would remove the automatic sunset. The measure to remove the sunset was passed by the Senate Health and Human Services Committee this week, so it is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for consideration on the floor.

## **Special Elections This Week**

This week four special elections were held to fill vacant House and Senate seats. In Senate District 11, formerly held by Dr. Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), former House member Sam Watson (R-Moultrie) defeated two challengers with 76 percent of the vote. In House District 7, formerly held by the late Speaker David Ralston, banker Johnny Chastain (R-Blue Ridge) narrowly defeated Sheree Ralston, the widow of Speaker Ralston, in a runoff election. In House District 172, which was vacated by Sam Watson to run for the Senate, Colquitt County Administrator Chas Cannon (R-Moultrie) ran unopposed.

In the crowded race to fill the seat of former House Appropriations Chairman Terry England, which was vacated by Representative-Elect Danny Rampey, no candidate was successful in

reaching the 50 percent plus one threshold. The House District 119 seat will go to a special election runoff between Republican Holt Persinger and Republican Charlie Chase.