



GEORGIA STATE SENATE SENATE RESEARCH OFFICE

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

ANGIE FIESE, DIRECTOR
ALEX AZARIAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
ELIZABETH HOLCOMB, PROJECTS MANAGER

UPCOMING ISSUES 2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Livestock Dealers

House Bill 876, which failed to pass in the 2016 Legislative Session, would have made certain changes to licensing provisions relating to livestock market operators and dealers, including surety requirements and an expansion of protection from civil liability for livestock activity sponsors, professionals, and owners of livestock facilities. This issue may be considered again in the 2017 Legislative Session.

Reducing Regulatory Burdens on Small Businesses

Various rules enacted by state agencies often have a negative impact on the ability of business to function. Excessive state agency rules and regulations add costs to small business, stifle innovation, and make states less competitive than other states. In order to assist in creating a pro-job growth climate in Georgia, legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session to reduce unnecessary state regulation on small businesses.

BANKING AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Joint Study Committee on Industry Incentives for Financial Technologies and the Payment Processing Industry

This joint committee was created to study issues relating to maintaining Georgia's leadership in the financial transaction, or "FinTech," industry. Committee meetings have thus far included testimony on the state of this industry in Georgia (and how this industry has been a large but invisible part of Georgia's economy), as well as testimony on education opportunities available in Georgia for students wishing to be employed in this industry. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

Venture Capital Investments Senate Study Committee

The Senate Study Committee on Venture Capital Investments in Georgia was created for the purpose of studying the feasibility and possible benefits of increasing funding to the Invest Georgia Program. The Invest Georgia program is a venture fund created by the General Assembly in 2013, which is aimed at helping and investing in early-stage and growth-stage businesses in the technology, health care, life sciences, agribusiness, logistics, energy, or manufacturing sectors. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Joint High-Speed Broadband Communications Access for All Georgians Study Committee

Without up-to-date access to the digital world, Georgia's rural communities are at a disadvantage because they lack access to high-speed broadband communications.

Broadband communications is required and needed for rural communities to compete for company locations, new jobs, and to remove the barriers to economic development. Senate Resolution 876, which passed in the 2016 Legislative Session, created the Joint High-Speed Broadband Communications Study Committee (Committee) to strategize and undertake a study on how to remove these broadband barriers to help make rural Georgia thrive.

Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

Music Tax Credits

Senate Resolution 1092 created the Joint Economic Music Study Committee in the 2016 Legislative Session to study and examine: the music industry in Georgia; the economic impact that music has on the state; ways to attract and retain talent in the music industry; how to foster integration with other creative industries including film, digital media, and gaming; ways to support and promote the current state of the music and sound recording sector; the current state of music tourism including live music and performance, music festivals, and music attractions; the musical tour and theatrical production in Georgia and ways to develop and promote it; and ways to expand and promote the music sector as a whole in the state.

In its testimony before the Committee, the music industry has advocated for tax incentives comparable to those currently provided to the film industry in Georgia. Georgia's Entertainment Industry Investment Act provides a 20 percent tax credit for companies that spend \$500,000 or more on production and post-production in Georgia, either in a single production or on multiple projects. The state grants an additional 10 percent tax credit if the finished project includes a promotional logo provided by the state.

EDUCATION

Education Reform Commission

In its 2015 report, Governor Deal's Education Reform Commission (Commission) issued numerous recommendations for legislation in the areas of: funding; teacher recruitment, retention, and compensation; early childhood education; Move on When Ready; and school choice. However, in his 2016 State of the State Address, Governor Deal proposed delaying any legislation implementing the recommendations until 2017 to allow for available funding and a full vetting of the Commission's report. Governor Deal also created a Teachers' Advisory Committee which met in the 2016 interim and issued a Final Report in October that provided feedback in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention, teacher compensation, and Move on When Ready. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the recommendations of the Commission and the Teachers' Advisory Committee.

School Performance

Constitutional Amendment Number One, which failed in November's General Election, would have established the "Opportunity School District" to allow the state to assume, supervise, manage, and operate failing public elementary and secondary schools.

Proponents of the amendment argued that the measure would temporarily bring underperforming schools under state control to improve student outcomes. Opponents of the amendment argued that it would result in a loss of local control. According to several news articles, legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session to address issues relating to school performance, the flexibility in spending currently provided to local school systems, as well as enhanced options for school choice, similar to legislation proposed in the past two legislative sessions relating to the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program and Education Savings Accounts.

ETHICS

Judicial Qualifications Commission Reform

The Judicial Qualifications Commission (Commission) was created by constitutional amendment in 1972 to conduct investigations and hear complaints of ethical misconduct by Georgia judges. The General Assembly passed House Resolution 1113 in the 2016 Legislative Session proposed an amendment to the Georgia Constitution, which was adopted by Georgia voters in the November General Election, abolishing the current Judicial Qualifications Commission and instead creating authority in the General Assembly to reconstitute the Commission. Nominations to the Commission will be subject to Senate confirmation. The General Assembly also passed House Bill 808 in the 2016 Legislative Session, which is the enabling legislation that accompanies House Resolution 1113. The bill establishes three-year terms for commission members and gives authority to the Governor, the Speaker of the House, the Senate President, and the Supreme Court to appoint the commission members. The bill also provides for broad confidentiality of the records and proceedings of the Judicial Qualifications Commission.

In order to improve the transparency and accountability of the Commission and improve public trust in the judiciary, both the Senate and House of Representatives created study committees to examine the processes the Commission uses to investigate complaints and select its members. While the Senate study committee was not appointed, the House study committee, chaired by Representative Wendall Willard, sponsor of House Bill 808, held several meetings in the interim. The committee heard testimony from judges, residents, former and current members of the Commission on their experiences, along with suggestions on reforms to the Commission. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the findings of the House study committee.

FINANCE

Tax Reform Subcommittee Meetings

The Senate Finance subcommittee on Tax Reform was created to continue the conversation on tax reform in Georgia and to hear the concerns of Georgia citizens across the state in regards to taxation. It is likely that legislation will be created as a result of these meetings to address the challenges discussed by the presenters and citizens at these meetings. This may possibly include reforming the income tax and lowering the income tax rate, as well as creating or reforming incentives given to businesses in our state.

GATE Card Reform

During the 2016 Legislative Session, both the House and the Senate passed separate versions of House Bill 911, which would have reformed the program used to give a sales tax exemption for agricultural producers (commonly referred to as the GATE Card program).

Reforms for this program had been recommended so as to prevent fraud in the program, and to reduce the frequency in which agricultural producers must apply for this program (for instance, by making any sales tax exemption certificate last three years instead of one). However, the legislative session ended before both chambers could agree to a version of this bill. It is likely that legislation will be introduced this session to again address this issue.

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

Prevent Discrimination in Public Funding against Religious Organizations Providing Social Services

During the 2016 Legislative Session, the Senate passed Senate Resolution 388, which would have allowed religious or faith based organizations to receive public aid for the purposes of providing social services. However, this resolution was not voted on in the House. A new resolution may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session to again address this issue.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hospital Provider Fee

The Georgia hospital provider fee is a funding mechanism that was initially established for the Fiscal Year 2011 budget to help fill a deficit in Georgia's Medicaid program and was reauthorized in 2013 for three years. The fee is a payment assessed by the Department of Community Health (DCH) for the privilege of operating a hospital and is often referred to as the "bed tax" by opponents of the program. The law authorizing the hospital provider fee is set to expire on June 30, 2017, and will not renew for Fiscal Year 2018 without legislative approval. The renewal of the hospital provider fee and the funding formula used by DCH to assess hospital fees will be topics for discussion with the upcoming session.

Emergency Cardiac Care Centers Study Committee

The committee has held two public hearings where discussion has focused on incorporating emergency cardiac care into Georgia's current law on certified system of stroke centers/"Coverdell-Murphy Act." The committee is currently examining what other states have done to implement a system of emergency cardiac care centers. In December, the committee is expected to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including ideas for legislation.

Opioid Abuse Senate Study Committee

The committee has held two public hearings to address the increased use and abuse of opioids in Georgia. In its study of this issue, the committee has examined the abuse of legal and illegal drugs, including synthetic opiates that were developed as research chemicals and are being sold as designer street drugs. The increased use of opioids coincides with the increased number of babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and the health care costs associated with treating these babies in hospitals. In December, the committee is expected to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including ideas for legislation.

Surprise Billing Practices

Surprise billing practices refer to cases where a patient is “surprised” to receive a bill for out-of-network services when those services are in connection to the patient receiving in-network services at the same medical facility.

During the 2016 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 382 was introduced by Senator Unterman in an effort to initiate discussion on this contentious issue among consumers, hospitals, physicians, and insurance providers. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee held two hearings on this legislation where public comment was not only allowed, but strongly encouraged. Senate Resolution 974 was later adopted to create the Senate Study Committee on Surprise Billing Practices to continue the discussion and help identify reasonable solutions to address the issue of surprise billing practices in Georgia during the interim.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education Affordability in Georgia

According to a 2015 presentation by the University System of Georgia, the average cost of attendance in the 2013-2014 fall and spring semesters at an institution of the university system was roughly between \$16,000 and \$23,000 per year. During those same years, between 41 and 61 percent of students borrowing money for college graduated with approximately \$22,000 to \$25,000 worth of debt. In the past, the HOPE scholarship covered 100 percent of a student’s tuition, including fees and a book allowance. Currently, the HOPE scholarships only cover a percentage of a student’s tuition as determined by the Georgia Student Finance Commission, and the state does not offer need-based aid. The average student in Georgia is still left with financial debt even after paying for college with grants, scholarships, loans, HOPE scholarships, and Pell Grants.

Senate Resolution 1001 created the “Higher Education Affordability” Study Committee in the 2016 legislative session. This committee will study and analyze the rising cost of tuition, varying federal and state funding, and fluctuating need-based grant aid to ensure affordable tuition for Georgians.

INSURANCE AND LABOR

Health Insurance Coverage for Children’s Hearing Aids

The General Assembly is expected to introduce legislation that requires some form of limited insurance coverage for children’s hearing aids based on the findings of the Hearing Aids for Children Senate Study Committee.

Currently, 20 states require private health insurers to provide coverage for hearing aids for children. States that currently provide this coverage generally include some form of coverage limitation based on at least one of three factors:

1. The age of the beneficiary;
2. The frequency at which insurers must provide hearing aids to beneficiaries; or
3. The dollar cost the insurer must cover.

One Year Prescription of Contraceptives

Oregon's recently enacted legislation allowing women to be prescribed contraceptives for 12 months at a time has received significant media attention and similar legislation is expected to be introduced in Georgia during the 2017 Legislative Session.

Oregon's House Bill 3343 requires insurers that cover prescription contraceptives to reimburse health care providers or dispensing entities for a 12-month supply of contraceptives after an initial 3-month period of coverage. Supporters of the bill believe it will reduce unwanted pregnancies. The bill passed the House 55-2 and the Senate 28-0, and was signed by the Governor on June 11, 2015.

Auto Insurance Regulation

In 2008, the General Assembly adopted Senate Bill 276 which deregulated the majority of private passenger automobile insurance rates in Georgia. The bill abandoned the "prior approval" system, in which insurers must file rates with the Insurance Commissioner and seek formal approval, in favor of the "file and use" system, where the Commissioner no longer reviews and approves rate filings and insurers are simply required to file rates with the department. Under this newer process, filings become effective immediately or on a future date specified by the insurer. The adoption of the file and use system was intended to promote competition and lower rates among insurance companies. However, a series of substantial increases in automobile premiums over the past two years led the insurance commissioner to issue a "consumer alert" in April 2016 after Allstate filed for a 25 percent auto insurance rate hike.

Although legislation completely abolishing the file and use model is unlikely to be adopted, the General Assembly may pursue other avenues, such as legislation establishing "flex rating" system which would require prior approval if a proposed rate increase exceeds a predetermined threshold such as a 5 or 10 percent increase.

Premium Assistance

The Premium Assistance Program Senate Study Committee is currently examining the costs and benefits of expanding Medicaid coverage in Georgia under a premium assistance model. The premium assistance model is a form of Medicaid expansion which allows a state to use federal Medicaid funds to purchase private insurance coverage for enrollees through the Health Insurance Exchange or some other source such as employer sponsored insurance. Premium assistance legislation similar to Senator Michael Rhett's 2016 Senate Bill 368 may be reintroduced in 2017.

JUDICIARY

Religious Freedom

The General Assembly passed House Bill 757 in the 2016 Legislative Session, which was vetoed by Governor Deal. The legislation's key components contained multiple religious protections: religious practitioners could perform or deny services at their discretion; faith based organizations could deny the use of their property by another if the party's event seemed objectionable; faith based organizations also could withhold social, educational, or charitable support to entities it deemed to be violative of its sincerely held religious beliefs; similarly, these organizations could form hiring and retention decisions based upon whether the employee or prospective employees beliefs and practiced aligned with the organizations' beliefs. The legislation afforded immunity from legal action taken in direct response to these actions. The bill also included a heightened constitutional analysis if government action burdened the exercise of religion alongside a clause explicitly prohibiting invidious discrimination.

Several news articles have indicated that the General Assembly may introduce similar legislation in the 2017 Legislative Session.

Transgender Bathrooms

Nineteen states have considered legislation in 2016 that would restrict access to multiuser restrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities on the basis of a definition of sex or gender consistent with sex assigned at birth or “biological sex.” Currently, only North Carolina has enacted this type of legislation. Legislation in South Dakota was adopted by the General Assembly, but was vetoed by the governor. Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Mississippi, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin have also considered similar legislation this year.

In February 2016, the Charlotte City Council approved a nondiscrimination ordinance which extended long-standing protections associated with age, race, religion, and gender to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The change applied to places of public accommodation—such as bars, restaurants and stores—and taxis as well. The most controversial part of the ordinance permitted transgender residents to use either a men’s or women’s bathroom, depending on the gender with which they identify. In response, the North Carolina legislature convened a special session and passed House Bill 2 in March 2016. The bill requires single sex multiple occupancy bathrooms in public schools and agencies, and preempts any local ordinance, regulation, or resolution that regulates or imposes any requirements pertaining to regulation of discriminatory practices in a place of public accommodation.

In a "Dear Colleague" letter, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) issued guidance to schools in May 2016. The guidance summarizes schools' Title IX obligations regarding transgender students and explains how the U.S. DOE and U.S. DOJ evaluate a school's compliance with the obligations. One obligation listed in the letter is providing transgender students access to sex-segregated activities and facilities consistent with their gender identity. The letter defines gender identity as "an individual's internal sense of gender," and says "a person's gender identity may be different from or the same as the person's sex assigned at birth."

Following a flurry of lawsuits, including a nationwide injunction in the lawsuit brought by Georgia and several other states which seeks to block the federal government from enforcing the “Dear Colleague” letter, as well as a statewide injunction in a lawsuit in North Carolina brought against HB 2, the United State Supreme Court granted certiorari on October 28th to *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board*. The issue to be decided in *Gloucester County* is whether schools receiving federal funding must “generally treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity” as opposed to biological sex. The Court’s decision to hear the case may buffer some of the increased interest by many states to legislate on the question until an opinion is issued; however, legislation may be considered in the 2017 Legislative Session relating to state and local control of the issue.

JUDICIARY NON-CIVIL

Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform

Created during the 2013 Legislative Session by House Bill 349, the Georgia Council on Criminal Justice Reform conducts periodic comprehensive reviews of criminal laws, criminal procedure, sentencing laws, adult correctional issues, juvenile justice issues, enhancement of probation and parole supervision,

better management of prison population, and other issues related to criminal proceedings and accountability courts. The Council's efforts have led to several changes to Georgia's criminal laws and will likely continue its work in the 2017 Legislative Session. According to the 2016 Report issued by the Council, mandatory minimum sentencing and adult felony and misdemeanor probation supervision serve as areas of focus for the Council and the Legislature in the immediate future. Previous reports issued by the Council can be found at <http://dcs.georgia.gov/georgia-council-criminal-justice-reform>.

Sex Offender Registry Study Committee

Senate Resolution 1032, adopted by the Senate during the 2016 Legislative Session, created the Senate Sexual Offender Registry Study Committee. This legislation recognizes that in 1996, the Georgia General Assembly enacted one of the nation's strongest laws requiring persons convicted of sexual offenses to register with the state. In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 42-1-12, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) is the central repository for Georgia's Violent Sexual Offender Registry. This study committee was created to examine ways in which our approach to monitoring the activities of registered sexual offenders can again be strengthened.

No-Knock Warrants

Currently, the use of no-knock warrants is liberally regulated. Although meant to be used sparingly, some Georgia judges have been known to consistently issue no-knock warrants. Thus, during the 2016 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 45 was introduced but never made it out of committee. SB 45 provides that law enforcement officers must demonstrate probable cause that an "act of knocking and announcing would likely pose a significant and imminent danger to human life or imminent danger of evidence being destroyed." Similar legislation may be revisited by the General Assembly in 2017.

Additionally, House Bill 56 was introduced to provide tighter regulations on the issuance of no-knock warrants. Distinguishing it from similar bills, HB 56 required each judge issuing warrants, to generate a monthly report detailing the number of warrants issued and the number of no-knock warrants requested and executed. Although HB 56 never made it out of committee, similar legislation is expected to return during the 2017 Legislative Session.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

Alternative Fuel Infrastructure Incentives

Fuel economy and emissions are becoming increasingly stringent, such that alternative fuels are quickly becoming an attractive alternative to traditional gasoline and diesel fuel. However, vehicles powered by alternative fuels are effective only if refueling infrastructure is available to meet consumer needs. Providing incentives for investors and operators to install the necessary infrastructure for the efficient refueling of vehicles powered by alternative fuels may be necessary to bring the consumer market to fruition in Georgia.

Thus, Senate Resolution 1038, which passed in the 2016 Legislative Session, created the Joint Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Study Committee to study how market incentives for installation of refueling infrastructure for alternative fuel vehicles would serve as a catalyst for the realization of cheap and clean fueling options for the public, and to study whether increased market incentives for the purchase or lease of alternative fuel vehicles may drive development of infrastructure. This issue may be considered more thoroughly in the 2017 Legislative Session.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Blue Lives Matter Movement

In response to an increasing number of officer-related deaths in this country, both federal and state legislation was proposed this year seeking to define an attack on a law enforcement officer as a hate crime. Louisiana's House Bill 953 (also known as the Blue Lives Matter bill) was adopted in 2016 and expands Louisiana's hate crime statute to include the targeting of police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel. By enacting HB 953, Louisiana serves as the first state to add an individual's chosen vocation to the list of those characteristics protected by hate crime law.

Federally, House Resolution 4760 (also known as the Blue Lives Matter Act of 2016) and Senate Bill 3184 (also known as Back the Blue Act of 2016) were introduced this year as well. HR 4760 extends greater protections to police officers by expanding the federal hate crime statute to include law enforcement. Moreover, SB 3184 would make it a federal crime to kill a federal judge, a law enforcement officer, or a public safety officer. The federal crime would be subject to the death penalty and a mandatory minimum sentence of 30 years.

Currently, Georgia is one of five states that lacks a hate crime statute. As such, the General Assembly will possibly increase penalties for crimes committed against law enforcement officers.

Body Camera Legislation

In a well-established effort to increase transparency within the criminal justice system, Senate Bill 46 was introduced during the 2016 Legislative Session to require every local and state law enforcement agency to equip all peace officers who conduct traffic stops or respond to emergency dispatch calls as their primary duty with body cameras on and after January 1, 2017. Although the bill never made it out of committee, body camera legislation is likely to be considered again in the 2017 Legislative Session.

REGULATED INDUSTRIES

Breweries

Senate Bill 63, which passed in the 2015 Legislative Session:

- Authorizes licensed brewpubs to manufacture malt beverages for retail sale off the premises;
- Authorizes licensed brewers and licensed distillers to apply for an annual permit to conduct tours of the licensed premises, which may include free souvenirs and free tastings;
- Allows brewers to charge varying fees for the brewery tours, provided that the fees are charged prior to the beginning of such tour;
- Limits on-site tastings for breweries to no more than 36 ounces of malt beverages to an individual in one day;
- Requires free souvenirs to be in a sealed container(s) with a total liquid capacity that does not exceed 72 ounces; on-site tastings for distilleries are limited to no more than three samples to one person in one day; and
- Limits free souvenirs to a single bottle of distilled spirits, not to exceed 750 milliliters.

In September of 2015, the Department of Revenue (DOR) published a Policy Bulletin which stated that brewers and distillers were permitted to charge varying fees for tours, but were not allowed to vary tour prices in such a way that the tour prices were clearly and directly tied to the market value of the alcohol furnished.

Many breweries were reported to have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars to build new tasting rooms, hire employees, and market their new tours; some were reported to have been given written approval by the department to do so. The DOR recently proposed rules and regulations which represented a compromise and agreement among all parties, and which went into effect in May, that allow a brewer that chooses to charge admission fees for facility tours to charge varying fees for facility tours, provided that the fees are charged prior to the beginning of such tour. Admission fees may vary based on the amount and quality of alcohol included in free tastings and the free souvenir.

Beer regulations were expanded in March of 2016 when the DOR interpreted existing law as allowing brewpubs to sell and fill “growlers” – containers used for the transport of beer – and also deferred to local governments to decide whether or not to allow the sale of growlers in their communities. However, this small victory may not be enough to satisfy Georgia brewpub and brewery owners, such that the General Assembly may revisit Senate Bill 63 during the 2017 Legislative Session to further expand the ability of Georgia’s small breweries to sell directly to the general public.

Casino Gambling and Pari-Mutuel Wagering

While the General Assembly considered legislation relating to casino gambling and pari-mutuel wagering during the 2016 Legislative Session, including devoting a portion of the anticipated revenues towards higher education funding, the legislation did not reach final passage. The General Assembly may revisit both issues in the 2017 Legislative Session.

Petroleum Pipelines

Georgia property owners and environmental groups strongly opposed Kinder Morgan’s proposed pipeline project, the Palmetto Pipeline, which would extend from Belton, South Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida, stretching across 200 miles of eastern and coastal Georgia. In response, House Bill 1036 was adopted during the 2016 Legislative Session, placing a temporary moratorium on the exercise of eminent domain powers of pipeline companies until June 30, 2017 – effectively suspending Kinder Morgan’s Palmetto Pipeline project. In addition, House Bill 1036 created a State Commission on Petroleum Pipelines to examine various issues related to pipeline construction and operation, including their impacts on land, and their current legal and regulatory structure. After a thorough study of these issues, the Commission may recommend legislation to the General Assembly to accomplish the continuing goals of, both, pipeline companies and Georgia residents. Thus, this issue may be revisited in the 2017 Legislative Session.

RETIREMENT

Credit for Military Service

Senate Bill 149, introduced in 2015 and carried by Senator Michael Rhett, allowed certain military members to obtain up to five years of creditable service under the Employees’ Retirement System (ERS) of Georgia for active military service performed on or after January 1, 1990. Although it favorably passed out of the Senate Retirement Committee, the legislation failed to reach the Senate floor.

Due to its fiscal impact on ERS, any future bill proposing retirement credit for military service would have to be introduced in the first year of a biennium, or the 2017 Legislative Session, and then studied in the interim.

RULES

Senate Legislative Process

The Senate Study Committee on the Legislative Process (Committee), created by Senate Resolution 842 in the 2016 Legislative Session, is tasked with evaluating and determining an efficient, transparent method of reviewing bills, amendments, substitute bills, and conference committee reports to promote the confidence of the citizens of the State of Georgia in the legislative process. The Senate may incorporate any suggested changes of the Committee in its 2017-2018 Senate Rules.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Data Security and Privacy Study Committee

The Senate Data Security and Privacy Study Committee (Committee) was created for the purpose of studying issues relating to both data security and protecting data stored on government networks. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the Committee's findings and recommendations.

Drone Commission

With the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) releasing a more comprehensive set of guidelines for small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUAS) in June of 2016, the emergence of drone legislation is inevitable. Senate Bill 325, authored by Senator Judson Hill and introduced during the 2016 Legislative Session, provided for the creation of the Georgia Unmanned Vehicle Systems Commission in order to study the areas of concern surrounding the unmanned vehicle systems industry. A similar bill, House Bill 779, was introduced and passed in 2016 before ultimately being vetoed by Governor Deal in May of 2016. The Governor's reasoning included a necessity to wait on federal direction from the FAA before creating a layer of state regulation. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session.

STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Townships

Senate Bill 272 was introduced during the 2016 legislative session establishing a local form of government in Georgia known as a township. Although the legislation failed to gain a hearing, it is expected to be reintroduced in 2017. Generally speaking, a township is a limited-service organized local government that is empowered with limited rights and responsibilities such as zoning, planning, and code enforcement. Some states refer to these entities as villages or simply towns.

Annexations, Deannexations, and Municipal Incorporations

Two pieces of Senate legislation were introduced in 2016 to clarify the annexation/deannexation and municipal incorporation process in Georgia. Specifically, Senate Bill 372 would have required counties objecting to annexations to notify DCA as well as the annexing city.

The bill also extended the time period in which DCA has to appoint an annexation arbitration panel from 15 calendar days to 15 business days. Senate Bill 375 would have established and codified the legal framework for city incorporations. Despite neither bill reaching final passage, the General Assembly is expected to take up similar measures in 2017.

TRANSPORTATION

Region-Wide Transit Solution

Georgia is home to the world's busiest airport, the nation's 10th largest road system, and the fastest growing container port in the United States. However, traffic congestion in metropolitan Atlanta is among the worst in the nation. Senate Resolution 1085 created the Regional Transit Solutions Study Committee (Committee) in the 2016 Legislative Session to determine what role a region-wide transit system should play in mitigating congestion, as well as the possible creation of a regional transit governance and funding model. Legislation may be introduced in the 2017 Legislative Session based on the recommendations of the Committee.

VETERANS, MILITARY, AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Veteran Benefits

Although Georgia is at the forefront of providing benefits for its veterans and current service members, legislation may be introduced:

- Creating a new lottery game that helps fund certain veteran services or legislation that expands on assisting veteran-owned businesses;
- Allowing veteran organizations to conduct bingo gaming with a maximum weekly jackpot above the current \$3,000 limit; or
- Establishing a bidding preference for veteran-owned businesses bidding on state contracts.