

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Week 11 — 2018



Friday, March 23, brought to a close legislative day 38 of 40. As our Sine Die deadline approaches, we had another hectic week of bill review, votes and resolutions. Last week we passed measures dealing with rural broadband expansion, education and healthcare. We also passed a number of resolutions which create study committees tasked with researching issues of importance prior to next session.

Georgia Lottery for Education Act

Those lucky enough to hit the lottery will no longer worry about their safety after claiming prize money under Senate Bill 331, which passed last week. This bill allows winners of lottery prize money to remain anonymous under certain conditions. SB 331 requires the Georgia Lottery Corporation to keep all information private regarding those winning of \$250,000 or greater confidential upon written request of the prize winner. Current law allows lottery winners to request anonymity, but news organizations can still obtain this information. Lottery winners are often targets of scams, and several people have tragically died after winning the lottery. We are hopeful this legislation protects lottery winners and their loved ones.

Georgia Alzheimer's and Related Dementias State Plan Advisory Council

Sadly, Alzheimer's has become the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. As this disease becomes more prevalent, so does the need to ensure proper healthcare for our Georgia citizens suffering its effects. To assist in these efforts, we passed Senate Bill 444, which creates the Georgia Alzheimer's and Related Dementias State Plan Advisory Council. The council will focus on implementing and amending goals, as needed, set forth in the Georgia Alzheimer's and Related Dementias State Plan. The bill requires the advisory council to submit an update to the governor and General Assembly every three years reporting on the council's work. This act is also known as the 'Senator Thorborn 'Ross' Tolleson, Jr., Act.' Until recently, Senator Tolleson served our Georgia Senate, before choosing to step down following his Alzheimer's diagnosis.

Focused Programs of Study

In recent years, we have recognized that the traditional "one size fits all," where education is concerned, may not be in the best interests of all Georgia students. To expand educational options in Georgia, we have passed Senate Bill 139. SB 139 will allow local school systems, charter schools, and college / career academies to develop additional education pathways for students. Before any action is taken, the plans must be considered and approved by the State Board of Education. This legislation also requires the State Workforce Development Board, in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Technical College System of Georgia, to develop a list of high demand careers. The list must include industry credentials and state licenses linked to occupations that are in high demand and pay at least 70 percent of Georgia's average annual wage. The bill also requires the completed list be distributed to all Georgia middle and high schools. Further, SB 139 requires local school systems to submit an annual report to state leadership covering the number of students earning industry credentials and state licenses by type from the distributed workforce development list.

Broadband Expansion

Our efforts in addressing rural broadband issues continue as we passed Senate Bill 402. SB 402 lays the groundwork for expanding broadband access to rural Georgia by promoting public-private partnerships. This legislation also gives oversight to the Georgia Technology Authority to evaluate communities and create plans for broadband expansion. Under the legislation, local communities will receive incentives such as a new designation of “broadband ready,” allowing designees to qualify for grant programs and tax exemptions in their areas. Further, the legislation requires use and expansion of existing DOT right-of-ways to lay the fiber optic networks and allows Georgia’s electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) wishing to deploy broadband services, VoIP or wireless services the opportunity to do so.

House Resolutions

In any given session, we pass a number of resolutions which allow us to form off-session committees to research areas of interest or urge our congressional leaders on the federal level to take action on issues of importance. Last week we passed resolutions in hopes to increase options for school security and mental healthcare for members of our military.

House Resolution 1414 creates a study committee tasked with researching what is needed to provide more security for our Georgia schools. As school mass shootings have become more frequent, we are hopeful this committee will be able to offer policy changes and viable solutions to help curtail incidents of violence while addressing procedures regarding life-saving responses. The committee will be composed of nine members from the House of Representatives and will be appointed by House leadership in the months following adjournment of the 2018 legislative session.

House Resolution 1137 urges the President and the United States Congress to aid service personnel of the armed forces for repairing and supporting their mental and physical health needs prior to discharge through legislative and other provisions. Service men and women often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental and emotional health conditions upon completion of service, and many of these individuals are not properly prepared to return to civilian life. Providing necessary repair and support resources to our service members before they return to nonmilitary life could help them avoid some of the challenges many veterans face, such as homelessness, and this proactive assistance would allow soldiers to be restored physically and mentally before returning to society.

Recently, I welcomed Leadership Dodge to the Capitol. I am so grateful for organizations such as this that recognize the importance of getting our citizens involved with the political process. Tuesday, March 27, began day 39 of the 2018 session. We will finish day 40 Thursday, as we adjourn, Sine Die after midnight. As always, it is a pleasure to work for the betterment of our district and I am honored that you have chosen me to be your voice under the Gold Dome. With session ending in less than a week, I look forward to returning home and catching up with everyone. Until then, please let me know if you need anything at all.