

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Week 3 & 4 — 2017



The Georgia General Assembly has completed 8 of 40 legislative days. Each legislative day that goes by means the pace picks up! Just imagine 236 legislators, 2000 lobbyists and bus loads of visitors on the third floor of one building. And every one of them is there to talk to us about voting for or against bills. As session days fly by, we have our work cut out for us as hot topic issues such as gambling, education reform and medical cannabis make for interesting and heated debate.

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. We expect 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 our area of the state were devastated by severe weather resulting in numerous tornados. These storms caused school closures, power outages and a lot of property damage. In case of such event, we annually put funding into the Governor's Emergency Fund to aid citizens in times of critical need. Last week 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 district. My thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones, as well as, those recovering from injuries sustained during these devastating storms.

State of the Judiciary

As Dodge County is home to one of Georgia's state prisons, Criminal Justice reform is particularly important to our district. On Wednesday, January 25th, the annual State of the Judiciary was given during a joint session in the House Chamber. Chief Justice P. Harris Hines spoke about judicial branch has accomplishments in the last year, the problems it still faces and the steps we need to take to solve them. It was noted that Georgia has become a national leader in criminal justice reform policy, however, there is still work to be done as we still have the highest probation rate in the nation. Chief Justice Hines also discussed the importance of updating current technology systems to help our judicial systems simplify procedures currently in place. Updating our technologies within the Criminal Justice system will likely be the next step in our ongoing reform efforts.

Issue Watch

Casino Gaming bills and Medical Cannabis expansion bills are already making their way through the legislative process. House Bill 158 introduced last week 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. This year’s proposal dedicates more funding to the HOPE Scholarships program than the 2016 bill. 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.

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.

Week Four

On Monday, January 30th, we reconvened for a busy fourth week of the 2017 session. Committee and subcommittee hearings were in full swing as we considered a number of bills. We also took House floor votes on issues regarding public safety and agriculture.

Public Safety Measures

Last week we passed two initiatives in the House that will benefit Georgia's public safety sector while keeping us in line with federal regulations. The first was House Bill 38 which would distinguish a three-wheeled vehicle that is controlled by a steering wheel from a motorcycle which is controlled by handlebars. This bill would also update licensing requirements for drivers of three-wheeled motor vehicles. Federal safety standards qualify three-wheeled motor vehicles, equipped with steering wheels, as automobiles. However, current Georgia law considers all three-wheeled vehicles as motorcycles. HB 38 would require drivers of these three-wheeled automobiles with steering wheels to obtain Class C commercial driver’s licenses rather than Class M motorcycle license.

The second measure passed was House Bill 58. This legislation would update the reference date in Georgia law to the federal regulations regarding the safe operation of motor carriers and commercial motor vehicles. HB 58 would update the effective date to January 1, 2017 and keep us in line with federal regulations.

Agriculture

It is no secret that agriculture in our state is extremely important, especially in our district. The protection of our AG industry is a top priority, which is why I voted in favor of House Bill 49. HB 49 protects farmers from fraudulent practices that occur while selling and acquiring livestock, especially online. The legislation also closes regulatory gaps where this practice is concerned. Georgia law currently requires livestock market operators and dealers to obtain livestock dealer licenses; however, these licenses have no expiration date and no fee association, making it impossible for the Department of AG to track the number of licensed livestock dealers in our state. As a result, Georgia farmers are often taken advantage of by fraudulent dealers. The legislation requires the following:

Agriculture Continued....

- Requires licensed livestock dealers and auction operators to apply for and obtain a license from the AG Commissioner every three years.
- Requires the Commissioner of AG to publish the names and locations of licensed individuals online and in writing.
- Revises language on what defines a “livestock dealer” and “surety,” or a letter of credit, certificate of deposit or other written document guaranteeing the faithful performance of the terms of the contract purchase.
- Allows the Department of AG to charge a \$25 triennial fee for livestock dealers and livestock order buyers.
- Allows a triennial fee not to exceed \$200 for livestock markets based on the surety requirement.

If HB 49 is signed into law, the bill’s requirements will promote more consistency and transparency within our AG industry, which generates over \$71 billion annually into Georgia’s economy.

Last week we also voted on the adjournment resolution for the remaining days of session. The last day of session, Sine Die, will take place on Thursday, March 30th. In the meantime, I will continue to update you on the latest news in regards to your Government at work. If you are in Atlanta, or plan on making a trip to the Capitol, please come by and see us. Thank you for allowing me to represent your voice and thank you for the kind words of encouragement and prayers. Your confidence in me means a great deal! If you need anything at all, please don’t hesitate to contact me anytime.