



Senate District 15 – Session Update – Week Seven - 2017

On Tuesday, February 21, we reconvened for the seventh week of the 2017 legislative session. We completed day 24 on Friday, and we are all working against the Crossover Day deadline which takes place this Friday! It was another lively week under the Gold Dome as we drafted, discussed and passed legislation to address a number of important issues for the betterment of our great state.

Back the Badge

As an avid supporter of our law enforcement community, I was proud to stand with my colleagues as we passed a number of measures to “Back the Badge.” We passed a total of four bills in support of our Law Enforcement Officers, which came in the form of Senate Bills 154, 155, 160 and 169.

Senate Bill 154 would increase the punishment of individuals who commit crimes of aggravated assault or battery against a public safety officer. The bill would add a \$5,000 fine to aggravated assault and battery crimes; increase the payments to families of officers who are killed in the line of duty; provides that parents or legal guardians of minors are responsible for the unlimited financial liability of these crimes.

Senate Bill 155 would establish the Local Law Enforcement Compensation Commission. The Commission would be responsible for examining salaries and benefits of local law enforcement officers. Further, this commission would review comparative compensation offered by law enforcement agencies across the state.

Senate Bill 160, known as the Back the Badge Act of 2017, would impose harsher penalties of those convicted of harming public safety officers. Currently, Georgia law imposes punishment of 10 to 20 years on anyone who is convicted for aggravated assault for harming a public safety officer. SB 160 strengthens the sentence for aggravated battery with the imposition of a mandatory 10-year minimum sentence, which cannot be suspended, deferred or probated. Further, the bill also allows juveniles to be charged as adults when charged with aggravated assault against an LEO.

Finally, we passed Senate Bill 169 which would allow citizens to purchase license plates titled “Back the Badge.” Funds collected will be donated to the Peace Officers Annuity and Benefit Fund which prepares members for retirement and provides a well-deserved pension once that goal is reached.

In addition to “Backing the Badge,” we also took votes on a number of other critical issues.

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Public Safety Measures

Throughout Georgia, we have had issues with the safety of traveling carnival rides. Senate Bill 141 works to fix those issues by requiring an engineering evaluation by engineers on carnival rides before a permit can be issued for operation in the state of Georgia. Further, the evaluation must be done before the ride's annual inspection.

Senate Bill 137, known as the Child Support Recovery Act would change current law so that a person owing child support would be charged \$25 annually based off the Federal Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Under the new bill, departments can collect the fee through various ways, not just monthly installments.

Health Care Measures

Senate Bill 8, known as Surprise Billing and Consumer Protection Act, would protect consumers against surprise billing by providers, hospitals and insurers for out-of-network services. Under SB 8, surprise bills for emergency services would be disputed through a resolution process within the Department of Insurance. Further, the bill also requires that a database with usual and customary cost of services be created and maintained by the Department of Community Health.

Senate Bill 109, would allow emergency medical service personnel (EMS) to cross state lines and treat patients in the event of an emergency.

Senate Bill 108 would create and establish a Women Veterans Office. Female veterans have different challenges than men- including healthcare needs, mental health, and re-introduction into society after serving. This office would provide and education and mentor program to ensure these women get the assistance and support they need.

Senate Bill 50 would permit the use of primary care agreements in Georgia and create legal structure for carrying out these arrangements. Patients and their Physicians would form their own contracts regarding care, cost, and a time table for payment between each other, putting healthcare back into the hands of citizens and their doctors.

Senate Bill 71 would safeguard monies and/or assets set aside for healthcare or medical emergencies by making health or medical savings accounts exempt from bankruptcy. This bill passed unanimously.

Transportation

Senate Bill 6 would establish the Georgia Regional Transit Council, which would work to create plans to reduce overall travel times and road congestion, improve access to state highways and develop ideas for transportation innovation. This bill passed unanimously.

As we make our way towards the last day, also known as Sine Die, please feel free to reach out to me with questions or concerns. It is a pleasure to serve you and I thank you for the opportunity to work on your behalf under the Gold Dome!

Ed Harbison

Senator of Georgia's 15th District