

Legislative Days 6 - 10
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Session Week 2 Legislative Report



Georgia Society
of Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery

2024

PGR | PEACHTREE
GOVERNMENT
RELATIONS

Week 2, Legislative Days 6-10

This week, the Georgia General Assembly met Monday through Friday for Legislative Days six through ten of the 2024 Session. With over thirty committee meetings scheduled over the course of the week, the Legislature was in full swing with multiple prominent issues arising such as election regulations, anti-semitism, early education funding, school choice, and the legalization of sports betting. Keep reading for a breakdown of the week!



Election Bills

This session, there will be significant attention toward elections and how the state handles these processes. Several bills have been introduced from both the House and Senate to combat concerns with election processes.

In the Senate Ethics committee on Thursday of this week, Senator Burns presented two separate bills concerning elections. Senate Bill 189 tackles text portions of ballots that are for vote tabulation and recounts purposes. This bill will effectively eliminate QR codes from the text portion of the ballot only. This bill does not impact absentee ballots, except for still having a code to identify precinct. No voter selection in any way is included in that code. These changes will require the state to organize and acquire different scanners to complete this new task, and the fiscal note for these new scanners is an estimated \$15 million for those scanners. This measure, after much discussion, did pass the committee and will be moved onto the Senate rules for determination of when to be heard by the chamber.

Senator Burns presented Senate Bill 212 as his second presentation in the Senate Ethics committee. This bill aims to work on Probate Court Judges related to elections, and this hearing focuses on the substitute for the bill. The intention of this bill is to change the jurisdiction of elections to the local Boards of Election and away from Probate Court Judges. This bill would affect the 29 counties that used Probate Court Judges for elections last year with the absence of local Board of Election help. SB 212 would remove any payment for running elections, and it will go into effect January 1st, 2025 if passed.

In a House Government Affairs meeting on Wednesday, the committee heard two House bills concerning elections. Representative LaHood is sponsoring House Bill 976, and this bill pushes a similar platform to Senator Burns' bills he presented a day after this presentation. This bill focuses on ballots used in optical scan voting systems, and the systems will use paper with a visible watermark for security purposes. Most counties in Georgia would be able to use their current ballot inventory for the primary season, but the updates would require

changes going forward. This change has an estimated cost between \$100 and \$100 thousand. This bill passed out of the committee unanimously.

House Government Affairs also heard House bill 974, another bill presented by representative LaHood. This bill deals with the Secretary of State, and it looks to establish and hold a state-wide system for posting scanned paper ballots. This bill was heard briefly, but it is being held as it needs more time to continue refining the work.

Anti-Semitism in Georgia

This week, the legislature heard HB 30, legislation concerning anti-semitism in the state. Representative John Carson is the sponsor for the bill, and there was widespread support for the new bill. This legislation, if adopted, would incorporate a new definition of antisemitism into Georgia's law which is drawn from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and it has been widely accepted by many states and organizations around the country. This bill was presented last year during the previous session, however the bill was stalled in a debate over the wording.

HB 30 was heard on the Senate floor on Thursday, January 25th. All across the state, this bill has been contentious. Many parties have their take on the bill, and it has caused a lot of tension in Georgia. Republicans are increasing support for Israel, so this bill has caught traction with their supporters. On the other hand, several groups are opposed to this legislation. Groups like American Civil Liberties Union and Georgia's charter of the Council on American Islamic Relations are both critical of the bill and the precedent it sets. They worry that codifying specific legislation for a specific group of people may not be inclusive of other minority groups. Overall, each group can agree that the anti-semitism and general hate in Georgia needs to be combatted, and this bill is yet another attempt to counter that hatred.

After much debate over the bill, it ended up passing with a majority of 44-6. The specific bill passed by the Senate was a substitute, or a slightly altered version of what the House passed, so the bill was transmitted immediately to the House. If the House of Representatives passes the Senate substitute, the bill will then be transmitted to Governor Brian Kemp for a signature.



School Choice and Early Education Funding

The Senate Education Committee heard multiple bills on Tuesday of this week, the most notable being SB 147. Sponsored by Senator Still and known as the "Boundless Opportunities for Georgia Students Act," SB 147 aims to ensure that county and city boundaries do not limit opportunities for students in the state. Notably, the bill establishes a floor of \$10,000 per student in the public school system and prohibits fund transfers that

would cause the budget to fall below this threshold. The bill would allow students the choice to leave their school district to attend other public schools outside of their area if the school has space. Despite some division, the committee approved SB 147 with a 4-2 vote, to foster equal opportunities for students across Georgia.

In a recent presentation before the House Education Committee, Pro Temp Jan Jones, representing the Early Learning Study Committee, outlined findings and recommendations that carry an estimated annual cost of approximately \$100 million. The primary recommendation involves a reduction in class sizes from an average of 25 to 20, aligning them more closely with K-5 class sizes. Additionally, the proposal suggests increasing the salaries of assistant teachers and lead teachers to match the pay scale of non-pre-K teachers, with assistant teachers seeing a raise from a \$20,000 salary to around \$25,000. Furthermore, the presentation advocated for boosting transportation funds for pre-K students to match the average funding received by K-12 students, which is approximately \$80 per child per year. Another key aspect involves an increase in capital construction costs, proposing that public school pre-K classes qualify for state capital construction funds. It was recommended that all these financial additions be funded through lottery funds.

During a presentation to the House Education Appropriations Committee, the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) outlined key changes to the amended budget. Notable adjustments include an increase in the nutrition budget, with a focus on fostering partnerships with nonprofits and sponsors to address barriers to food service in underfunded areas. Additionally, there is a proposed increase in employer rates within the Pre-K budget. The budget for the Summer Transition Program, a five-week initiative designed to support rising K-5 or Pre-K students in need of additional assistance, is set to see an expansion. Lastly, the presentation highlighted a planned computer refresh for Pre-K staff to update technological resources in early education.

Sports Betting

Late Wednesday evening, a group of bipartisan leaders in the Senate introduced a new bill on sports wagering. This measure's sponsors include Senate Education Chairman Clint Dixon, Senate Minority Leader Gloria Butler, Governor Floor Leader Bo Hatchett, among others. The bill has received support from the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta's professional sports teams and a nod from Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. Having a strong coalition of both Democrats and Republicans will be necessary in garnering passage of the measure, with it failing numerous times in past legislative sessions. The funds collected from the measure will be administered by the Georgia Lottery Corporation with the proceeds going towards the HOPE Scholarship, pre-k programs and needs-based student aid. Supporters have estimated that sports betting would bring anywhere from \$30 million to \$100 million in taxes or fees to the state each year.

The Week Under the Gold Dome

<i>Bill</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Status</i>
HB 30 (Rep. John Carson)	State government; definition of antisemitism; provide	House passed; Senate committee favorably reported
HB 191 (Rep. Ron Stephens)	Revenue and taxation; pack of cigarettes; increase rate of tax	House read and referred
HB 192 (Rep. Ron Stephens)	Revenue and taxation; consumable vapor products; increase rate of tax	House read and referred
HB 380 (Rep. Marcus Wiedower)	Georgia Lottery Game of Sports Betting Act; enact	House withdrawn and recommitted
HB 489 (Rep. Mitchell Horner)	Georgia Entertainment Industry Investment Act; aggregate annual limit; provide	House read and referred
HB 530 (Rep. James Burchett)	Civil practice; protective orders for certain high-ranking officers; provide	Senate recommitted
HB 565 (Rep. Tyler Smith)	Social services; temporary assistance for needy families; increase access to benefits	House withdrawn and recommitted
HB 581 (Rep. Shaw Blackmon)	Audits and Accounts, Department of; revise deadlines, selection criteria, and required contents for certain annual economic analyses	House passed; Senate read and referred
HB 841 (Rep. James Beverly)	Public Service Commission; members elected from election districts instead of state wide; provide	House read and referred
HB 915 (Rep. Jon Burns)	Supplemental appropriations; State Fiscal Year July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024	House read and referred
HB 929 (Rep. Jordan Ridley)	Income tax; exclude net capital gains	House read and referred
HB 1015 (Rep. Lauren McDonald)	Income tax; reduce rate of tax	House read and referred
HR 210 (Rep. James Beverly)	General Assembly; law for sports betting, pari-mutuel betting, and casino gambling; authorize - CA	House read and referred
HR 768 (Rep. Matt Hatchett)	Piper, Barbie; recipient of the LPN of the Year award; commend	House read and referred
SB 113 (Sen. Randy Robertson)	Municipal Corporations; the transition of services and facilities from an existing municipality to a newly incorporated municipality; provide	Senate recommitted
SB 172 (Sen. Bill Cowsert)	State Government; regulation and taxation of sports betting in this state; authorize and provide	Senate Tabled

SB 186 (Sen. Greg Dolezal)	"Georgia Landowners Protection Act"; enact	Senate recommitted
SB 191 (Sen. Shawn Still)	Motor Vehicles and Traffic; authorizing joinder of motor carriers and their insurance carriers in tort and contract causes of action; provisions; repeal	Senate recommitted
SB 192 (Sen. Lee Anderson)	Torts; employers and insurance providers of commercial motor vehicle operators based upon history of driving incidents; limit liability	Senate read and referred
SB 194 (Sen. Shawn Still)	Alcoholic Beverages and Motor Vehicles and Traffic; delivery of alcoholic beverages for personal use; provisions	Senate read and referred
SB 200 (Sen. Bill Cowsert)	"Civil Practice Act"; high ranking government or corporate officer of whom a deposition is sought to seek a protective order; provide	Senate recommitted
SB 255 (Sen. Chuck Payne)	Gambling; provisions relative to dogfighting; revise	Senate read and referred
SB 260 (Sen. Bo Hatchett)	"Georgia Electric Vehicle Future Act"; enact	Senate recommitted
SB 265 (Sen. Blake Tillery)	Notaries Public; electronic notarization of certain notarial acts using real time audio-video communication technology; provide	Senate read and referred
SB 271 (Sen. John Albers)	Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority; in-person electronic execution of notarial certificates; authorize	Senate read and referred
SB 349 (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler)	Ad Valorem Taxation of Property; setting of millage rates; revise provisions	Senate read and referred
SB 351 (Sen. Jason Anavitarte)	"Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act of 2024"; enact	Senate read and referred
SB 386 (Sen. Clint Dixon)	State Government; regulation and taxation of sports betting in this state; authorize and provide	Senate read and referred

Healthcare Legislation

In this week's Senate Health and Human Services Committee, the Georgia Trauma Care Commission presented a Trauma System Stabilization Proposal. The presentation highlighted significant improvements in treating severely injured patients, with 93% treated at a Designated Trauma Center (DTC) in 2020 compared to 64% in 2011. Despite progress, the Trauma Center Readiness Costs have risen considerably, creating a funding gap. The proposal recommended allocating 50% of the total readiness costs, amounting to \$61.7 million, for all four trauma center levels. Additionally, during the committee meeting, HB 343 by Rep. Newton, concerning the regulation and licensure of pharmacy benefits managers, faced a setback as it failed to pass the committee vote by 8-5.

<i>Bill</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Status</i>
HB 70 (Rep. Mandisha Thomas)	Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act	House read and referred
HB 82 (Rep. Mack Jackson)	Income tax; limit eligibility for rural physician tax credit to physicians who qualify on or before December 31, 2023	House passed; Senate recommitted
HB 150 (Rep. Meisha Mainor)	Professions and businesses; definition of physical therapy to include ordering diagnostic imaging and using ultrasound; revise	House read and referred
HB 196 (Rep. Alan Powell)	Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission; subject to Administrative Procedure Act and laws governing open meetings and records; provide	House passed; Senate passed by substitute; House agreed Senate sub; Senate disagreed House amend
HB 214 (Rep. Alan Powell)	Professions and businesses; authorize registered nurses and physician assistants to certify an individual is disabled for purposes of obtaining special vehicle decals	House read and referred
HB 266 (Rep. Charlice Byrd)	Medical Freedom Act; enact	House read and referred
HB 284 (Rep. Beth Camp)	Insurance; health care sharing ministry; change definition; provisions	House Withdrawn, Recommitted
HB 286 (Rep. Michelle Au)	Surprise Billing Consumer Protection Act; certain consumer protections against surprise billing for ambulance service; provide	House read and referred to the Committee on Insurance
HB 343 (Rep. Mark Newton)	Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for Patients Act; enact	House Passed; Senate read and referred
HB 362 (Rep. Karen Mathiak)	Insurance; benefit provider to disclose certain payments to a treating healthcare provider; provide	House passed; Senate recommitted
HB 363 (Rep. John LaHood)	Health; eligibility to receive tax credits; revise a definition; provisions	House read and referred

HB 417 (Rep. David Knight)	Insurance; prohibit insurers from discriminating against certain healthcare facilities and providers in connection with provider administered drugs	House Withdrawn, Recommitted
HB 455 (Rep. John LaHood)	Professions and businesses; professional programs to address career fatigue and wellness in healthcare professionals; provisions	House passed; Senate Committee Favorably Reported
HB 458 (Rep. Clay Pirkle)	Agriculture; hemp farming; provide for intent	House passed; Senate read and referred
HB 470 (Rep. Sharon Cooper)	Georgia Candor Act; enact	House passed; Senate recommitted
HB 487 (Rep. Mark Newton)	Crimes and offenses; assault and battery offenses upon all healthcare workers; expand enhanced punishment	House Withdrawn, Recommitted
HB 606 (Rep. Sharon Cooper)	State health planning and development; certificate of need; revise definitions	House read and referred
HB 745 (Rep. Trey Kelley)	Health; provide requirements for nurse staffing in hospitals; provisions	House read and referred
HB 887 (Rep. Mandisha Thomas)	Insurance; use of artificial intelligence in making certain decisions regarding coverage; prohibit	House read and referred
SB 16 (Sen. John Albers)	Georgia EMS Reform Act	Senate read and referred
SB 99 (Sen. Greg Dolezal)	Certificate of Need Requirements; exemption for acute care hospitals established in rural counties that meet certain criteria; provide	Senate passed; House read and referred
SB 102 (Sen. Larry Walker)	Nurses; provision relating to the administration of anesthesia by certified registered nurse anesthetists; revise	Senate read and referred
SB 111 (Sen. Chuck Hufstetler)	"Anesthesiologist Assistant Act"; an anesthesiologist assistant to be appointed in an advisory capacity to the Georgia Composite Medical Board; provide	Senate recommitted
SB 162 (Sen. Ben Watson)	Health; certificate of need requirements for all healthcare facilities except certain long-term care facilities and services; eliminate	Senate Recommitted
SB 238 (Sen. Mike Hodges)	Georgia Health Care Professionals Data System; provide for the establishment	Senate read and referred
SB 270 (Sen. Carden Summers)	Medical Cannabis; the location of retail outlets for the dispensing of low THC oil; authorize	Senate Read and Referred
SB 286 (Sen. Ben Watson)	"Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for Patients Act"; enact	Senate read and referred
SB 293 (Sen. Ben Watson)	County Boards of Health; operational policies and procedures of the Department of Public Health Apply to	Senate read and referred

	local personnel; provide	
SB 296 (Sen. Sonya Halpern)	Department of Public Health; appointment of a state surgeon general; provide	Senate read and referred
SB 307 (Sen. Kay Kirkpatrick)	Private Review Agents; health insurers to implement and maintain a program that allows for the selective application of reductions; provide	Senate read and referred
SB 325 (Sen. Sheikh Rahman)	Dispensing Opticians; employee of a licensed physician or optometrist who is under the direct or real-time supervision of a licensed optician; exempt from licensure	Senate read and referred
SR 372 (Sen. Ben Watson)	Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease; improvement of care; support	Senate read and referred

GSDDS Legislation

House Bill 502 Georgia Cosmetic Laser Service Act passed the House on January 26th, and it will be passed to the Senate to be heard in committee next week. (highlighted below)

<i>Bill</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Status</i>
HB 502 (Rep. Deborah Silcox)	Georgia Cosmetic Laser Services Act; revise a definition; revise a provision	House passed
HB 844 (Rep. Ginny Ehrhart)	Practice of Nutrition and Dietetics Act; enact	House read and referred
HB 872 (Rep Lee Hawkins)	Medical professionals; rural assistance; expand service cancelable loan program for health care providers to include dental students	House read and referred
HB 887 (Rep. Mandisha Thomas)	Insurance; use of artificial intelligence in making certain decisions regarding coverage; prohibit	House read and referred
HB 897 (Rep. Jordan Riley)	Medical Freedom Act; enact	House read and referred
HB 945 (Rep. Lee Hawkins)	State employees' health insurance plan; protection for covered persons when an in-network hospital becomes out-of-network prior to the end of year plan; provide	House read and referred

