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This Week in the Senate

March 14 - 18, 2016



Committees Hold Final Meetings

The State Senate held its final committee meetings on Wednesday, March 16. The Senate will now focus on bills that have made it through the committee process.

This week we passed House Bill 768, the Georgians Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, allowing disabled individuals to save money through special accounts that can be used to pay for education, housing or transportation needs.

House Bill 238, re-written by Sen. Judson Hill (R-Marietta) and the Senate Finance Committee, will relieve the tax burden on hardworking Georgians. Now known as the Tax Relief Act of 2016, this bill provides for a flat income tax rate of 5.4 percent and eliminates corporate net worth taxes. This bill simplifies the filing process and allows Georgians to keep more money in their pockets.

The Senate approved a new version of House Bill 757, the newly renamed Free Exercise Protection Act, which combined the Pastor Protection Act by Speaker David Ralston (R - Ellijay), the Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act by Sen. Josh McKoon (R - Columbus) and the First Amendment Defense Act by Sen. Greg Kirk (R - Americus). This bill, which provides robust religious protections for Georgians, now goes to the Governor for his approval.

The Senate Rules Committee will hold its final meeting on Monday to determine the calendar for the final two days of the 2016 Legislative Session. To all the staff who have long days ahead in the next week, thank you in advance for your hard work.

Sen. David J. Shafer

President Pro Tempore, Georgia State Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 14

Disability Benefits for Community Supervision Officers

Sen. John F. Kennedy (R – Macon) carried House Bill 421. This bill would extend eligibility for disability benefits to community supervision officers and other state employees. The employee will only be eligible for disability if they become disabled due to injury sustained while serving in their official capacity. It will also only become effective if funding is available under the Public Retirement Systems Standards Law. The bill passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 421**

Establishing Georgia Palliative Care and Quality of Life Advisory Council

Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah) carried House Bill 509 to establish the Georgia Palliative Care and Quality of Life Advisory Council under the Department of Community Health (DCH). The council will consult and advise the DCH on the

establishment, maintenance, operation and outcome evaluations of palliative care initiatives. The bill would also establish a Palliative Care Consumer and Professional Information and Education Program run by the DCH. The bill passed with a vote of 46 to 7. – **HB 509**

Reporting Number of Abortions Granted Without Parental Consent

Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White) carried House Bill 555. This bill would require juvenile court clerks to report the number of abortions without parental consent granted or denied to the Administrative Office of the Courts. The bill requires that the report be submitted on an annual basis and be destroyed six months after submission. The report will be confidential and not fall under the Open Records Act. The bill passed with a vote of 37 to 17. – **HB 555**

Required Years of Service for Probate Court Judges

Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta) carried House Bill 635, which would raise the number of years of service required for probate court judges to be eligible for retirement benefits. According to the bill, a probate court judge must pay into the retirement fund for a maximum of 30 years and have contributed to the fund for at least eight years before receiving full retirement benefits. The bill passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 635**

Accountability, Change Management and Process Improvement Act of 2016

Sen. P.K. Martin (R – Lawrenceville) carried House Bill 676. This bill would require all Executive Branch agencies to submit a written business summary for any information technology project exceeding \$1 million in value to the Georgia Technology Authority. It would require the same agencies to submit a change of management plan for projects that cost more than \$1 million, involve two or more agencies or change existing business practices. The bill provides definitions for what the reports are to include. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 676**

Child Abuse Records Protection Act

Sen. Charlie Bethel (R – Dalton) carried House Bill 725. Titled the Child Abuse Records Protection Act, this bill would require a court order for the release of child abuse records and adds child advocacy centers to the list of entities allowed to release these types of records. HB 725 would also require the court to issue a protective order over the records. Individuals allowed to access the records must acknowledge, in writing, that he or she agrees to be bound by the protective order. Released records must be immediately returned to the court when the matter requiring the release of records is closed. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 725**

Updating the Safe Operation of Vehicles Reference Date

House Bill 747, carried by Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla), would update Georgia law regarding the safe operation of motor carriers and commercial motor vehicles to match that of federal regulations. The bill would update the term “present regulations” under Georgia Code to be the same as the federal regulations under Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations. The bill passed with a vote of 52 to 1. – **HB 747**



Georgia Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act

Sen. Fran Millar (R – Atlanta) carried House Bill 768, otherwise known as the Georgia Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. This bill would allow those with disabilities to create an untaxed savings account to help pay for “qualified disability benefits,” such as purchasing a car or making a house payment. The program is limited to those with significant disabilities diagnosed before the age of 26 years old. The bill passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 768**



Georgia Lemon Law Consumer Fees

Sen. Mike Dugan (R – Carrollton) carried House Bill 871 to amend Georgia law and designate the Department of Law as the agency to receive and deposit consumer fees collected under Georgia Lemon Law into the Treasury. The Georgia Lemon Law requires vehicle dealers to collect consumer fees when selling or leasing new motor vehicles. The bill passed with a vote of 52 to 2. – **HB 871**



Placement of Children by DFCS with an Adult or Fictive Kin

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 887. The first section, known as the Supporting and Strengthening Families Act, provides a statutory mechanism for parents to grant temporary caregiving authority for a child without involving the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The legislation states that DFCS would only become involved if the child has been under the care of DFCS in the past and that the child is not considered abandoned or in foster care. The second section of the bill requires DFCS to give preference to a relative or fictive kin (persons regarded as family although there is no blood relation) over a nonrelative in a child placement hearing. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 887**



The Honorable Jimmy Carter Cancer Treatment Access Act

House Bill 965, carried by Sen. Charlie Bethel (R – Dalton), would prohibit health plans from requiring a patient fail to respond to one drug before providing coverage for a different FDA-approved drug. The bill only covers treatment of stage four advanced, metastatic cancer, and the use of a different drug must be supported by peer reviewed medical literature. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 1. – **HB 965**



Commending LifeLink of Georgia and Cast of *The Wish*

Sen. Donzella James (D – Atlanta) commended LifeLink of Georgia and the cast of *The Wish* with Senate Resolution 1080. LifeLink of Georgia is an organization dedicated to educating the public on kidney donations and transplants, and *The Wish* is a faith-based film that looks into the life of a high school teacher awaiting a kidney transplant. *The Wish* cast and LifeLink members joined Sen. James to encourage all Georgians to become organ donors. – **SR 1080**



Council for Quality Growth Day

The Senate recognized March 16, 2016 as Council for Quality Growth Day at the Capitol with Senate Resolution 712, sponsored by Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta). The Council for Quality Growth is a 31-year-old

nonprofit trade association that promotes balanced, responsible growth in metro Georgia. The Council works directly with thousands of elected officials, administrators and staff to address strategic economic planning, infrastructure needs and quality of life issues throughout the metro Atlanta region. – **SR 712**

Honoring Hank and Billye Aaron

Sen. Gail Davenport (D - Jonesboro) sponsored Senate Resolution 1115 to honor Hank and Billye Aaron on their distinguished careers and the 20th anniversary of their 755 Restaurant Corporation. A retired Major League Baseball player and National Baseball Hall of Fame inductee, Hank Aaron is a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom and owner of numerous Atlanta businesses. His wife, Billye, was the first African American woman in the Southeast to co-host a daily television talk show and is a philanthropic pillar of the Atlanta community. – **SR 1115**

Honoring Child Review Fatality Committees and Coroner of the Year

The Senate honored the work of the Richmond and Cherokee Child Fatality Review Committees with Senate Resolutions 1158 and 1114, sponsored by Sen. Gloria Butler (D - Stone Mountain). The Senate also honored the Child Review Fatality Coroner of the Year Mark Alvarez with Senate Resolution 1156, also sponsored by Sen. Butler. Child Review Fatality Committees are tasked with investigating all child deaths within their jurisdiction. – **SR 1114, 1156, 1158**

Recognizing Stephanie Moody

Sen. David Shafer (R - Duluth) sponsored Senate Resolution 1146 recognizing Stephanie Moody for her years of service on the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System Board of Trustees. The wife of former state Sen. Dan Moody, Stephanie Moody has served on the board of trustees since 2001 and as chair since 2010. She was instrumental in the passage of a \$275 million library bond referendum that assisted in funding eight new Fulton County libraries. – **SR 1146**

Honoring Georgia Association of Paralegals

The Senate honored the Georgia Association of Paralegals (GAP) with Senate Resolution 947, sponsored by Sen. Josh McKoon (R - Columbus). Founded in 1973, the GAP provides support for those entering the legal field and enhances the role of paralegals in law offices by working with bar associations throughout the state. Board of Directors President Suzette M. Corley joined Sen. McKoon to thank the Senate for their efforts to honor those working behind the scenes in the legal profession. – **SR 947**

Honoring St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee

The Senate honored the Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee and welcomed its officers and marshals with Senate Resolution 390, sponsored by Sen. Ben Watson (R - Savannah). The St. Patrick's Day Parade has been held in Savannah for almost 200 years and is a celebration of the Irish faith and heritage. General Chairman and Grand Marshal Michael J. "Jerry" Hogan Jr. spoke before the Senate and offered a prayer of St. Patrick in honor of the parade this Thursday. – **SR 390**



TUESDAY, MARCH 15

Increased Penalties for Assaults Against Health Workers

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 979. The bill would increase the penalties of individuals convicted of aggravated assault and battery against health care workers. Current offenders are subject to a prison sentence of one to 20 years. Under this bill, new offenders would serve a five to 20 year prison sentence. The bill passed 51 to 2. – **HB 979**

Regulations on the Use of Fireworks

Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga) carried House Bill 727. The bill would impose further regulations on the sale and use of fireworks including time constraints and restrictions on use during times of drought. The legislation also grants enforcement authority to the state fire marshal and other appropriate agencies. HB 727 passed by a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 727**

Moratorium on the Exercise of Eminent Domain

Sen. Jesse Stone (R – Waynesboro) carried House Bill 1036. HB 1036 provides for a moratorium extending through June 30, 2017 restricting oil pipeline companies from exercising eminent domain to construct any new pipelines in the state. The bill also calls for the creation of a State Commission on Petroleum Pipelines. The bill passed 53 to 1. – **HB 1036**

Redefining Public Swimming Pools

House Bill 219, carried by Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick), would exempt specific pools from being classified as public swimming pools. Current law classifies pools and hot tubs in apartment complexes and country clubs as “public.” This legislation also allows for residents or owners of apartment complexes or country clubs to request inspections of an area pool free of charge. – **HB 219**

Electronically Tracking the Sales of Drugs

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 588, which would electronically track sales of ephedrine or pseudoephedrine products beginning on January 1, 2017. Customers would be required to present a valid government issued ID when purchasing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine. The bill passed with a vote of 39 to 1. – **HB 588**

Licensing and Regulating Lactation Consultants

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) brought House Bill 649 to the Senate floor, which would call on the Secretary of State to license and regulate lactation consultants in Georgia. An additional provision in the bill creates the Lactation Consultant Advisory Group within the office of the Secretary of State. The bill passed 47 to 1. – **HB 649**

Updating Banking Laws

House Bill 811 is the annual banking clean up bill and was carried by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon). The bill would bring Georgia’s Code up to date with recent federal guidelines and court decisions regarding banking and the regulation of banks. It would remove all references of “building and loan associations” and provide for the regulation of virtual currency. The bill passed 47 to 1. – **HB 811**

Expanding Livestock Definitions

Sen. Burt Jones (R – Jackson) carried House Bill 815. The bill would update the definition of the term “non-traditional livestock” to include species of birds grown for commercial human food sale but not amenable to the Federal Poultry Products Inspection Act. The bill passed 52 to 0. – **HB 815**

Instructional Content Review Process

Carried by Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonga), House Bill 739 revises procedures for the selection of state-approved educational materials and content. Under the legislation, the selection of the educators who sit on the committee(s) is at the discretion at the State Board of Education, and any state-approved educational materials would

need to be presented for public comment and parent feedback. Beginning with the 2017-18 school year, local boards of education would be required to establish a review and recommendation process for locally approved materials and content. The bill passed 38 to 8. – **HB 739**

Sales Tax Exemptions

Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville) carried House Bill 951. HB 951 reauthorizes the “back to school” state sales tax holiday and a sales tax exemption for energy efficient appliances. The bill also creates a new sales and use tax exemption for ticket sales to non-recurring major sporting events. HB 951 passed with a vote of 38 to 14. – **HB 951**

Restrictions on the Sale of Prescription Glasses or Contacts

House Bill 775, carried by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), would prohibit the sale of prescription glasses or contacts to an individual who has not had a comprehensive eye exam performed by a licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist. The penalty for writing a prescription without a license is lowered to a misdemeanor and is punishable by up to one year in prison and/or by a fine up to \$1,000. HB 775 passed with a vote of 47 to 3. – **HB 775**

Cell Phone Use by School Bus Drivers

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) carried House Bill 777. The bill would allow school bus drivers to use cell phones in a similar manner as two-way radios when communicating with school officials or public safety professionals. Current law prohibits school bus drivers from using cell phones while the vehicle is in motion. The bill passed 47 to 0. – **HB 777**

Tyler Perry Visits the Senate

Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta) sponsored Senate Resolution 1176 to congratulate Tyler Perry for his Georgia-based film and television production company. Perry was specifically thanked for his dedication to the state and for his repurposing of Fort McPherson. Perry is an actor and director who is known for his *Madea* film series. Perry also has created several television shows, some of which have been filmed in Atlanta. – **SR 1176**

Recognizing Ed Gambell

Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa) introduced Senate Resolution 734 to honor Ed Gambell on the occasion of his retirement. Gambell served as the administrator for Stephens County Hospital since 1987 and previously served on the boards of the Georgia Hospital Association, Northeast Georgia Health Partners, LLC, Northeast Georgia Health Development, Inc., and Georgia Hospital Association Worker's Compensation Self-Insurance Fund. – **SR 734**

Dedication of “Hammond’s Crossing”

Sen. Michael Williams (R – Cumming) sponsored Senate Resolution 952 to recognize the Hammond Family of Forsyth County by naming an intersection in their honor. The intersection of State Routes 306 and 369 is to be dedicated as “Hammond’s Crossing.” – **SR 952**



Honoring the Life of Lance Corporal Skip Wells

Senate Resolution 1057, introduced by Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta), honors the life of Lance Cpl. Skip Wells. Wells was killed during a voluntary assignment in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in July 2015. His family joined Sen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16

Specific Deposit Requirements and How Health Organizations Report Risk-Based Capital

Sen. P. K. Martin (R – Lawrenceville) carried House Bill 884. This bill would repeal current law requiring foreign insurers to deposit specific dollar amounts with the Insurance Commissioner for securities intended for investment towards capital funds. The bill changes this requirement and allows the Commissioner to determine the amount required. The bill also changes how health organizations report a Company Action Level Event to the Insurance Commissioner to also include the filing of a Risk-Based Capital System report. The bill passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **HB 884**

Transparency of Schools Operating Budget

Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White) carried House Bill 65, which would require education agencies to hold at least two public meetings when creating their annual operating budget. According to the bill, the meetings must be advertised in the local newspaper, and a summary of the budget must be posted publicly on the agency's website. The bill passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **HB 65**

Creating New Special License Plates

House Bill 736, carried by Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah), would allow the Department of Driver Services to issue special license plates for women veterans, the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Foundation, Hampton University, the Department of Natural Resources Law Division and Coastal Resources Division, the Georgia Pet Foundation and others. The bill passed with a vote of 50 to 2. – **HB 736**

Exclusive Georgia Department of Transportation Easement

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonga) carried House Resolution 1312 to grant an exclusive easement to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). Under this resolution, GDOT would be granted 3.145 acres of a heritage preserve in Houston County in order to expand State Route 96 and maintain traffic safety. The resolution passed 51 to 1. – **HR 1312**

Adding Private Nurses to the Nurse Aide Registry

Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) carried House Bill 1037, which would expand the current nurse aide registry to include nurse aides providing temporary or permanent service in private residences. The bill would also require registry administrators to create a method for public comments and complaints about nurse aides. This bill passed by a vote of 51 to 0. – **HB 1037**

Right to Visitation Laws

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 229. This bill would expand Georgia's right to visitation laws to include great-grandparents, aunts and uncles. Right to visitation laws are enforced when a child custody case has gone before a court or when the parents are no longer living together. This bill also contains language from the Supporting and Strengthening Families Act. – **HB 229**

School Spending on Virtual Instruction

Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta) carried House Bill 100. This bill would require school systems spend 90 percent of any funds earned or granted for students enrolled in a virtual instruction course on the costs of that student's virtual instruction. The bill does not apply to the Georgia Virtual School or through state charter schools. The bill passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 100**

Changing District Residency Requirements

Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell) carried House Bill 73. This bill gives the General Assembly the authority to adopt local legislation establishing district residency requirements of less than 12 months for candidates running for a district seat within a county or city. This bill passed with a vote of 52 to 1. – **HB 73**



Revisions to the Official Code of Georgia Annotated

Sen. Josh McKoon (R – Columbus) carried House Bill 737. This bill is the annual “clean-up” bill to revise, modernize and correct errors or omissions in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated as produced by the Code Revision Commission. This bill passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 737**



Lawsuits Against Passive Investors of Nursing and Immediate Care Homes

House Bill 920, carried by Sen. Charlie Bethel (R – Dalton), would restrict civil lawsuits against passive investors of nursing and intermediate care homes. According to the bill, a passive investor can only be added to a civil lawsuit against a care home if the court determines they are a licensee, management, or consulting company. The bill also states that the civil lawsuit cannot proceed until the court determines investor liability. The bill passed by a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 920**



Tax Penalty Forgiveness for Military Service Members

Sen. Hunter Hill (R – Atlanta) carried House Bill 991, which waives penalties and interest for military service members who fail to pay ad valorem taxes due to combat zone deployment. The service member must pay the balance of the outstanding taxes within 60 days of returning from his or her military service. The bill passed with a vote of 53 to 1. – **HB 991**

Notice of Hazardous Waste Release for Municipal Landfills

Sen. Tommie Williams (R – Lyons) carried House Bill 1028. This bill would require landfill owners to notify local governments after a dangerous contaminant has been released due to accident or malfunction. The bill directs operators to notify localities within 14 days after confirmation of release. The bill passed with a vote of 55 to 0. – **HB 1028**



Lawsuits Regarding Free Speech Claims

Sen. Charlie Bethel (R – Dalton) carried House Bill 513, which establishes a procedure for courts to consider a “motion to strike” in lawsuits where the plaintiff’s claim arises from an act argued as free speech. The act must be a reasonable consideration of the exercise of free speech or petition rights under the Georgia Constitution and U.S. Constitution. The legislation also expands the definition of such acts to include written or oral statements, or writings or petitions made in a place open to the public or a public forum, in connection with an issue of public interest or concern. The bill passed by a vote of 50 to 2. – **HB 513**



Operating a Farm-Use Vehicle on Public Roads and Highways

Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa) carried House Bill 579, which would

permit a farmer that is at least 16 years old to operate a farm vehicle on all public roads and highways in Georgia. The bill offers requirements for use such as to transport agricultural products, farm supplies or to move items between the farmer's residence and their farm. The bill passed with a vote of 55 to 1. – **HB 579**

Invoicing Federal Excise Taxes for Tobacco Sales

House Bill 726, carried by Sen. Bill Heath (R – Bremen), would allow tobacco dealers to only pay state excise tax on the sales prices of the goods. The federal excise taxes and shipping charges must be listed separately from the final sale price on the sales invoice. The bill passed with a vote of 49 to 3. – **HB 726**

Adding Retirees to Those Allowed on County Family and Child Service Boards

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) carried House Bill 765. This bill would allow retirees, in addition to current employees, required to be appointed to a county's board of family and children services. The bill passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 765**

Revising the Definition of Sexual Servitude

House Bill 770, carried by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) revises the definition of sexual servitude under Georgia law. This bill expands the definition by including developmental disability and controlled substances as methods of coercion or deception abusers use on individuals under the age of 18. The bill passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 770**

Regulating the use of Drones and Creating the Unmanned Vehicle Systems Commission

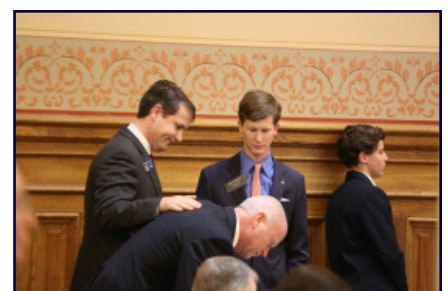
Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) carried House Bill 779 to establish the Georgia Unmanned Vehicle Systems Commission and provide regulations for unmanned Aircraft Systems. The Commission will be tasked with consulting with the Department of Economic Development and other agencies to determine the benefits of unmanned drones to the public and state and to identify any concerns the use of drones may cause. The bill also regulates unmanned drones by stating that no weapon may be equipped to a unmanned aircraft and places restrictions on where drones may be launched on public and private property. The bill passed with a vote of 51 to 3. – **HB 779**

Georgia Professional Regulation Reform Act

Sen. Mike Dugan (R – Carrollton) carried House Bill 952, otherwise known as the Georgia Professional Regulation Reform Act. This act creates regulations for professional licensing boards and board members so as to protect them from antitrust lawsuits, as established in a recent Supreme Court case. The bill also grants the Governor of Georgia the authority and duty to actively supervise professional licensing boards in the state. The bill passed 52 to 0. – **HB 952**

Exempting Insurers From Product Promotion Limits

Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White) carried House Bill 784, which would



allow insurers and their employees to promote their products through prizes, goods and gift cards worth up to \$100. Giving of items cannot be a prerequisite to sale or renewal of a policy. Current law prohibits insurers from giving any gift or prize to promote their product. The bill passed by a vote of 50 to 2. – **HB 784**

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

House Bill 800, carried by Sen. Larry Walker (R – Perry), states that licensed veterinarians may not assign responsibility for making medical judgments on an animal's health to another individual, licensed or otherwise. The bill also permits veterinarians to visit locations where animals or groups of animals are kept to create a preliminary medical diagnosis. The bill passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **HB 800**

Adding an Additional Judge to the Clayton Judicial Circuit

Sen. Curt Thompson (D – Tucker) carried House Bill 804. This bill would add a fifth judge to the Clayton Judicial Circuit. The judge, whose term will last from January 1, 2017, to December 31, 2018, will be selected by the Governor and have the same authority as other superior court judges on the circuit. The bill passed with a vote of 53 to 1. – **HB 804**

Employment Protections for Out-of-State National Guard

Current law requires employers to rehire any prior employee who left their position when called into active state service under the Georgia National Guard under approved circumstances. House Bill 831, carried by Sen. Ed Harbison (D – Columbus), extends the employment protections granted to members of the Georgia National Guard to members of another state's National Guard. The bill passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 831**

Requiring Audits of County Libraries

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) carried House Bill 851. This bill amends Georgia law to require county libraries to have an annual audit of their finances performed by a Certified Public Accountant. The bill also requires the audit be made available to the county's governing body and the public. The bill passed by a vote of 42 to 9. – **HB 851**

Civil Liability of Livestock Owners

House Bill 876, sponsored by Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla), revises Georgia law to include "livestock activities" as inherently risky activities. Current law limits the civil liability of those involved in equine and llama activities by requiring contracts and signs to include certain language which identifies this risk. This bill adds "livestock activities" to this requirement. It also updates livestock transactional requirements involving a "bond" to livestock transactional requirements involving a "surety." The bill passed 34 to 18. – **HB 876**

New Requirements on Tobacco Importers and Manufacturers

Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick) carried House Bill 899. This bill would place new requirements and regulations on tobacco manufacturers and importers not participating in the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement of 1998. Non-participating manufacturers will be required to make quarterly payments into a fund used to cover any potential civil liability for the company. The bill also requires tobacco importers to be held jointly liable for a non-participating manufacturer's payments. The bill passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **HB 899**

Influenza Information in Assisted Living Communities

House Bill 902, carried by Sen. JaNice VanNess (R – Conyers), would require assisted living communities to provide residents annually with information on influenza. The bill states that each resident must receive the information by September 1 each year, and it must include the risks associated with the flu, common symptoms and how the disease is spread. The bill passed with a vote of 48 to 4. – **HB 902**

Tax Relief Act of 2016

Sen. Judson Hill (R – Marietta) carried House Bill 238, otherwise known as the Tax Relief Act of 2016. This

bill would create a flat income tax rate of 5.4 percent on all taxable income, or income after excluding deductions and exemptions. The bill states that taxpayers will also be able to claim nonbusiness deductions including charitable donations, all medical deductions and mortgage interest paid up to \$25,000 annually. The cap on personal exemption amounts was also raised for all taxpayer statuses including joint filers, married filing separate and all other taxpayers. The bill passed with a vote of 35 to 17. – **HB 238**



HIV Test During Pregnancy Screening and Sharing Confidential AIDS Information

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) carried House Bill 1058, which would require women to be notified of their right to refuse an HIV test during a pregnancy screening. The bill also states that AIDS confidential information may be shared with a parent or legal guardian if the patient is a minor. The bill passed with a vote of 46 to 7. – **HB 1058**



Administrative Charges for Providing Mental Health Records

Current law allows medical professionals to charge a fee of up to \$20 to cover the expenses of providing medical records to a requesting party. House Bill 910, carried by Sen. Bill Cowsert (R – Athens), would expand this law to also apply to requests for a patient's psychiatric, psychological and other mental health records. The bill passed with a vote of 47 to 4. – **HB 910**



Free Exercise Protection Act

Carried by Sen. Greg Kirk (R – Americus), House Bill 757 passed by a vote of 37 to 18. HB 757 protects ministers, clerics or other religious practitioners that are authorized to perform a marriage ceremony from being compelled to perform one that goes against their religious beliefs. The bill also restricts the state government from enacting any discriminatory policies or taking adverse action against faith-based organizations based solely on their sincerely held religious beliefs. The act also provides other protections for faith-based religious organizations, including affording them the right to hire or not hire employees based on the potential employee's religious faith and beliefs. – **HB 757**

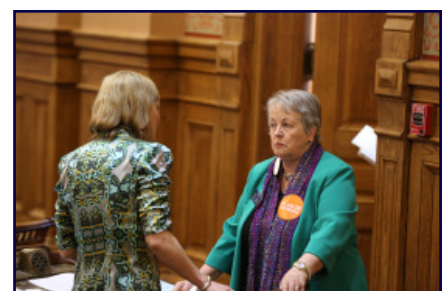


Adjusting the Weighted HOPE GPA for STEM Courses

Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville) carried House Bill 801, which revises HOPE scholarship requirements to include computer science coursework, provides weighted scores for certain college courses and requires the Georgia Student Finance Commission to submit a biennial report. The bill passed 54 to 0. – **HB 801**

The Shawn Smiley Act

Sen. Nan Orrock (D – Atlanta) carried House Bill 54, also known as the Shawn Smiley Act. The bill would provide for tuition grants for children of police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, prison guards and Highway Emergency Response Officers who were disabled or killed in the line of duty. The tuition grants would be paid for by voluntary donations through state income tax returns. The bill passed 51 to 0. – **HB 54**



Creating the Kinship Care Enforcement Administrator Position

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 962, which would create a Kinship Care Enforcement Administrator position within the Department of Human Services (DHS). This administrator would be responsible for ensuring DHS kinship care programs are in compliance with federal regulations. The bill also contains language from the Supporting and Strengthening Families Act. HB 962 passed by a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 962**

Protecting Military Children Act

Sen. Harold Jones (D – Augusta) carried HB 825, also known as the Protecting Military Children Act. This bill would call on a child services organization investigating allegations of abuse or neglect to notify the military installation in which the child's parents are based as quickly as possible. The bill passed 55 to 0. – **HB 825**

**The Georgia State Senate will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. on
TUESDAY, MARCH 22.**