

Under the Gold Dome

District 149 Legislative Update – Week 4 — 2018



Thursday, February 1, brought to a close the fourth week of our 2018 legislative session! I continued my work for the benefit of our district as I attended several committee and sub-committee meetings to work through various bills up for discussion. My colleagues and I also addressed issues in the House chamber by casting many floor votes. Measures dealing with Georgia's outdated adoption procedures, tax reform, as well as, updating the state retirement program for some members of our law enforcement community now await action from the Senate.

House Bill 159- Adoption Modernization

House Bill 159, which would completely overhaul Georgia's current adoption process, passed unanimously last week. During the first week of session, we received the Senate version of the bill, which made significant changes to the original legislation passed in 2017. Upon receiving the newest version of HB 159, we immediately began negotiations with the Senate and the governor's office. Thankfully, for the sake of our children who are badly in need permanent homes, it looks as if we have reached a compromise.

Some of the bills changes includes shortening the time in which a birth mother can revoke the adoption of her child. Currently, birth mothers have 10 days to revoke the surrender of their newborn. Under HB 159 this revocation period is shortened from 10 to four days.

Additionally, the House version of the adoption bill updates the following:

- Allows birth mothers to receive reasonable living expenses in both private and agency adoptions, thus leveling the field regardless of chosen adoption procedure.
- Safeguards several temporary powers of attorney.

The updated bill is now back in the Senate, where we hope they will agree to the current changes. If approved by the Senate, HB 159 will head to the Governor for his signature and final passage into law.

House Bill 661- Real Estate Tax Lien Reform

Passing unanimously in our chamber last week was House Bill 661, dealing with real estate tax liens. This bill works to simplify the process for filing and removing realty tax liens. If signed into law, it would further increase transparency for taxpayers, moving the Department of Revenue's process to electronic-based transactions, as opposed to the traditional paper transactions. HB 661 also updates legislation signed into law last year, removing a current provision regarding statewide liens, reverting to county specific liens. HB 661 also requires every realty tax lien be filed with the superior court clerk in the county where the real estate is located. I have always firmly believed the more local control- the better.

House Bill 694- Tax Laws

House Bill 694, a measure intended to update the way motor fuel distributors and wholesalers submit their monthly motor fuel tax reports to the Department of Revenue, also passed. This bill modernizes and streamlines the filing process for our state's oil distributors by requiring all monthly reports be submitted electronically.

House Bill 671- Honey Bee Bill

Did you know Georgia is the third largest producer of bees and the tenth largest producer of honey in the nation? The honey bee also holds the distinction of being Georgia's official insect! Last week we passed House Bill 671, which would promote conservation and protection of the honey bee, through the purchase of specialty license plates. All revenue collected would be given directly to the Georgia Beekeepers Association, who will use the funds to support educational, training, research and non-profit grant programs, all intended to help raise honey bee awareness.

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House Bill 135- State Retirement Reform

If signed into law, House Bill 135 would expand the term “law enforcement officer” to include Department of Driver Services (DDS) investigators. Under the bill, they would qualify to receive up to an additional five years of creditable service in the state’s Employees’ Retirement System (ERS) for prior law enforcement service. Eligibility stipulations include:

- DDS investigators receiving retirement benefits from a local government for that same service are not eligible.
- The individual is not eligible unless they have been a member of the retirement system for at least ten years.

HB 135 corrects an oversight missed in 2016, when we passed a bill allowing all other law enforcement officers to obtain creditable service through the ERS. This bill simply corrects the oversight, making Georgia’s 16 DDS investigators eligible for this benefit.