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This Week in the Senate

March 2 - 5, 2020



Approaching Crossover Day

On Thursday, we concluded our eighth week of legislative business at the Capitol. This week was our busiest one yet and included the Senate passing a total of 30 bills and resolutions. In addition, our committees held extensive hearings on legislation and vetted a multitude of bills in preparation for our Crossover Day deadline. While the week was busy, it resulted in the passage of several pieces of beneficial legislation, including the amended budget for the 2020 fiscal year.

The Amended Fiscal Year 2020 (AFY20) Budget is based on \$23.7 billion of expected revenue and reflects some changes that needed to be made due

to our state experiencing slower than expected growth. However, the Senate and the House have spent a great deal of time over the last two months analyzing the funding needs of our state agencies and balancing them with projected revenues to ensure that no vital state services or programs would be affected. Through the diligent work of Chairman Jack Hill (R – Reidsville) and other members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, we have produced a fiscally responsible budget that will meet the needs of our state. Next, we will repeat a similar process of budget hearings on the General Budget for the 2021 Fiscal Year, at which point our constitutional obligation to pass a balanced budget will be complete.

One of Governor Kemp’s key priorities this session was strengthening our state’s education system. The Senate made progress on achieving that goal through the passage of Senate Bill 367. This bill would remove five currently mandated state assessments that our K-12 students are required to take and would grant schools greater flexibility in when tests should be administered. An additional provision allows the Georgia Department of Education to access data on testing to remove any redundancy and assist local school districts in helping our students excel. The focus of our educators should be to prepare our bright young minds for college and their careers. This bill will allow our educators to do just that, instead of simply preparing students for how to pass a test.

We also continued to make gains in working to reduce the prevalence of human trafficking in our state and ensure justice for victims of these tragic crimes. Senate Bill 435, known as the “Survivors First Act,” would clarify that any convictions that an individual earns as a direct result of their position as a victim of human trafficking may be vacated by petitioning the court. Additionally, it would allow victims the ability to restrict access to certain criminal history information, if those crimes were committed while a victim of human trafficking. This bill will make clear that victims should be treated with dignity and respect and should not be responsible for criminal behavior they were forced to commit while a victim of human trafficking.

Next Thursday will be Crossover Day, which is the final day a Senate Bill can pass the Senate and be sent to the House for consideration and vice versa. As a result, we will likely face longer than usual days in the Senate Chamber voting through the extensive calendars of legislation. While this means much longer hours, I believe all members of the Senate are looking forward to perfecting bills for the state of Georgia. If there is anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or my office.

Senator Butch Miller
President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 2

Renaming Law Assistants

Senate Bill 271, sponsored by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon), would change the language in the Georgia Code from “law assistant” to “law clerks and staff attorneys” and would revise the terms related to creditable service. SB 271 passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **SB 271**

Adjusting Custody Provisions for State Inmates

Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia) sponsored Senate Bill 301, which would allow a county sheriff to request that offenders who commit an additional misdemeanor or felony crime while in the custody of the Department of Corrections (DOC) to remain in DOC custody instead of being transferred into local custody. SB 301 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **SB 301**

Voting on Daylight Savings Time

Senate Bill 351, sponsored by Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah), would place a nonbinding advisory referendum on the next election ballot to determine whether Georgia electors wish to observe standard time year round, observe daylight savings year round or continue to utilize the current system. SB 351 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **SB 351**

Changing Duties and Standards for Nonprofit Corporations and Other Organizations

Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon) sponsored Senate Bill 373, which would adjust the duties and standards of conduct for directors and officers of nonprofit corporations, electric management corporations and foreign electric cooperatives. SB 373 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **SB 373**

Revising Requirements for Tort Claims

Senate Bill 374, sponsored by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon), would change the requirements for settlement offers and arrangements for all tort claims made under the “Georgia Civil Practice Act.” SB 374 passed with a vote of 35 to 19. – **SB 374**



Developing the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Legal Division

Sen. Brian Strickland (R – McDonough) sponsored Senate Bill 393, which would create the Legal Division of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and give attorneys authority to prosecute civil or criminal cases at the request of the Attorney General, a district attorney, a solicitor-general or a United States Attorney. SB 393 passed with a vote of 35 to 19. – **SB 393**

Declaring the Official Nut of Georgia

Senate Bill 396, sponsored by Sen. Larry Walker (R – Perry), would designate the pecan as the official state nut of Georgia. SB 396 passed with a vote of 54 to 1. – **SB 396**

The Survivors First Act

Sen. Brian Strickland (R – McDonough) sponsored Senate Bill 435, which would allow victims of human trafficking to petition that their convictions be vacated if they were a direct result of their trafficking. SB 435 passed with a vote of 55 to 0. – **SB 435**

Recognizing the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival

Senate Resolution 582, sponsored by Sen. Nan Orrock (D – Atlanta), celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival (AJFF). The AJFF was founded in 2000 with an overall attendance of 1,900 for its first festival. In 2015, the AJFF made history by becoming the world’s largest Jewish film festival by attracting over 38,600 attendees. – **SR 582**

Honoring the Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics

Sen. Elena Parent (D – Atlanta), sponsored Senate Resolution 592, which recognized the 60th anniversary of the Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics (GCTM). The GCTM is made up of preschool through graduate school mathematics educators from across Georgia. The GCTM is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which recently celebrated its 100th year of service. – **SR 592**

Commending Dr. Kerwin Lee

Senate Resolution 768, sponsored by Sen. Gloria Butler (D – Stone Mountain), recognized Dr. Kerwin B. Lee for his service as the senior pastor of Berean Christian Church. Dr. Lee founded Berean Christian Church in 1996 and has since expanded it to include over 10,000 members across three Georgia campuses. He has also written several books and is the founder of the nonprofit ministry A Word for the Times, Inc. – **SR 768**



Celebrating Delta Day at the State Capitol

Sen. Gloria Butler (D – Stone Mountain) sponsored Senate Resolution 775, which celebrated March 2, 2020, as Delta Day at the state Capitol. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. was founded in 1913 and has grown to over 300,000 members across the country, with chapters at 25 Georgia colleges. – **SR 775**

Phi Beta Sigma Day at the State Capitol

Sen. Lester Jackson (D – Savannah) sponsored Senate Resolution 845, which recognized March 2, 2020, as Phi Beta Sigma Day at the state Capitol. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. expanded to Georgia in 1924 and now has over 40 chapters throughout the state. The fraternity also has a motto of “Culture For Service and Service For Humanity,” which is seen through their service in communities across Georgia and the United States. – **SR 845**

Thomaston-Upson Community Heart and Soul Day at the State Capitol

Senate Resolution 851, sponsored by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon), recognized March 2, 2020, as Thomaston-Upson Community Heart and Soul Day at the state Capitol. The Heart and Soul initiative was developed as a means to provide a voice for change in small towns and has been undertaken in 66 towns across 14 states. In Georgia, the Thomaston-Upson Community Heart and Soul has connected with more than 5,800 citizens who have helped make an impact on local decision making. – **SR 851**

Recognizing Virginia Harris

Sen. Butch Miller (R – Gainesville) sponsored Senate Resolution 857, which commended Virginia W. Harris for her work as the President of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. Ms. Harris formerly served on the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners, as the Gwinnett County Auditor and the Comptroller for the Governor’s Office. In October 2019, Ms. Harris was elected to serve for a second term as President of the National Coalition of Black Women, Inc. – **SR 857**

Honoring Senate District 35 Mayors

Senate Resolution 860, sponsored by Sen. Donzella James (D – Atlanta), recognized March 2, 2020, as Constituent Day at the state Capitol. SR 860 thanked the citizens of Senate District 35 for their contributions to the state of Georgia, including the district’s police officers, elected officials and business owners. – **SR 860**

Senator David Perdue Addresses the Senate

The Senate welcomed United States Senator David Perdue (R – Georgia) who thanked the members of the General Assembly for their work in bettering the lives of Georgians across the state. Sen. Perdue also spoke about his efforts to protect military installations, expand the Port of Savannah and strengthen Georgia’s agriculture industry.

Senate Welcomes the Atlanta Braves

The Atlanta Braves visited the Georgia Senate where they were celebrated for their 19th Division Title win last season. This win set a record for the most Division Title wins in the history of Major League Baseball.



TUESDAY, MARCH 3

The Living Hope Home Act

Senate Bill 307, sponsored by Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), would provide a definition for supportive housing maternity residences and grant the Georgia Department of Human Services oversight of these residences. SB 307 passed with a vote of 47 to 4. – **SB 307**

Establishing the Georgia Commission on African American History and Culture

Sen. Lester Jackson (D – Savannah) sponsored Senate Bill 312, which would create the Georgia Commission on African American History and Culture, as well as specify its mission and terms of membership. SB 312 passed with a vote of 48 to 0. – **SB 312**

Making Changes to the State Board of Veterinary Medicine

Senate Bill 346, sponsored by Sen. Ellis Black (R – Valdosta), would allow a registered veterinary technician member to join the State Board of Veterinary Medicine (SBVM) and would authorize the SBVM to create a professional program for impaired veterinarians. SB 346 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **SB 346**

Reducing the Frequency of Mandatory Educational Assessments

Sen. P.K. Martin (R – Lawrenceville) sponsored Senate Bill 367, which would reduce the number of mandatory state assessments for K-12 students, change testing dates for state assessments and grant the Georgia Department of Education the ability to analyze assessments implemented by local school boards. SB 367 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **SB 367**

Expanding the Authority of the Attorney General

Senate Bill 394, sponsored by Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell), would grant authority to the Attorney General to investigate sex trafficking and affairs of the state, as well as investigate and prosecute Medicaid fraud. SB 394 passed with a vote of 36 to 19. – **SB 394**

Changing Circumstances for Unsecured Judicial Release

Sen. Randy Robertson (R – Cataula) sponsored Senate Bill 402, which would change the conditions in which an individual can be released on their own recognizance. SB 402 passed with a vote of 46 to 8. – **SB 402**

Urging the Creation of a Wellness Program for State Employees

Senate Resolution 645, sponsored by Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga), would urge the Georgia Building Authority to determine the viability of implementing a workplace wellness program for the General Assembly, and other state agencies, within the former state judicial building. SR 645 passed with a vote of 52 to 2. – **SR 645**

Recognizing Gregory W. Ragsdale

Senate Resolution 564, sponsored by Sen. Valencia Seay (D – Riverdale), celebrated the life of Gregory Wayne Ragsdale, a distinguished citizen of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Ragsdale served in the United States Army as a military policeman and worked for the Atlanta Police Department for over 28 years. – **SR 564**

Honoring the Georgia Chinese American Republicans

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford), sponsored Senate Resolution 735, which recognized the Georgia Chinese American Republicans (GCAR) for their service to Georgia. GCAR is made up of first generation Chinese Americans, as well as over 100 volunteers who carry out service work across Gwinnett County. – **SR 735**

Commending Gordon State College

Senate Resolution 840, sponsored by Sen. Marty Harbin (R – Tyrone), recognized Gordon State College for its contributions to education in the state. Gordon State College was founded in 1852 in Barnesville, Georgia and has since grown to serve 4,000 students across 60 majors. Gordon State College is led by Dr. Kirk Nooks, who was appointed as president in August 2019. – **SR 840**

Celebrating the Harrison High School Varsity Football Team

Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – Marietta) sponsored Senate Resolution 879, which commended the Harrison High School Varsity Football Team for winning the 2019 Georgia High School Association Class AAAAAA State Football Championship. Last season, the Harrison High School Varsity Football Team was ranked 7th in the state and 90th in the nation under head coach Matt Dickmann. – **SR 879**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Providing Protections for Patients Under Sedation

Senate Bill 323, sponsored by Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick (R – Marietta), would require any medical facility that administers sedation to follow regulations established by the Georgia Composite Medical Board and would prohibit unlicensed practitioners from administering sedation during office-based surgeries. SB 323 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **SB 323**

Amending Department of Public Health Sections of the Georgia Code

Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia) sponsored Senate Bill 372, which would update and clarify several sections of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated related to the Georgia Department of Public Health. SB 372 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **SB 372**

Allowing Variability in Investments by Hospital Authorities

Senate Bill 395, sponsored by Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah), would expand the standard of indigency for hospital authority irrevocable trusts and grant greater flexibility in investment to certain authorities. SB 395 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **SB 395**

Regulating the Harvest and Sale of Saw Palmetto Berries

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) sponsored Senate Bill 407, which would establish regulations for selling and harvesting saw palmetto berries, and create penalties for violating these regulations. SB 407 passed with a vote of 51 to 3. – **SB 407**

Making Annual Revisions to the Georgia Code

Senate Bill 429, sponsored by Sen. William Ligon (R – Brunswick), would update several titles of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated to revise terminology, punctuation and grammar. SB 429 passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **SB 429**



Exempting Taxes on Hurricane Michael Relief

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonoga) carried House Bill 105, which would establish an excise tax on rideshare trips, as well as create an income tax exemption for payments related to Hurricane Michael relief. HB 105 passed with a vote of 51 to 2. – **HB 105**

Passing the Fiscal Year 2020 Amended Budget

House Bill 792, carried by Sen. Jack Hill (R – Reidsville), is the Amended Fiscal Year (AFY) 2020 Budget. The AFY20 Budget totals \$27.3 billion. HB 792 passed with a vote of 52 to 1. – **HB 792**

Commending Georgia Association of REALTORS

Senate Resolution 651, sponsored by Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonoga), congratulated the Georgia Association of REALTORS (GAR) for 100 years of service to Georgia. The GAR was founded in 1920 and has expanded to a membership of over 41,000 real estate professionals across the state. – **SR 651**

Recognizing Veteran's Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonoga) sponsored Senate Resolution 652, which designates September as Veteran's Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month. SR 652 also established Pantone 395 as the official color for Georgia's veteran suicide awareness and prevention efforts. During the presentation, the United States Mountain Ranger Association was honored for its commitment of time, personnel and resources to bring awareness to and prevent veteran suicide in Georgia. – **SR 652**

Celebrating the Metro Atlanta Chess Partners Inc.

Senate Resolution 681, sponsored by Sen. Nikema Williams (D – Atlanta), recognized Thomas and Tonya Clem, as well as Metro Atlanta Chess Partners, Inc., for bringing the game of chess to children in Atlanta. Metro Atlanta Chess Partners, Inc. has purchased memberships in chess organizations, mentored students on how to play chess and entered over 200 local students into chess tournaments. – **SR 681**

Congratulating the Cedar Grove Saints

Sen. Gail Davenport (D – Jonesboro) sponsored Senate Resolution 710, which honored the Cedar Grove Saints for winning the 2019 GHSA Class 3A State Football Championship. This win gives the Cedar Grove Saints three state football championships in the past four year under head coach Miguel Patrick. – **SR 710**

Praising Barry Sanders

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) sponsored Senate Resolution 738, which commended Barry Sanders for his service in the state healthcare industry. Mr. Sanders formerly worked for several Fortune 500 companies before starting his own businesses. His latest endeavor, Complete Care Medical, serves as the largest independent hospice equipment provider in the state. Mr. Sanders has been honored as a Hometown Hero for the Atlanta Braves and was a recipient of the Governor's Leadership Medallion. – **SR 738**



Honoring the Civil Air Patrol

Senate Resolution 863, sponsored by Sen. Bill Heath (R – Bremen), thanked the Civil Air Patrol for their extensive service to the state of Georgia. The Georgia Wing of the Civil Air Patrol is made up of 1,900 volunteers across six groups and 43 squadrons across the state. The Georgia Wing has also assisted with missions across many specialties and events, including homeland security for Super Bowl LIII, photography services for Hurricane Michael and disaster relief assistance for Puerto Rico. – **SR 863**

Recognizing the Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade

Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah) sponsored Senate Resolution 888, which honored the Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee, Committee Chairman Lawrence Edgerly and Parade Grand Marshal Michael Roush Sr. This year's Savannah St. Patrick's Day Parade will be the city's 196th celebration of the holiday, and the parade committee planning the event is celebrating 94 years of existence. – **SR 888**

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

Adjusting the Georgia Firefighters' Pension Fund

Senate Bill 248, sponsored by Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell), would increase the monthly dues, tax on premiums and maximum monthly retirement benefits payable to members of the Georgia Firefighters' Pension Fund. SB 248 passed with a vote of 51 to 1. – **SB 248**

Modifying the Peace Officers' Annuity and Benefit Fund

Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell) sponsored Senate Bill 249, which would raise the monthly contribution amount and retirement benefits payable to members of the Peace Officers' Annuity and Benefit Fund, as well as revise the amount it collects from fines in criminal cases. It would also allow for the inclusion of jail officers on the list of persons eligible to participate in the fund. SB 249 passed with a vote of 48 to 0. – **SB 249**

Joining the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact

Senate Bill 306, sponsored by Sen. Valencia Seay (D – Riverdale), would enter Georgia into the Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact and give the State Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology authority to administer the compact. SB 306 passed with a vote of 46 to 0. – **SB 306**

Changing Regulations for Pharmacy Benefit Managers

Sen. Dean Burke (R – Bainbridge) sponsored Senate Bill 313, which would adjust the regulation and licensure of pharmacy benefit managers by establishing reporting requirements and addressing issues related to rebates, steering and duties to health plans. SB 313 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **SB 313**



Creating a Special License Plate

Senate Bill 336, sponsored by Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega), would create a special license plate for U.S. Army Rangers, graduates of the U.S. Army Ranger School and recipients of the Meritorious Service Medal. SB 336 passed with a vote of 41 to 1. – **SB 336**

Regulating Boxing, Wrestling and Kickboxing Associations

Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta) sponsored Senate Bill 355, which would grant the Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission the authority to regulate five athletic associations related to boxing, wrestling and martial arts that were previously exempted. SB 355 passed with a vote of 39 to 6. – **SB 355**

Adopting Safety Requirements For EMCs Working Along Railroads

Senate Bill 370, sponsored by Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega), would require electric membership corporations to comply with safety and permit regulations of the Federal Railroad Authority when electric easements are used for broadband services. SB 370 passed with a vote of 45 to 0. – **SB 370**

Defining “On-Time Graduation Rate”

Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa) sponsored Senate Bill 431, which would establish a definition for “on-time graduation rate” within the Official Code of Georgia Annotated. SB 431 passed with a vote of 45 to 0. – **SB 431**

Commending the Chattooga High School Wrestling Team

Senate Resolution 670, sponsored by Sen. Jeff Mullis (R – Chickamauga), congratulated the Chattooga High School Wrestling Team on their win in the Class 2A Boys 2019-2020 Wrestling Dual State Championship. The Chattooga High School Wrestling Team captured the school’s first ever wrestling championship by defeating the defending state champions by a score of 59-21. – **SR 670**

Recognizing the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta

Sen. Sheikh Rahman (D – Lawrenceville) sponsored Senate Resolution 723, which honored the Islamic Speakers Bureau (ISB) of Atlanta for their work on supporting the Muslim community in Atlanta. The ISB undertakes a variety of different initiatives including training for law enforcement, educating students and providing recognition for local governments. – **SR 723**

Georgia Food Bank Day at the State Capitol

Senate Resolution 847, sponsored by Sen. Lee Anderson (R – Grovetown), recognized March 5, 2020, as Georgia Food Bank Day at the state Capitol. Georgia is home to eight regional food banks that work with over 2,400 partners to distribute 150 million pounds of food each year. Every week, these food banks serve 156,000 low income individuals and families. – **SR 847**

Congratulating the Blessed Trinity Football Team

Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell) sponsored Senate Resolution 897, which celebrated the Blessed Trinity Football Team for winning the 2019 State AAAA Championship. The Blessed Trinity Football Team finished the season with a record of 14–1 under the direction of head coach Tim McFarlin. – **SR 897**

**The Georgia Senate will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. on
MONDAY, MARCH 9.**