

2021 Georgia General Assembly Legislative Days 25-27 Overview



Housekeeping

The General Assembly convened for Monday, Wednesday and Friday this week (Legislative Days 25-27), using Tuesday and Thursday as committee workdays. The General Assembly will reconvene on Monday, March 1st for Crossover Day (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 is currently still in session as this report is being written, and may be subject to update. A robust report will be sent next week that will include a thorough analysis of Crossover Day.

General Bills

HB 479 (Rep. Bert Reeves) - This bill would repeal Georgia's Citizen Arrest Law. This bill is in response to the murder of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia last year. Governor Kemp listed this as a legislative priority, and is being carried by his Floor Leader. This bill passed the House Judiciary 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 provisionals, among others. This bill passed the Georgia House of Representatives 97-72.

SB 47 (Sen. Steve Gooch) - This bill makes significant changes to the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act. Measures in this act includes greatly expanding eligibility for students, recalculating scholarship amounts, and to require annual parent surveys. This bill passed the Georgia Senate 30-23.

SB 222 (Sen. Carden Summers) - This bill would designate the pecan as the official state nut. This bill passed the Georgia Senate 51-0.

SB 241 (Sen. Mike Dugan) - This bill serves as the omnibus elections bill from the Senate side. This bill has been sponsored by the Senate Majority Leader, and has the entire GOP Caucus as cosponsors. This bill includes similar language to House Bill 531, but also introduces language on limitations on no-excuse absentee voting, along with requirements for ID when voting absentee and restrictions on drop boxes. This bill passed the Senate Ethics Committee by substitute.



HB 531

On Monday, March 1st the Georgia House of Representatives passed House Bill 531, the closely watched omnibus elections bill. The bill was sponsored by the House Special Committee on Election Integrity's Chairman, Rep. Barry Fleming. The 66-page bill was passed on party lines, and contained a multitude of changes to Georgia's election system. The bill brought a crowd of protestors to the Capitol, initially beginning with chants outside to protestors coming inside. Debate on the bill became very contentious with each side being allotted an hour worth of time. Democrats claimed the bill would usher in wide-spread voter suppression, while Republicans asserted that common sense reform was necessary to ensure election integrity. The bill outlines changes including: reducing the number of early voting days to make counties more uniform, requiring an ID or other forms of identification for an absentee ballot application, and making it a misdemeanor to send voters food and drink while standing in line to vote, among other provisions. This bill has been read in the Georgia Senate and referred to the Senate Ethics Committee.



Governor Kemp's Vaccination Update

On Wednesday, March 3rd Governor Brian Kemp gave a press conference on the COVID-19 vaccine and where the state stood in the vaccination process. Beginning on March 8th, more groups and individuals became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine including Pre-K through 12 educators and staff, adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their caregivers, and parents of children with complex medical conditions will be eligible for vaccinations. This added an additional million Georgians to those eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine to the existing two million eligible Georgians. Governor Kemp also announced that 83,000 Johnson & Johnson vaccines are set to arrive this week and will be prioritized for teachers. Additionally, the Governor also announced that Georgia will be adding five state-run mass vaccination sites on March 17th in Chatham County, Ware County, Washington County, Bartow County, and Muscogee County. These vaccination sites will be in addition to the four currently being run by the state in Fulton County, Bibb County, Dougherty County, and Habersham County. Governor Kemp also offered optimism in his assessment of Georgia's vaccination progress: "I feel like we're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel."

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 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 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 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.

HB 150 (Rep. Bruce Williamson) - This bill would prohibit governmental entities from adopting any policy that prohibits the connection or reconnection of any utility service based upon the type or source of energy or fuel. The House passed this bill and the Senate read and referred to the Committee of Regulated Industries and Utilities.

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 Georgia House of Representatives 169-3.

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 failed to pass the Georgia House of Representatives 80-86.

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 470 (Rep. Dale Washburn) - This bill would provide that no plans are required when units are not designated by physical structures. This bill passed the Georgia House of Representative on March 3.

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 passed the Georgia House of Representatives 163-2.

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 the Georgia House of Representatives 164-0.

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.

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.