



Senate District 15 – Session Update – 2019

2020 FY Budget

Legislative day 38 brought the passage of [House Bill 31](#), fulfilling our only constitutional obligation, to pass a balanced budget. Our 2020 Fiscal Year Budget allocates more than 50 percent of available funds to education, 22 percent to health and human services and 8 percent to transportation and economic development. I am also proud to announce that our Senate body voted to approve the largest salary increase in our state's history for teachers and certified personnel! This action will raise the base pay of our hard-working educators by \$3,000, starting in July of this year. Please be on the lookout for my upcoming budget column which will include a detailed report of final allocations, including any Capital projects expected for our region of the state. Georgia's new Fiscal Year will begin, July 1.

Military Measures

As Georgia has the sixth largest military population in the nation, our body is committed to ensuring our brave service members are providing the assistance and support they need. We are particularly proud of the work in the General Assembly, being so pro-active in supporting our military members through legislative action. In fact, over the last two years, we have passed 23 military-friendly bills.

Last week was no exception as we passed, House Bill 25. HB 25 will provide financial relief for active duty members in Georgia by allowing them to terminate contractual obligations with a provider of subscription services like television, video, and audio programming services; internet access services; or health spa or gym services. To qualify, service members must be on active duty, receive orders of deployment to a location that does not support these same exact services and give a 30-day notice.

Support of our military continues through the passage of House Bill 59 which assists our military families when required to transfer to Georgia. This bill allows parents or guardians on active military duty to pre-enroll their children into school in the same manner as those currently residing within their respective school districts. Current Georgia law requires established residency prior to enrollment, however this bill makes allowances for our military members.

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Healthcare

Currently, insurance companies in Georgia often use step therapy, which is a process that requires a patient to try and fail one or more medications preferred by their insurer, before receiving coverage for the medication that their doctor originally prescribed. House Bill 63 works to change this as it would allow health care providers to request exceptions to step therapy protocols when medically necessary. Under the bill physicians would be allowed to submit a step therapy exemption under certain circumstances. HB 63 also ensures that patients would not have to begin a step therapy process for a medication after switching insurance providers. As we work with all parties involved, our priority is obvious- Quality and effective healthcare for all citizens, as prescribed by their respective physicians.

Agriculture

House Bill 213 was introduced in response to the enactment of the federal farm bill this past December, which reauthorizes hemp production in the United States. The legislation, a result of our House Study Committee on Industrial Hemp Production, would allow for the cultivation and processing of hemp and its products in Georgia. The bill would also allow our state colleges and universities to conduct research on hemp. Further details of the bill are as follows:

- State would allow hemp growers who meet certain criteria to obtain a license for an annual fee of \$1,000.
- Allows the state issue up to 12 permits to produce hemp
- Department of Ag may award more permits based on the financial standing and hemp processing experience of applicants.
- Approved producers must meet specific requirements and pay an initial fee of \$100,000 for a permit / \$25,000 annually to renew.
- Department of Agriculture to oversee program and test hemp grown in-state to ensure it contains less than .30 percent THC.

Allowing Georgia farmers to produce Hemp, will place us with 41 fellow states already allowing growth and production. We feel confident that this measure will only increase profits for our farmers while supporting of our most lucrative industry which provides countless jobs throughout the state.

facilities.