
Legislative Update



Legislative Lowdown prepared by GACVB &



Legislation potentially affecting Georgia's Tourism and Hospitality Industry

Session was once again in full swing this week with a significant uptick in the number of bills and resolutions introduced and a large number of committee meetings over a four-day period. The House and Senate reconvened on Tuesday for legislative day 13, and held session the rest of the week. For a bill to stay alive this session, it must pass the chamber where it was introduced by Crossover Day, which is scheduled for March 12 this year. Next week the Legislature will meet Monday, Legislative Day 17, through Friday, Legislative Day 21.

Budget

Following a second full week of House Appropriations Subcommittee hearings, the full House Appropriations Committee met Tuesday morning to review the FY20 amended budget and it was taken up on the House floor on Wednesday morning, passing by a vote of 126 to 46. It now heads to the Senate for consideration.

Next, all eyes turn to the FY21 budget, which is expected to be even more contentious with Governor Kemp's call for state agencies to cut their budgets by 6 percent in addition to his recommendation to give teachers another \$2,000 raise, fulfilling his campaign promise to raise teacher pay by \$5,000. House Speaker David Ralston (R- Blue Ridge) this week reiterated his commitment to cutting the income tax rate from 5.75 percent to 5.5 percent following the legislature's decision to cut taxes from 6 percent to 5.75 percent in 2018. Both proposals

significantly impact the budget in a year when there is enough concern over revenues that the Governor directed state agencies to cut their budgets by 6%.

Short Term Vacation Rentals and Lodging Taxes

There remain two bills related to short term vacation rentals, House bill 448 by Matt Dollar (R-Marietta) and House Bill 523 by Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton). Conventional wisdom at the Capitol is that these two bills will likely be combined at some point.

[HB 448](#) has been heard twice in subcommittee but still awaits action by the House Ways and Means Committee. It is supported by many in the tourism industry because it clarifies many terms like "innkeeper" and "lodging tax facilitator", and the hope is that it will generate more lodging tax revenue for local governments and for tourism marketing and for convention centers because it requires third party facilitators to collect lodging taxes and the \$5 transportation fee.

[HB 523](#) has passed out of committee but awaits action by the House Rules Committee. The sponsor has agreed to several changes to the legislation since then with the intention of amending the bill again, possibly in the Rules Committee. It has been described as a pre-emption bill since it severely limits or eliminates the ability of local governments to regulate STVRs. The Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) have both taken positions of opposition to the bill, while the Georgia Chamber of Commerce has taken a position of support.

Adoption Legislation (potential RFRA alert)

As previously reported, Senator Marty Harbin (R-Tyrone) introduced [Senate Bill 368](#) on February 5th. After the two-week recess it was first-read in the Senate on Tuesday and referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill would allow faith-based adoption agencies to refuse to place children with couples that violate "certain religious or moral convictions." Harbin said the bill is intended to preserve choice for mothers who want to ensure their child grows up in a particular religious background. In past years similar legislation has been labeled "religious freedom" legislation and this bill has the potential to stir up those same debates.

In a similar vein but presumably without the same controversy, several pieces of legislation were introduced this week that would make fostering and adopting children easier in Georgia, which is another one of Governor Kemp's top legislative priorities for this year. [House Bill 912](#) by Representative Bert Reeves (R-Marietta) would allow foster parents to arrange for short-term babysitting. [House Bill 913](#), also introduced by Reeves, would strengthen, clarify, and update provisions related to the protection of children, including foster children and adopted children. House Bills 912 and 913 were first read this week in the House and referred to the House Juvenile Justice Committee. Reeves also introduced [House Bill 934](#) this week, which raises the tax credit for adopting a child from \$2,000 to \$6,000 for the first five years. The tax credit would then be \$2,000 a year after that until the adopted child turns 18.

Sports Marketing Fund

[House Bill 740](#), introduced by the Chairman of the House Economic Development and Tourism Committee, Representative Ron Stephens (R-Savannah), would create the Sports Marketing Fund

to provide a funding mechanism to attract sporting events to the State of Georgia, which would provide an economic benefit to the state. The bill has been assigned to the House Economic Development and Tourism committee, which is not scheduled to meet this week.

GACVB Legislative Representation

During the legislative session GACVB public affairs staff, [Hughes Public Affairs](#) (HPA), and members of the [GACVB Public Policy Committee](#) are at the Capitol representing GACVB on all matters related to tourism. HPA is monitoring legislation and apprising legislators of the GACVB priorities and position.

GACVB works with coalition partners in tourism, hospitality, and development [Georgia Hotel & Lodging Association](#) (GHLA), [Georgia Restaurant Association](#) (GRA), Georgia [Economic Developers Association](#) (GEDA), and [Tourism Leadership Council](#) (TLC) - all ally "Advocate" level members of GACVB. GACVB also supports the advocacy efforts of the [Georgia Agribusiness Council](#) (GAC) advancing the business of Agriculture (including AgriTourism) through economic development.

GACVB participates with ally partner Southeast Tourism Society (STS) in federal advocacy efforts and joins the [STS Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism](#) (June 23-25, 2020). See Facts & Figures impacting Georgia, your National Travel & Tourism Caucus, and much more at the [STS Advocacy Resource Center](#).

GACVB Legislative Agenda

Georgia General Assembly Website

GACVB Winter Conference - Feb. 24-26, 2020 in Valdosta, GA
(Annual Business Meeting & Legislative Update - Feb. 26, 10:00 am)

See the partner organizations attending!

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