



GEORGIA STATE SENATE

SENATE RESEARCH OFFICE

204 Coverdell Legislative Office Building | 404.656.0015
18 Capitol Square SW
Atlanta, GA 30334

ELIZABETH HOLCOMB
DIRECTOR

(DRAFT) FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON COMBAT SPORTS (SR 995)

Committee Members

Senator Brandon Beach, Chair
District 21

Senator Mike Dugan
District 30

Senator Gloria Butler
District 55

Senator Ellis Black
District 8

Bob Kelly
Expert Sports Medicine

Rick Thompson
Regulatory Expert

Preston Halliburton
Industry Expert

Prepared by the Senate Research Office, 2018

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COMMITTEE FOCUS, CREATION, AND DUTIES

The Senate Study Committee on Combat Sports (Committee) was created with the adoption of Senate Resolution 995 during the 2018 Legislative Session. The Committee was charged with undertaking a study of the conditions, needs, and problems associated with combat sports in the State of Georgia and recommend any action or legislation the committee deems necessary or appropriate.

The following individuals were appointed by the President of the Senate to serve as members of this Committee:

- Senator Brandon Beach of the 21st, Chair
- Senator Mike Dugan of the 30th
- Senator Gloria Butler of the 55th
- Senator Ellis Black of the 8th
- Bob Kelly, Expert Sports Medicine
- Rick Thompson, Regulatory Expert
- Preston Halliburton, Industry Expert

The following legislative staff members were assigned to this Committee: Andrew Allison of the Senate Press Office; Ryan Bowersox of the Senate Research Office; and Jinnie Christensen, Legislative Assistant to Senators Beach and Black.

REGULATORY OVERVIEW

Chapter 4B of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia provides for the creation, powers, and duties of the Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission (Commission). The Commission is the sole regulator of Combat Sports within the State, including boxing, martial arts, and wrestling.

Specifically exempted from the Commission's authority is any match, contest, or exhibition where all the contestants are amateurs, and is governed or authorized by any of the following:

- U.S.A. Boxing;
- The Georgia High School Athletic Association;
- The National Collegiate Athletic Association;
- Amateur Athletic Union;
- Golden Gloves;
- Team Georgia Amateur Wrestling;
- USA Wrestling;
- National High School Coaches Association;
- North American Sport Karate Association;
- International Sport Kick Boxing/Karate Association;
- World Kick Boxing Association;
- United States Kick Boxing Association;
- International Sport Combat Federation;
- Professional Karate Commission;
- International Kick Boxing Federation; or
- The local affiliate of any organization listed.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Meeting 1 – September 18, 2018

The first meeting was held on September 18th at the Georgia State Capitol. The Committee heard testimony from the following individuals covering the current state of mixed martial arts in Georgia and potential beneficial changes in its regulation:

- **Mr. Blake Grice**, Mixed Martial Arts referee
- **Mr. David Oblas**, National Fighting Championship
- **Mr. Matt Woodruff**, Executive Director, Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission

Introducing the first meeting of the Senate Study Committee on Combat Sports, Committee Chairman Senator Brandon Beach described the growing popularity of combat sports and the desire to grow this entertainment industry within Georgia. Mr. Blake Grice discussed the current state of combat sports within Georgia, and the issue of weight cutting in the sport. Mr. David Oblas presented to the committee regarding organizations not currently under the authority of the Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission, suggesting several current exceptions be eliminated. Mr. Oblas continued on to discuss ways the combat sports industry could grow within Georgia, including more prominent events, designed venues, and gambling. Mr. Matt Woodruff presented information on previous recent combat sporting events in the state and discussed potential legislative changes, including tax breaks and increased sanctioning authority for the Commission.

Meeting 2 – September 25, 2018

Meeting 2 was held on September 25th at Knuckle Up at 4540 Roswell Rd. Atlanta, Georgia. The Committee was welcomed by Knuckle Up Owner and Chief Executive Office CJ Wilson, as well as instructors from the fitness gym. The Committee heard testimony from the following individuals regarding the current safety environment of combat sports and heard open testimony from those in attendance:

- **Mr. Andy Foster**, Executive Officer, California State Athletic Commission
- **Mr. CJ Wilson**, Owner and CEO, Knuckle Up

The Committee met for its second meeting at Knuckle Up, a local gym and workout club focused on combat sport training. Mr. Andy Foster presented to the committee via teleconference, discussing combat sports in Georgia compared to his current state, California. Mr. Foster shared how California worked to grow combat sports and how the state addressed safety concerns. Mr. CJ Wilson, owner of the Knuckle Up gym, discussed his experiences with combat sports in Georgia and its recent growth. Finally, the meeting was opened up for public comment from trainers in attendance to share their experiences with combat sports.

Meeting 3 – October 23, 2018

The Committee held a third hearing on October 23rd at the Georgia State Capitol. The Committee heard testimony from the following individuals regarding economic development and regulatory practices:

- **Mr. Matthew Valenzuela**, Government and Regulatory Affairs Director, Ultimate Fighting Championship
- **Mr. Kevin Langston**, Deputy Commissioner of Tourism, Georgia Department of Economic Development
- **Mr. Johnny Davis**, International Kickboxing Federation

At the third Committee meeting, Mr. Matthew Valenzuela presented to the Committee regarding the varying regulatory structures among different states and countries that UFC operates across. Mr. Valenzuela also shared factors such as availability of hotel rooms, venues, and tourism efforts help impact where UFC events take place. Mr. Kevin Langston presented to the Committee concerning the positive economic impact a state receives by hosting large combat sport events. Finally, Mr. Johnny Davis presented to the committee concerning his involvement with the International Kickboxing Federation and the organization's regulation and safety procedures

Meeting 4 – November 8, 2018

The Committee met a fourth time on November 8th at the Georgia State Capitol. Testimony was provided by the following individuals:

- **Mr. Bert Wells**, USA Boxing
- **Mr. James Corbett**, International Kickboxing Federation
- **Seth Millican**, Chairman, Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission

During the Committee's final meeting, Mr. Bert Wells discussed the organization and regulatory structure of USA Boxing, specifically explaining why USA Boxing is not under the authority of the State Commission. Mr. James Corbett shared with the committee a standard report that is provided to the State's Commission following International Kickboxing Federation events. Mr. Seth Millican addressed the primary objectives of the Commission moving forward, focusing on safety concerns and appropriate levels of market regulation. Finally, the Committee discussed previously submitted legislative recommendations. The Committee voted to adopt the forthcoming recommendations in this final report.

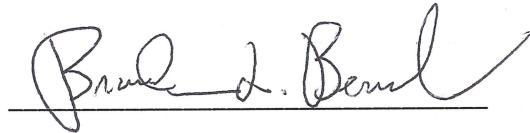
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing testimony, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Legislation should be introduced in 2019 to revise the list of organizations whose event participants are considered as “amateur” under the definition in O.C.G.A. § 43-4B-1, and outside the authority of the Georgia Athletic and Entertainment Commission. Specifically, the following organization should be removed from this code section:
 - International Sport Kick Boxing/Karate Association (ISKA)
 - World Kickboxing Association (WKA)
 - United States Kickboxing Association (USKA)
 - International Sport Combat Federation (ISCF)
 - International Kickboxing Federation (IKF)
- These same organizations should be removed from the list of exemptions under O.C.G.A. § 43-4B-2 as well.
- In conjuncture with the above referenced legislation, additional funds are requested to be allocated in the budget to assist in the increased workload placed on the Athletic and Entertainment Commission. An approximate \$48,829 is requested to allow for the hiring of one additional licensure analyst.

Respectfully Submitted,

**FINAL REPORT OF THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON
COMBAT SPORTS**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brandon Beach", is written over a horizontal line.

Honorable Brandon Beach, Chair

Senator, District 21