

## 2021 Georgia General Assembly Legislative Days 20-24 Overview



### Housekeeping

The Georgia General Assembly convened for the seventh week (Legislative Days 20-24). Legislation has moved quickly through the week with a continued focus on election reform. Other closely watched bills that have been moving this week include various school voucher bills, online gambling, and tort reform. The calendar has also been officially set to Wednesday, March 31st (Legislative Day 40, Sine Die). Crossover Day is set for Monday, March 8th (Legislative Day 28). Crossover Day marks the cutoff for when a piece of legislation must pass a legislative body in order to be considered for the rest of the year. The General Assembly will reconvene on Monday, March 1st for Legislative Day 25.



### Election Bills on the Move

This week, the Georgia General Assembly saw movement on a series of election bills with many being passed on a chamber floor. While the majority of election bills that have been moving have been sponsored by Republicans, one Democratic sponsored bill (Sen. Jen Jordan - SB 40) made it to the Senate floor and was passed unanimously. One of the most closely watched bills include the House Special Committee on Election Integrity Chairman Barry Fleming's House Bill 531. House Bill 531 is considered an "omnibus bill," a bill that packages together several measures into one piece of legislation. His bill would make sweeping changes to Georgia's election system. Senate Majority Leader Mike Dugan (R-Carrollton) introduced his own omnibus bill on the Senate side that also included extensive changes to Georgia's election system.

The following elections bills moved this week:

SB 89 - (Sen. Butch Miller) - This bill would create the position of an Elections Assistance Officer in the Secretary of the State's Office that is selected by the State Elections Board. The Officer would work closely with local election officials on training and voting processes. This bill was passed by the Georgia Senate on the floor by 35-18.

SB 67 - (Sen. Larry Walker III) - This bill would require an additional step of identification to be provided from voters when sending their absentee ballot application. In order to ensure their identity, voters would need to provide either a driver's license number, a state ID number, or supply a copy of an acceptable form of photo ID (ex: passport). This bill was passed by the Georgia Senate on the floor by 35-18. The House read and referred to the Special Committee on Election Integrity.

SB 184 (Sen. Larry Walker III) - This bill would shorten the time county election officials have to input voter credit into the state's system from 60 days to 30 or face a \$100-a-day fine. This bill was passed in Senate Ethics, and passed by the Georgia Senate. The House read and referred to the Special Committee on Election Integrity

SB 40 (Sen. Jen Jordan) - This bill would require county officials to begin processing absentee ballots eight days before election day, aiming to cut down on delays in counting mail-in ballots on election days. This bill was passed by the Georgia Senate on the floor by 53-0. The House read and referred to the Special Committee on Election Integrity.

SB 141-This bill would provide for the immediate counting and tabulation of votes right after the polls close. This bill passed out of the Senate Ethics Committee.

HB 531 (Rep. Barry Fleming)- This bill is a large omnibus bill that covers an array of election reform. This bill has sweeping changes to Georgia's election systems, and includes language to change: outside funding that county elections offices would be able to receive, abilities for poll workers to serve in adjacent counties, additional voting machines and poll workers for long lines, restrictions on mobile precincts, increased flexibility for county election officials, absentee ballot application regulations, drop boxes, instant runoff ranked-choice voting for military members, weekend voting, signature verification, giving food or water to voters standing in line, out-of-precinct provisional, among others. This bill passed the House Special Committee on Election Integrity and has been put on the debate calendar for Monday, March 1st.

SB 188 (Sen. Bill Cowser) - This bill provides for an election results reporting system to be established and maintained by the Secretary of State. This bill passed the Georgia Senate on the floor by a vote of 34-18.



## School Vouchers

It did not take long for legislators to begin tackling the issue of school vouchers this legislative session. There are multiple school voucher bills that have been on the move in both the House and Senate. House Bill 60, known as the “educational scholarship accounts,” passed the House Education Committee on a razor thin vote of 12-10. This bill would be open to students whose local public schools did not offer face-to-face instruction in the prior school year along with low-income students, students adopted from foster care, and qualifying special education students and students who have been bullied. The sponsor of the bill, Rep. Cantrell noted that the bill could cost Georgia schools up to \$175 million.

In the Senate, Majority Whip Steve Gooch’s bill, SB 47 passed Senate Education and is now awaiting a vote from the Senate Rules Committee to make it to the floor. This bill expands the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act. This bill not only expands the necessary conditions for students to meet (adding in over twenty more conditions such as ADHD, and drug and alcohol abuse), but also expands for what state funding can also be provided for. Currently, this bill not only offers for state funds to be used for tuition and fees at private schools, but also for uniforms, athletics and field trips.



## Vaccine Update

On Thursday Feb 25th, Gov. Kemp gave a press conference updating the state on the expansion of the Covid-19 vaccine distribution. The state has previously been in phase 1A+ meaning that people of 65+ age and their caretakers, police and firemen, and care facility residents and employees are eligible for the vaccine. Beginning March 8, the criteria will expand to Pre-K through 12 teachers and other educational employees, adults with intellectual disabilities and their caretakers, and caretakers of children with severe medical conditions. Phase 1A+ previously applied to 2 million Georgians but this expansion will qualify 1 million more, increasing the eligible population by 50%.

## General Bills

HB 112 (Rep. Trey Kelley) - This bill extends the applicability of the COVID-19 liability protections enacted last year for one year beginning on July 14, 2021. This bill was passed out of the Special Committee on Access to the Civil Justice System. This bill was passed by the House. The Senate read and referred to the Judiciary Committee.

HB 86 (Rep. Ron Stephens) - This bill would create the Georgia Lottery Mobile Sports Wagering Integrity Act. This Act would allow for Georgians to participate in mobile sports betting regulated by the Georgia Lottery Commission. This bill passed out of the House Committee of Economic Development and Tourism.

HB 394 (Rep. Ron Stephens) - This bill would raise the tax on cigarettes from \$.37 to \$1.87 per pack. The bill provides that cigars, smokeless tobacco and other nicotine

products would be taxed at 39% of the wholesale cost. The bill raises the tax on vapor products from 7% to 39%. This bill is in the House Ways and Means Committee.

SB 100 (Sen. Ben Watson) - This bill provides that the state observes standard time year round. This was passed by the Senate on Feb. 24.

HB 286 (Rep. Houston Gaines) - This bill would restrict the ability of county governing authorities and consolidated governing authorities to reduce funding for county police departments. This bill passed the Georgia House of Representatives 101-69.

HR 119 (Rep. David Ralston)- This bill recognizes United States Senator Johnny Isakson and dedicates a bridge in his honor. This bill was passed by the Georgia House 169-0.

## Legislation

HB 90 (Rep. Bruce Williamson) - This bill will allow for persons or businesses who are buyers of land for conversion of timber to be exempt from certain liabilities relating to damages. This bill was voted out of the House Judiciary Committee, and passed by the House. The Senate read and referred to the Committee on Banking and Financial Institutions.

HB 147 (Rep. Heath Clark) - This bill would create a licensure by endorsement where a licensed professional establishes residency in Georgia and (1) holds a current license to practice such occupation or profession issued by another state that was acquired prior to moving from another state and establishing residency in this state for which the training, experience, and testing are substantially similar in qualifications and scope to the requirements under this state to obtain a license; (2) is in good standing in such other state; and (3) passes any examination that may only be required to demonstrate knowledge of the laws and rules and regulations of this state specific to the practice of the profession, business, or trade for which such license by endorsement is being sought. The House read and referred to the Committee on Regulated Industries.

SB 49 (Sen. Clint Dixon) - This bill focuses on standards for construction and will provide for procedures for alternative plan review, permitting and inspection by a private provider and allow for the applicant to keep the private provider at their own expense. This bill passed through the Senate Committee on State and Local Governments and was voted out by the senate. The House read and referred to the Committee of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs.

SB 143 (Sen. Lindsey Tippins)- This bill will affect mechanics and materialmen by conforming a reference within a statutory form regarding labor and material bond rights and waivers of lien. This bill passed the Georgia Senate by 53-0.

HB 435 (Rep. Victor Anderson)- This bill will provide for the exemption of certain contracts procured competitively by the state or organizations relating to contract and bidding requirements for public works. This bill was passed by the House Governmental Affairs Committee.

HB 99 (Rep. Ron Stephens)- This bill would provide for access to employee toilet facilities in retail establishments. This bill is in the House Judiciary Committee.

HB 480 (Rep. Dale Washburn)- This bill provides for the creation, declaration,

amendment, notice, and priority of liens for labor, services, or materials performed or furnished by registered interior designers. This bill passed a House Judiciary Subcommittee.

HB 122 (Rep. John Corbett)- This bill will provide for the extension of deadlines for a manufacturers' sales tax exemption for concrete mixers. This bill was passed by the House Ways and Means Committee.

HB 586 (Rep. Sam Watson) - This bill would extend the sunset date for the exemption for projects of regional significance regarding sales and use tax. This bill passed out of House Ways and Means.

HB 469 (Rep. Ron Stephens) - This bill would revise procedures, conditions, and limitations relating to tax credits for the rehabilitation of historic structures. This bill was heard in a House Ways and Means Subcommittee.

HB 355 - (Rep. Marcus Wiedower) - This bill provides for the inclusion of building products in construction on the registry, and allows participants in the registry to voluntarily report the utilization of carbon sequestration and embodied carbon results. This bill also provides for certified third-party organizations to measure the amount of carbon sequestered from building materials that sequester carbon dioxide. This bill passed the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee.

HB 476 (Rep. Dale Washburn) - This bill would create the Georgia Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors Board, an independent state agency attached to the Secretary of State for administrative purposes only. This bill passed the House Regulated Industries Committee, and was also passed by House Rules. This bill will most likely receive a floor vote on Monday, March 1st.