



Senate District 15 – Session Update – Week Three - 2017

On Monday, January 23rd, we returned to Capitol Hill to resume the 2017 legislative calendar. As we continue to move forward, there is no shortage of committee meetings, legislative debate and Capitol day events. This week, we also passed the first of many, budget measures.

House Passes 2017 FY Amended Budget

Thursday, January 26th, the House overwhelmingly voted in favor for the passage of the amended state budget for fiscal year 2017. The AFY 2017 budget, if approved by the Senate, will allocate an additional \$606.2 million in earned revenue, bringing the total AFY 2017 budget to \$24.3 billion. The final amount is approximately 2.5 percent higher than originally estimated. The amended budget now heads to the Senate for further consideration. The House is expected to vote on the full 2018 Fiscal Year budget in the next couple of weeks. Further highlights of the Amended FY 2017 budget are as follows:

- \$16.7 million for the Move on When Ready program which allows eligible Georgia students to take advantage of dual enrollment and progress at their own pace.
- \$2.3 million to create the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, an education training center for developing literacy skills among children from birth to age 8 throughout the state.
- \$25.1 million for a 20 percent pay raise for state law enforcement officers over 16 agencies.
- \$50 million for the Georgia Cyber Innovation and Training Center in Augusta.
- \$974,712 to expedite the 57 percent per diem rate increase for Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) foster parents, effective April 1, 2017.
- \$746,243 for a \$1 per day increase for the relative, or kinship, foster care providers effective April 1, 2017.

Last weekend, many homes and businesses throughout middle and South Georgia were devastated by severe weather resulting in an outbreak of tornadoes. These horrific storms resulted in school closures, power outages and insurmountable property damage. In case of such event, we annually allocate funding to the Governor's Emergency Fund to aid citizens in times of critical need. Last week the House we put \$5 million into the AFY 2017 budget to supplement federal funding received from FEMA to aid community recovery. I would like to say thank you to Governor Deal and GEMA leaders for their swift action and aid as we begin to rebuild affected areas throughout our state. My thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones, as well as those recovering from injuries sustained during these devastating storms.

Casino Gaming

On Wednesday, legislators in the House and Senate took the first step in changing our laws regarding Casino gaming in Georgia. The identical bills, House Bill 158 and Senate Bill 79, would allow for the construction of two “destination” resorts that would include casinos. One would be located in metro Atlanta, while the second would be located outside of the metro region. The 2016 bill called for four “resort destinations” but failed to move forward. Further, this year’s proposals also dedicate more funding to the HOPE Scholarships program than the 2016 bill.

Senate District 15 – Session Update – Week Three - 2017

Casino Gaming Continued....

Those in support of the legislation believe that these resorts will bring additional revenue and economic development to Georgia, while increasing educational funding. Those against the measure fear that crime levels and gambling addictions will eventually end up causing the state more money in the long run.

Medical Cannabis Expansion

Thus, far there have been two medical Cannabis measures brought forth. If passed, House Resolution 36 would allow a statewide ballot question in an upcoming election for the state to oversee and regulate the in-state cultivation of marijuana for medical use. House Bill 65 would expand the number of illnesses allowed to use cannabis oil as a medical treatment. The added conditions under HB 65 include: Tourette's syndrome; Autism spectrum disorder; Intractable pain; Post-traumatic stress disorder; Alzheimer's disease.

This week, I had the pleasure of hosting many County and City leaders from our district on Capitol Hill. We discussed legislation, local issues and had a presentation from the DOT regarding district projects. All in all, it was a great day and I am humbled that they took the time to make a trip to Atlanta on behalf of their communities. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns regarding legislation, please let me know. As always, thank you for allowing me the pleasure of serving you.