

# Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Session Weeks 9 & 10 — 2017



Thursday, March 16th marked the 35th day of the 2017 legislative session. That means we only have 5 legislative days until day 40, Sine Die! We had a very busy couple of weeks with committee hearings and policy debate as both the House and Senate passed measures now under consideration by Governor Deal. Initiatives such as healthcare and public safety remain top priorities as we make our way through the final days of session.

## Agricultural Measures

Last week, agricultural measures were a top priority as we passed two Senate bills for the betterment of our state's largest industry. The first measure, Senate Bill 69, would eliminate the double registration requirements for those handling any certified organic food products in Georgia. Currently, producers are required to register with both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Under this legislation, certified organic producers would only be required to register with USDA, further streamlining regulation requirements. The second Agricultural bill passed was Senate Bill 78, which works to alleviate costly regulations within the food service industry. This bill would authorize the AG Commissioner, to issue exceptions or waivers to rules regarding food contamination and misbranding within grocery stores and meat markets making certain food products. This bill allows the Commissioner to modify all or part of a food safety requirement if the rule creates an obvious hardship, impairing one's ability to continue business practices. However, the business that is granted the waiver must prove that the rule can be achieved through another method. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) already permits this flexibility at the federal level, and SB 78 allows our Commissioner the same flexibility.

## Healthcare Measures

Improved access to quality healthcare continues with the passage Senate Bill 102 which works to incentivize statewide health care facility improvements, specific to cardiac care. Sadly, Cardiovascular disease claims the lives of nearly 23,000 Georgians each year, making it the leading cause of death in our state. In an effort to provide improved cardiac care, this bill creates the Office of Cardiac Care (OCC) within the Department of Public Health. The OCC would be responsible for designating qualified hospitals throughout the state as "emergency cardiac care centers." SB 102 also allows hospitals to apply through the OCC to be designated as an emergency cardiac care center and receive grant funding if needed. We are hopeful that the improvement of cardiac care in our state will grant citizens with the quick and quality care they need and save lives.

## Notable Resolutions

As an advocate for our rural communities, I am pleased with the passage of **House Resolution 389**, which would create the House Rural Development Council. This Council will be tasked with finding ways to promote our rural communities through economic development. This council, made up of 15 House members, appointed by Speaker Ralston, will work to identify the various challenges facing our less populated areas. Appointed members will explore legislative solutions in policy areas such as education, infrastructure, health care access and economic growth incentives to revitalize rural areas. The council will begin their two-year study, beginning this April and hold meetings throughout rural Georgia on a regular basis to study relevant issues. Rural local officials, educational and business leaders, healthcare providers, civic groups and individuals are invited to attend meetings and lend their insight. Creating the House Rural Development Council will give legislators the unique opportunity to take data and recommendations directly from our rural communities regarding issues and possible legislative solutions.

**House Resolution 170** works to educate us further on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome which effects between 32,000 and 79,000 Georgians. Chronic fatigue syndrome is highly debilitating, and causes extreme fatigue, weakness, pain, abnormal sleep patterns as well as other symptoms. Currently, the cause of the disease is unknown, incurable, and costs our state between \$75 million and \$685 million annually in medical expenses and lost productivity. This resolution urges state agencies, medical services providers, health care agencies, research facilities, medical schools and other interested parties to increase research, clinical care and medical education in hopes we find a way to alleviate pain for those suffering from this disease.

**House Resolution 492** recognized March 6<sup>th</sup> under the Gold Dome as Law Enforcement Appreciation Day! We took time to give thanks to the 54,000 men and women who put their lives on the line to protect and serve us. Throughout our state's history we have lost 699 officers in the line of duty, with nine of those occurring in the last year alone. One of those lost lives was Eastman Officer, Tim Smith, so this day was particularly meaningful for me. Although our brave officers deserve to be recognized for their courage every day, we were proud to pay special tribute to those we have lost as well as those still serving.

**House Resolution 490** recognized Major General James E. Rainey as well as service members of the Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield's Third Infantry Division. The House recognized their heroism and service for the Third Infantry Division Day at The Capitol. The Third Infantry Division has one of the most successful combat records of any U.S. Army division, having been deployed in both world wars, the Korean War, the Persian Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and played a key role during the Cold War. Fort Stewart is home to more than 20,000 active duty military soldiers and has been distinguished as the top U.S. Army installation worldwide six times, having created 51 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients.

#### **Middle Georgia State University Advisory Council**

I am honored to have been asked by President Blake to serve on the MGA University Advisory Council. The Council will work to explore ways we can partner to benefit both our students and the industries in which they will put their talents and MGA credentials to use. I am excited to participate on this Council as it combines my passion for education, workforce preparedness and economic development. We will begin meetings later in the year and I will keep you updated on how we are working to best serve our middle Georgia students and companies.

I will be back next week to update you on General Assembly happenings. As we head into the final stretch of this year's session, please contact me any time with your concerns! I am here to represent you and by doing so, it is important for me to hear from you. As always, thank you for allowing me to serve as your voice on Capitol Hill. The encouragement and prayers that you have sent helps me get through this demanding time of year and I would not make it without your support!

#### **Week 10**

#### **Reduced Regulation**

Georgia's craft brewery and distillery industries will benefit from the passage of **Senate Bill 85**. This bill will allow our craft breweries and spirit distilleries to sell limited amounts of product directly to visitors. Current Georgia law only allows these facilities to distribute their product through "facility tours." SB 85 would lift this requirement, allowing facilities to sell limited amounts for consumption on and off the premises. Conditions of the legislation are as follows:

- Brewers/manufactures can sell up to 3,000 barrels per year for consumption on and off the premise.
- Limit of 288 ounces per consumer per day for consumption off-premises.
- Spirit distilleries could sell up to 500 barrels of distilled spirits per year for consumption on or off the premises
- Limits sales to 2,250 milliliters per consumer per day for consumption off-premises.

Lessened regulation will help these small businesses grow, keep us competitive with neighboring states and solidify our reputation as the number one state in which to do business.

**Back the Badge**

To show support of our state's law enforcement officers, we overwhelmingly passed **Senate Bill 169**, which would create a specialty license plate with the phrase "Back the Badge." Proceeds from plate sales would be distributed to the Peace Officers' Annuity and Benefit Fund of Georgia. This fund prepares Georgia's peace officers for retirement and provides retired law enforcement officers with pension benefits. We are so grateful for our officers' selfless service and this measure gives Georgians an opportunity to express support for the brave officers who put their lives on the line to keep us safe.

**Healthcare Initiatives**

This week we passed a number of measures dealing with quality healthcare access. The first came in the form of **Senate Bill 96**, dealing with organ donations. Because organ donations are time sensitive, it is crucial we support policy that will increase the success of transplant surgeries, which is why we unanimously passed SB 96. This bill expands the list of non-physician medical personnel authorized to pronounce the death of a patient in a nursing home or hospice care facility. Physicians are currently the only health care providers permitted under law to make a determination or pronouncement of a registered organ donor's death. However, under this bill, professional nurses, nurse practitioners and physician assistants will be allowed to make the determination in certain facilities. Incredibly, one organ donor can save as many as eight lives, and through eye and tissue donations, the same donor can save or improve as many as 50 lives. This streamlined process will ensure those willing to donate, are able to do so, in the time sensitive fashion required to successfully save lives through transplant surgery.

Another healthcare measure passed last week was **Senate Bill 47**, which would permit out-of-state physicians, physician assistants and athletic trainers traveling with sports teams the ability to provide care for athletes and coaches during events in Georgia. Current law does not allow out-of-state medical personnel or trainers to provide care to sports teams they travel with while visiting our state. As we continue to host to a number of major sporting events, this legislation will allow visiting teams to use their own physicians who are familiar with the patient's history, thus providing timely and familiar care.

Similarly, we also passed **Senate Bill 109**, which would create the Recognition of Emergency Medical Services Personnel Licensure Interstate Compact (REPLICA) to legally allow out-of-state emergency management services (EMS) over state lines during declared "states of emergency." This bill would allow EMS personnel, not licensed in Georgia, to provide care within our state during times of extreme need. This compact has been enacted in eight states thus far, and will become fully operational once enacted by the tenth state. Georgia has been battered by storm systems over the last year, and this legislation was passed in an effort to provide relief, quality and timely care to our citizens in need.

**Water Measures**

Over the last few years, Georgia and other southern states have been in battle over each state's water rights. Better known as, "Water Wars," we are taking steps to further protect our water sources through the passage of two resolutions calling for Joint Study Committees in the House and Senate to address water issues. Each study committee will hold meetings to explore issues and file final recommendation reports by December 31, 2017.

The first, **Senate Resolution 152**, would establish the Joint House and Senate Study Committee on Stream Buffers. Buffers are strips of natural vegetation along the banks of a stream, lake or body of water that separates the water from lawns, buildings, roads, driveways and other structures, usually located on private property. The joint committee would review collected data and current practices relating to the conditions, needs, issues and problems associated with stream buffers. Further the committee would be tasked to find ways we can protect our water supplies, while keeping in line with private property rights.

**Senate Resolution 224** would establish the Joint Study Committee on Storm-Water Management Fees. Many of our local governments have storm-water management plans and utilities in place to lessen storm-water runoff, however, these plans charge private property owners a fee to collect and dispose of storm-water. Collection and disposal often take place without consideration of the property damage an owner may incur because of chosen practices. To help remedy this, the committee would study ways to protect water quality, while holding stakeholders equally responsible for storm-water systems which impact individual property owners.