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This Week in the Senate

February 29 - March 4, 2016



Senate Meets Crossover Deadline

The Georgia General Assembly met a significant deadline this week: Crossover Day. Under House and Senate Rules, bills must pass the chamber in which they were introduced (and “crossover” to the other chamber) by Day 30.

Nearly 30 bills and resolutions were on the calendar for Crossover Day. Any Senate bills that did not pass by Crossover Day are now considered “dead” for the session.

Among the measures we passed on Crossover Day were four constitutional amendments. Senate Resolution 604 by Sen. Bill Heath (R - Bremen) repeals the authority of the General Assembly to levy an ad valorem tax on real property. The state does not currently levy an ad valorem property tax. Under this resolution, it would no longer be an option. Senate Resolution 388, also by Sen. Heath, realigns the State Constitution with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution; effectively repealing the anti-Catholic “mini-Blaine Amendment” originally added to the State Constitution in the 1870s. Senate Resolution 675 by Sen. Josh McKoon (R - Columbus) makes English the official language of the state, effectively transferring existing statutory provisions to the State Constitution. Senate Resolution 756 by Sen. Judson Hill (R - Marietta) creates two triggers that would automatically lower the income tax rate as the general revenues rise. These four amendments now go to the House, and if approved, to Georgia voters in the 2016 general election.

Congratulations to Sen. JaNice VanNess (R – Conyers) and Sen. Elena Parent (D – Atlanta), who both passed their first bills through the Senate this week.

Senate leadership concluded the week with “green door” meetings to finalize our version of the Fiscal Year 2017 General Budget. The name “green door” comes from the color of the painted door to the Capitol meeting room where budget conferees met in the 1970s. The Senate Appropriations Committee will meet on Monday to review our work product and recommend a budget to the full Senate.

Sen. David J. Shafer

President Pro Tempore, Georgia State Senate

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Driver’s Privilege License for Immigrants

Sen. Josh McKoon (R – Columbus) sponsored Senate Bill 6. This bill would create a special driver’s privilege card for immigrants granted lawful alien status under the deferred action program. The bill also creates a special identification card for lawful aliens; with these cards being noticeably different from a standard issue driver’s license. This bill passed with a vote of 37 to 17. – **SB 6**

Collecting DNA of Convicted Felons and Serious Offenders

Senate Bill 77, sponsored by Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell), would require the collection and analysis of DNA samples from individuals convicted of felonies or those who are indicted for “serious offenses,” including serious violent felonies and 12 other criminal offenses. This bill establishes a timeline and procedure guideline for the DNA collection process. An individual whose DNA has been collected can request an expungement of the sample under certain circumstances. This bill passed with a vote of 42 to 4. – **SB 77**



Storing Patient Information on Involuntary Hospitalization

Sen. Elena Parent (D – Atlanta) sponsored Senate Bill 304. This bill would eliminate the current requirement to remove an individual’s involuntary hospitalization records maintained by the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) after five years. It establishes a judicial process through which records can be removed from the database following a petition to the court. The bill passed with a vote of 48 to 5. – **SB 304**



Transparency in Education Act

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) sponsored Senate Bill 310, the Transparency in Education Act. The bill would require schools and agencies applying for education grants over \$20 million to submit a written analysis to the General Assembly. The analysis must include long-term costs of the project, the impact on state and local education policy, the purpose of the grant and the grant’s relationship with existing law. The bill passed with a vote of 36 to 18. – **SB 310**



Alternative Education Program Attendance Limits and Guidelines

Senate Bill 328, sponsored by Sen. Emanuel Jones (D – Decatur), would clarify that only disruptive students between the ages 6 to 16 are required to be sent to an alternative school instead of expulsion or suspension. With the exception of serious offenses such as physical assault or possession of illegal drugs, a student may spend no more than two consecutive semesters in an alternative school. The bill passed with a vote of 43 to 5. – **SB 328**



Retirement Plan Options for Georgia Municipal Employees

Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta) sponsored Senate Bill 336, which would improve options for creating and implementing retirement plans under the Georgia Municipal Employees Benefit System (GMEBS). GMEBS would be authorized to administer benefits for retirement plans selected by employees through a central administrative system. The bill passed 53 to 1. – **SB 336**

Environmental Policy Act

Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta) sponsored Senate Bill 346 amending the “Environmental Policy Act”. This bill would exempt a public road improvement and construction project costing less than \$100 million from additional environmental reporting if the project is exclusively using state or local funds. The bill passed 36 to 15. – **SB 346**



Student Protection Act

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) sponsored Senate Bill 355. Titled the “Student Protection Act,” SB 355 would allow students with a doctor’s note for illness or life-threatening sickness be excused from standardized testing and to request standardized tests be provided in paper and pencil format. The legislation also directs the State School Superintendent to develop policies for how non-participants will be evaluated. The bill passed with a vote of 39 to 9. – **SB 355**



Changing Objectives and Policies for Local School Boards of Education

Senate Bill 357, sponsored by Sen. Michael Williams (R – Cumming), would revise the state defined objectives of local school boards members and would require local boards of education to create code of conduct and conflict of interest policies. The bill passed 50 to 0. – **SB 357**



Legal Process for City Incorporation and Establishing City-County Consolidated Government

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Bill 375. This bill establishes the legal process for city incorporation and creating city-county consolidated governments. The bill would require this type of legislation to be introduced the first session of a biennial legislative term. The legislation would also require a feasibility study to be conducted during the interim. These studies must review economic viability, financial impact on unincorporated areas and counties and the projected amount of franchise fees. The bill passed with a vote of 55 to 0. – **SB 375**



Regulation of Advertising for Certified Physicians

Senate Bill 385, sponsored by Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta), would establish criteria for advertising as a certified or board certified physician. Advertisements must contain the full name of the certifying board, which must also be a member of the American Board of Medical Specialties or the American Osteopathic Association. The certifying board may also require successful completion of a postgraduate training program approved by the Accreditation Commission for Graduate Medical Education or the American Osteopathic Association. The bill passed with a vote of 48 to 0. – **SB 385**



New SNAP and TANF Regulations

Sen. Hunter Hill (R – Atlanta) sponsored Senate Bill 389, which would enforce new reforms to protect against State Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) fraud. The legislation would also add new exceptions for maximum assistance amounts and establish a cash diversion program for TANF participants. The bill passed with a vote of 38 to 14. – **SB 389**

Prohibition of New Licenses for Narcotic Treatment Programs

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga) introduced Senate Bill 402 to establish a State Commission on Narcotic Treatment Programs and enact a moratorium on issuing licenses to any new narcotic treatment clinics in the state. The moratorium would allow time for legislators and state officials to assess the current state of narcotic treatment programs in Georgia and develop



recommendations for the licensing and regulation process. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **SB 402**

Off-Duty Use of State Vehicles by Law Enforcement

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) introduced Senate Bill 404. The bill allows uniformed law enforcement officers to use Department of Public Safety-issued vehicles when working off-duty jobs requiring vested police powers. The bill would only extend to officers from the Uniform Division, the Motor Carrier Compliance Enforcement Section and the Capitol Police Division. The bill passed 47 to 9. – **SB 404**



Posting Toll-Free Number to Report Child Abuse

Sen. JaNice VanNess (R – Conyers) introduced Senate Bill 409 to instruct public schools, including all local charter schools and state charter schools, to post a sign containing the toll-free number operated by the Department of Family and Children Services to report child abuse or neglect. The sign must be placed in a clearly visible location and the Department of Education has the right to adopt rules and regulations regarding size, location and language. The bill passed 54 to 1. – **SB 409**



Reorganizing the Georgia Information Sharing and Analysis Center

Sen. Bill Cowsert (R – Athens) sponsored Senate Bill 416 to reorganize the Georgia Information Sharing and Analysis Center (GISAC) to become a “fusion” center in which local, state and federal agencies work together on specific issues. The GISAC promotes public safety by working to detect, prevent and respond to criminal or terroristic activities. The director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation would be responsible for GISAC oversight. The bill was passed by a vote of 53 to 0. – **SB 416**



Directives for Water Service Providers

Current Georgia law states that water suppliers cannot refuse serve to a residential property based on debts incurred by the previous owner, occupant or lessee. Senate Bill 206, sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick), would expand this law to cover all types of property. The bill also provides notification instructions for water suppliers regarding outstanding charges when a property is being purchased. The bill passed with a vote of 49 to 5. – **SB 206**



Georgia Film and Television Trail Act

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga) sponsored Senate Bill 417. The bill would create a trail to encourage Georgia residents and tourists to visit production sites of films and television shows made in Georgia. The Georgia Department of Economic Development would be responsible for developing and locating the sites, while the Department of Transportation would be responsible for trail maintenance. The bill passed with a vote of 55 to 0. – **SB 417**



Constitutional Amendment to Prohibit State Ad Valorem Tax

Sen. Bill Heath (R – Bremen) sponsored Senate Resolution 604. This resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to prohibit the collection of

any state annual ad valorem taxes after January 1, 2017. The resolution passed with a vote of 38 to 17. – **SR 604**

Reducing Individual State Income Taxes

Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) introduced Senate Resolution 756. The resolution proposes a constitutional amendment, which would trigger a reduction in state income taxes based on the size of the general fund and the “rainy day fund”. If the general fund reaches \$23.6 billion and the rainy day fund exceeds 8 percent of that amount, a 0.1 percentage point reduction would occur. If the general fund reaches \$24.2 billion with at least 8 percent of that total in reserve, individual state income taxes would drop an additional 0.1 percentage point. These reductions must occur by the year 2020. SR 756 passed with a vote of 39 to 17. – **SR 756**

Public Funding for Fixed Guideway Transit

Senate Bill 420, sponsored by Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta), would require voters to approve any public expenditure for the establishment, maintenance and operation of fixed guideway transit. This bill requires the governing authority of a county to specify the type and location of the guideway transit, the date when costs will be paid in full and the capital costs to develop and maintain the transit system. The bill passed with a vote of 34 to 14. – **SB 420**

Public Funding of Religious Social Service Organizations

Sen. Bill Heath (R – Bremen) sponsored Senate Resolution 388, which would propose a constitutional amendment to allow religious or faith-based organizations to receive state funding to perform social services. Current law prohibits money from the general fund to be used, directly or indirectly, to aid any religious or sectarian organization. This bill creates an exception for providing social services. The resolution passed with a vote of 39 to 17. – **SR 388**

Establishing English as Georgia’s Official Language

Sen. Josh McKoon (R – Columbus) introduced Senate Resolution 675. The resolution would amend the Georgia Constitution to declare English as Georgia’s official language. The resolution passed 39 to 14. – **SR 675**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

Recognizing Georgia Southwestern State University

The Senate recognized Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) day at the Capitol with Senate Resolution 1070, sponsored by Sen. Greg Kirk (R – Americus). Sen. Kirk was joined by GSW President Charles E. Patterson, who spoke about the academic success of GSW students. GSW was founded 110 years ago and currently enrolls over 2,500 students. – **SR 1070**



Law Enforcement Appreciation

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) sponsored Senate Resolution 1050 recognizing March 2, 2016, as Law Enforcement Appreciation Day at the Capitol. According to the Department of Public Safety, there are approximately 54,000 certified peace officers in the state, with almost 40,000 of them working as local officers. Sen. Harper was joined by Coweta County Sheriff Mike Yeager and Georgia Bureau of Investigation Director Vernon M. Keenan in recognizing the dedication of Georgia’s law enforcement officers. – **SR 1050**



Genocide Awareness Day

The Senate recognized the month of April as Genocide Prevention and Awareness Month at the Capitol with Senate Resolution 991, sponsored by Sen. Elena Parent (D – Atlanta). The purpose of Genocide Prevention and Awareness Month is to provide education on past and ongoing genocides,

advocate for those suffering as a result of genocide and to develop policies to end genocide. – **SR 991**

Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education

The Senate commended the Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education (CORE) with Senate Resolution 1007, sponsored by Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge). Georgia CORE is a public-private partnership based in Atlanta that works to provide higher quality and cost-effective cancer treatment to all Georgia citizens of this state. – **SR 1007**

Recognizing Jim Grubiak

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega) sponsored Senate Resolution 1005 commending and congratulating James F. “Jim” Grubiak for over 40 years of public service. Grubiak began his public service career as a planner for the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). After leaving DCA, Grubiak joined the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), where he has served as the organization’s general counsel since 1982. – **SR 1005**

Sen. Bill Jackson and Sen. Tommie Williams Announce Retirement Plans

Sens. Bill Jackson (R - Appling) and Tommie Williams (R - Lyons) announced their intentions to retire from the Georgia State Senate at the conclusion of the current two-year term. Both Senators reminisced on their time spent in the General Assembly and shared personal stories of their years in public service. Sen. Jackson was elected to the Georgia Senate in 2007 and currently serves as an administration floor leader. Sen. Williams was elected to the Senate in 1998 and currently serves as the chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee.



**The Georgia State Senate will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. on
MONDAY, MARCH 7.**