



Legislative Update

January 26, 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.

- Recall that we were successful last session in defeating attempts to increase truck weights. As anticipated, these industries are working to renew their efforts from last year, and we are expecting House and Senate versions of a truck weight increase bill to be introduced relatively early in the session. We are closely monitoring this and will send you the legislation as soon as it is filed.

We have been meeting with legislators on the topic at the Capitol, and we anticipate mobilizing our membership when the bill(s) receive hearing(s) in committee.

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 legislature convened for its second full week of the 2023 Legislative Session after meeting for budget hearings last week. The House and Senate were in session Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 5 through 8. Several committees held meetings for the first time this week, though the majority were purely organizational, convened for the purpose of adopting the committee's rules for the next two years.

The General Assembly will be back in session Monday through Thursday again next week for Legislative Days 9 through 12. Legislators now have just over a month to introduce their bills, successfully shepherd them through the committee process, and get them passed by their full chamber to keep the measures alive this session—Crossover Day is set for March 6.

State of the State Address

The legislature convened for a joint session on Wednesday morning to listen to Governor Kemp's annual State of the State Address. Along with the Georgia Chamber's annual Eggs and Issues breakfast and the unveiling of the governor's budget proposals, this address serves the important role of laying out the governor's legislative package for the session.

In his remarks Governor Kemp emphasized his commitment to crack down on crime, announced the establishment of a Rural Workforce Housing Fund, and said he plans to fully fund QBE and the HOPE Scholarship. He also reviewed a number of his budgetary priorities, including an additional \$2,000 pay increase for teachers, \$4.5 million in loan repayment programs to help grow the number of healthcare workers in Georgia, and a \$1.7 million investment for additional residency slots to help combat the healthcare worker shortage.

Senate Majority Caucus Priorities

On Thursday afternoon, Senate Majority Leader Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega), President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon), Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, and other members of the Senate Majority Caucus held a press conference at the Capitol to announce the Senate Majority Caucus's legislative priorities for 2023. Majority Leader Gooch announced the caucus's priorities are:

1. Bolstering Opportunity and Innovation in the Georgia Economy
 - Conduct a prudent income tax reform and tax credit review
 - Support and implementation of new taxpayer and homeowner relief initiatives
 - Lay the groundwork for the continued electrification of transportation
2. Cultivating an Educated Workforce
 - Senate-led effort to improve literacy rates in line with graduation rates
 - Implementation of learning loss grants
 - Review degree requirements for state employment
3. Creating Safer Communities
 - Serious penalties for the recruitment of minors for gang activity

- Aggressive bail bond reform for violent offenses
 - Enhanced school safety legislation
4. Supporting the Health and Well-being of Families and At-Risk Youth
- Expansion of telehealth services for rural and underserved communities
 - Increased support for foster families and children
 - Extended benefits for income-eligible pregnant women

COVID Premises Liability

Senate Transportation Chairman Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) has introduced legislation that would remove the existing sunset on COVID-related premises liability legislation. In 2020, the General Assembly passed [Senate Bill 359](#), the ‘Georgia COVID-19 Pandemic Business and Safety Act,’ to limit premises liability for businesses and healthcare facilities for COVID-related claims. [House Bill 112](#) was passed the following year to extend the sunset through July of 2022.

Chairman Dolezal’s [Senate Bill 2](#) was cosigned by a number of key Senate members, including President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon) and Senate Majority Leader Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega). It has been assigned to the Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Anti-Crime Legislation

There were a number of bills dropped this week that seek to tackle crime, an issue that many under the Gold Dome, including Governor Kemp, have identified as a priority this year.

- [Senate Bill 7](#) by Economic Development Committee Chairman Brandon Beach seeks to impose minimum sentences for crimes committed with a knife or firearm. The measure has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee for consideration.
- [Senate Bill 10](#), introduced by Senator Emanuel Jones (D-Decatur), stiffens penalties for individuals knowingly attending and facilitating a drag race. The bill has a long list of bipartisan cosponsors and has been assigned to the Public Safety Committee for consideration.
- [Senate Bill 11](#), introduced by Public Safety Chairman John Albers (R-Roswell), gives the Georgia Bureau of Investigation concurrent jurisdiction in cases involving the violation of state laws concerning domestic, cyber, biological, chemical, and nuclear terrorism. The measure, entitled the “Georgia Fights Terrorism Act,” was passed by substitute in the Senate Public Safety Committee on Thursday afternoon. It must next be selected by the Senate Rules Committee to make it to the floor for a vote.
- [Senate Bill 12](#), the “Protecting Victims and Dismantling Georgia Street Gangs Act,” also introduced by Chairman John Albers, would impose minimum prison sentences for convicted felons found to be in possession of a firearm. The bill has been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee for further consideration.

Violence Against Healthcare Workers

This week Representative Michelle Au (D-Johns Creek) introduced legislation that would expand enhanced punishment for aggravated assault and battery committed upon emergency health workers to all

healthcare workers in a hospital or healthcare facility. The legislation would cover any employee or independent contractor of a hospital or healthcare facility.

The measure seeks to address the spike in incidences of violence against healthcare workers. The bill's sponsor, Representative Au, is an anesthesiologist, and the bill's cosponsors include Representative Mark Newton (R-Augusta), an emergency physician, and Representative Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta), who chairs the newly created Public Health Committee. The bill has been assigned to the Judiciary Non-Civil Committee for consideration.

Upcoming Special Elections

Though the legislative session is in full swing, a handful of open House and Senate seats remain, pending the results of Special Elections.

- There will be a special election runoff for House District 7 (former seat of the late Speaker David Ralston) on January 31;
- There will be a special election for House District 119 (vacated by Representative-Elect Danny Rampey) on January 31;
- There will be a special election for Senate District 11 (vacated by Senator Dean Burke, who resigned to take a job at the Department of Community Health) on January 31;
- There will be a special election for House District 172 (vacated by Representative Sam Watson, who resigned to run for Senate District 11); on January 31; and
- There will be a special election for House District 75 (vacated by Representative Mike Glanton) on March 21.

Senate Leadership

This week the Senate Majority Caucus held elections to fill its final leadership position. Senator Dean Burke (R-Bainbridge), who was elected Caucus Secretary, resigned his Senate seat this month to become the chief medical officer at the Department of Community Health. Senator Larry Walker (R-Perry), who chairs the Insurance and Labor Committee, was elected by his peers to fill the vacant leadership position.