



Georgia Senate Press Office Staff

Andrew Allison
Acting Director

Kessarín Horvath
Senior Communications Associate

Kami Briden
Communications Associate

Emma Johnson
Communications Associate

201 Coverdell Legislative Office Building
18 Capitol Square S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30303
p: 404.656.0028

Edited by:

Steve Tippins, Chief of Staff
Senate President Pro Tempore Office
steve.tippins@senate.ga.gov
321 State Capitol Building
404.656.6578

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This Week in the Senate

June 15 - 20, 2020



The Senate Reconvenes

After the legislature's abrupt pause in March due to concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic, the General Assembly reconvened at the Capitol this week to finish out the remainder of the 2020 legislative session. Returning legislators were met with enhanced safety protocols and new procedures on everything from presenting bills in front of a committee to voting on legislation in the chamber, in an effort to reduce the spread of the virus.

There was, however, one noticeable absence as the Senate gathered in the chamber for the first time in three months. Sen. Jack Hill (R - Reidsville) was not only a senator, but a true statesman in every sense of the word. He approached leadership with a quiet confidence and boasted a deeper and more thorough knowledge of Georgia's finances than anyone else in the state. More importantly, Jack was a father, a husband and a friend whose wisdom was valued by legislators, staffers and constituents alike. Georgia will never see another Jack Hill – not even close – and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to know him and call him my friend.

Sen. Blake Tillery (R - Vidalia) was appointed Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee and immediately picked up where Sen. Hill left off on the budget for the 2021 Fiscal Year. This legislation was passed by the House before the legislature's pause and, as a result of the economic impact of many of Georgia's businesses closing due to COVID-19 and the delaying of Georgia's state tax filing deadline, Georgia's revenue projections weren't quite where we would like them to be. This meant that many substantial changes needed to be made in the Senate Appropriations Committee to meet Governor Kemp's call for a 14% budget reduction across Georgia's agencies. This week, the Senate rose to this challenge and passed out a budget, in the form of HB 793, which meets Gov. Kemp's suggestions. Some of the reductions may be painful, but they are necessary and every effort has been made to minimize potential pay cuts or agency furlough days and ensure that vital state services receive appropriate funding. We will continue to work with the House to craft a balanced budget that all sides can agree on before our deadline at the beginning of next month.

Another important measure that the Senate took up this week was legislation addressing "hate crimes." Like many of you, I have watched, recently, with great sadness as the events of the last few months have unfolded. On Friday, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed HB 426 which would grant additional protections to certain victims of crimes, ensuring that those who commit them face the full might of the justice system. I look forward to doing my part to ensure that this bill passes the full Senate and eventually becomes law.

Next week, the General Assembly will take place in perhaps the latest Sine Die in the history of our state. While we are anticipating only taking up absolutely essential pieces of legislation from here on out, I still encourage you to reach out to my office if you have any questions or concerns.

Senator Butch Miller
President Pro Tempore, Georgia Senate

MONDAY, JUNE 15

Updating Georgia's Banking and Financial Institutions Code

House Bill 781, carried by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon), would create revisions to streamline existing statutes in order to make department regulations more efficient. HB 781 passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **HB 781**

Recreating the Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics

Sen. Brandon Beach (R – Alpharetta) carried House Resolution 935, which would recreate the Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics, as a means of studying investment projects within and outside the Atlanta area. Previously created in 2019, this current commission will be composed of 22 members and be abolished on December 31, 2020. HR 935 passed with a vote of 51 to 0. – **HR 935**

Proposing a Constitutional Amendment on Waiving Sovereign Immunity

House Resolution 1023, carried by Sen. John Kennedy (R – Macon), would propose a constitutional amendment that, if adopted by voters through a referendum, would allow citizens to petition for declaratory relief from the courts in the event a state or local government acts in a way that is inconsistent with the state or federal constitution. HR 1023 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HR 1023**

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Revising the Licensure Process for Certain Healthcare Professionals

House Bill 752, carried by Sen. Bruce Thompson (R – White), would revise the “Interstate Medical Licensure Compact Act,” as it relates to fingerprint background checks. Under HB 752, the State Board of Physical Therapy and State Board of Examiners of Psychologists will be given the authority to conduct national background checks through the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Georgia Crime Information Center fingerprint submissions, and satisfactory fingerprint record checks will be required for the licensure of physical therapists and assistants. HB 752 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 752**

Reviewing Georgia's International Building Code

House Bill 777, carried by Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa), would require the Department of Community Affairs to review the 2021 edition of the International Building Code through a time period spanning from July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021. The purpose of this review will be to understand if the Georgia state minimum standard code should be amended. HB 777 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 777**



WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

Prohibiting the Sharing of Unlicensed Material

Sen. Renee Unterman (R – Buford) carried House Bill 341, which would add memory cards, flash drives, hard drives and data storage devices to the list of devices whose data may not be transferred without the owner’s consent. HB 341 passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 341**

Extending the Ad Valorem Tax Exemption Period for Loaner Vehicles

House Bill 808, carried by Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla), would extend the period in which a loaner vehicle may be exempt from an ad valorem tax from 30 days within a 366 day period to 45 days within a 366 day period. HB 808 passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 808**

Creating the Georgia Freight Railroad Program

Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega), carried House Bill 820, which would create the Georgia Freight Railroad Program. The Program would be administered by the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation and would be composed of three subprograms: the Rail Enhancement Plan, the Rail Preservation Plan, and the Rail Industrial Plan. HB 820 passed with a vote of 54 to 0. – **HB 820**

“The Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act”

House Bill 888, carried by Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R – Rome), would establish a framework that offers certain protections against surprise billing. This includes a system of arbitration to resolve payment disputes between the health insurer, provider and facility, as well as established insurer payment measures related to non-participating providers in emergency and nonemergency medical services. HB 888 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 888**

Updating Fair Housing Regulations

Sen. Harold Jones (D – Augusta) carried House Bill 969 which would make numerous updates to policies related to fair housing practices. HB 969 passed with a vote of 52 to 0. – **HB 969**



THURSDAY, JUNE 18

“The Georgia Right to Farm Act of 2020”

Sen. John Wilkinson (R – Toccoa) carried House Bill 545, which would create limitations related to the ability to file nuisance claims against an agricultural facility and operation. In addition to restricting the filing date to within two years of the established date of operation, HB 545 would also provide a statute of limitations and clarify that the bill does not override federal regulations. HB 545 passed with a vote of 29 to 21. – **HB 545**

Revoking Commercial Licenses for Traffickers

House Bill 823, carried by Sen. John Albers (R – Roswell), would prohibit an individual who knowingly uses a commercial vehicle to traffic someone for labor or sexual servitude from operating a commercial vehicle in Georgia for life and would revoke their commercial driver’s license. HB 823 passed with a vote of 48 to 0. – **HB 823**

Revising Requirements for the Sexual Offender Registry

Sen. Burt Jones (R – Jackson) carried House Bill 983 which would make numerous revisions to Georgia’s Sexual Offender Registry including: adjusting the registration requirements for offenders who reside in privately operated hospice facilities and requiring offenders to provide landline and mobile phone numbers. HB 983 passed with a vote of 50 to 0. – **HB 983**

SPECIAL ORDERS

Senate Agreements

The Senate agreed to the House Amendment to the Senate Substitute on the following: **HB 105 (41-3)**



FRIDAY, JUNE 19

Reviewing Conviction Data of Healthcare Workers

House Bill 578, carried by Sen. Ben Watson (R – Savannah), would allow the Department of Human Services to receive conviction data on volunteers, students and interns who would be directly involved in the care, treatment, custodial responsibilities of a patient or for administrative support functions. HB 578 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 578**

Passing the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget

Sen. Blake Tillery (R – Vidalia), carried House Bill 793, which is the General Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget. The FY2021 budget totals \$28.1 billion. HB 793 passed with a vote of 34 to 15. – **HB 793**

Regulating Saw Palmetto Berries

House Bill 966, carried by Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla), would establish regulations on the harvest and sale of saw palmetto berries and would establish penalties for violations. HB 966 passed with a vote of 49 to 4. – **HB 966**

Increasing the Protection of Elderly Persons

Sen. Brian Strickland (R – McDonough) carried House Bill 987, which would amend the “Disabled Adults and Elder Persons Protection Act” in order to enhance protections for elderly persons who reside in care homes or assisted living communities. Additionally, HB 987 would revise the structure and name of the State Board of Nursing Home Administrators. HB 987 passed with a vote of 53 to 0. – **HB 987**

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

Amending Benefit Guidelines for the Peace Officers’ Annuity and Benefit Fund

House Bill 245, carried by Sen. Gail Davenport (D – Jonesboro), would allow the spouse of a surviving Peace Officers’ Annuity and Benefit Fund member to continue receiving benefits after remarriage. HB 245 passed with a vote of 49 to 0. – **HB 245**

Defining Commercial Motor Vehicle

Sen. Tyler Harper (R – Ocilla) carried House Bill 861 which would redefine the term “commercial motor vehicle” in Georgia Code to clarify that such vehicles may be used for interstate or intrastate commerce, or both. HB 861 also includes language adopting federal regulations on commercial motor vehicles. HB 861 passed with a vote of 47 to 0. – **HB 861**

The Georgia Podiatric Practice Act

House Bill 932, carried by Sen. Frank Ginn (R – Danielsville), would authorize Doctors of Podiatric Medicine to organize a professional corporation and require that applicants for licensure pass the fingerprint background check conducted by the Georgia Crime Information Center and Federal Bureau Investigation. HB 932 padded with a vote of 46 to 1. – **HB 932**

Extending The Health Insurance Fund

Sen. P.K. Martin (R – Lawrenceville) carried House Bill 957, which would authorize certain charter schools employees to be included in the health insurance fund for public school teachers, as well as provide that records created, received or maintained by a state charter school are property of such school. HB 957 passed with a vote of 47 to 0 – **HB 957**

“Healthcare Transparency and Accountability Act”

House Bill 991, carried by Sen. Ben Watson (R - Savannah), would create the Healthcare Transparency and Accountability Commission, which will have the authority to review state healthcare plans and their contractors. HB 991 would also establish membership and reporting requirements for the Commission, and would authorize the Commissioner of the Department of Insurance to levy fees for violations under this bill. HB 991 passed with a vote of 48 to 0. - **HB 991**

Adjournment Resolution

Sen. Mike Dugan (R – Carrollton) sponsored Senate Resolution 1010, which would outline the legislative calendar for the remainder of the 2020 legislative session. The schedule is as follows: June 22 (Legislative Day 36), June 23 (Legislative Day 37), June 24 (Legislative Day 38), June 25 (Legislative Day 39) and June 26 (Legislative Day 40). SR 1010 passed with a vote of 44 to 0. - **SR 1010**



The Georgia Senate will reconvene at 12:00 p.m. on
MONDAY, JUNE 22.