
Legislative Update



Legislative Lowdown prepared by GACVB &



Legislation potentially affecting Georgia's Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The legislature convened last week Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 22 through 25. House and Senate members hoping to pass legislation this session are quickly running out of time because Crossover Day is this Thursday, March 12. Bills not passed out of their original chambers by Crossover Day cannot move any further through the legislative process this year and would need to be reintroduced for consideration next year.

It was also the week of qualifying, meaning that all individuals planning to run for local, state, or federal office had to sign up by Noon on Friday. All State House and State Senate members are up for re-election. The composition of the legislature will change next year. More than 20 legislators announced that they would not run for re-election and most that are running for re-election have opposition.

The issues related to the legislative priorities of GACVB, tourism marketing, RFRA, lodging tax (short term vacation rental - STVR industry), etc, were pretty quiet for the week. We will report further on them in our next update. In the meantime, here is a review of some of the issues that were active:

Film Tax Credit

While Georgia's film tax credit has propelled the state to a position of prominence in the movie and television production world, the credit has faced some recent criticism following two audits released by Georgia's Department of Audits and Accounts. In response to some of these criticisms, Representative Matt Dollar (R-Marietta) introduced [House Bill 1037](#) to address several of the issues raised by the audits. The bill's major provisions include requiring mandatory audits of all productions, tightening up the process for how audits are conducted, and authorizing the Department of Revenue to set up a third-party independent auditor list. Following several hearings by the House Creative Arts and Entertainment Working Group last week, on Monday the bill was favorably reported out of the working group. It then moved to

the House Ways and Means Income Tax Subcommittee, where it passed unanimously. The bill must now pass the full Ways and Means Committee before it can be considered in the House Rules Committee.

Tort Reform

Two tort reform bills by Senator Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) address many of the recommendations from the Senate Study Committee on Reducing Georgia's Cost of Doing Business. [Senate Bill 390](#), an omnibus legal reform bill, received its first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee last week, where the bill was passed out by committee substitute. [Senate Bill 415](#), which is a legal reform bill largely relating to insurance, was passed out of the full Senate Insurance and Labor Committee. Following passage by their respective committees, both bills must pass out of the Senate Rules Committee in order to be considered for a vote by the full Senate by Crossover Day.

Daylight Savings Time

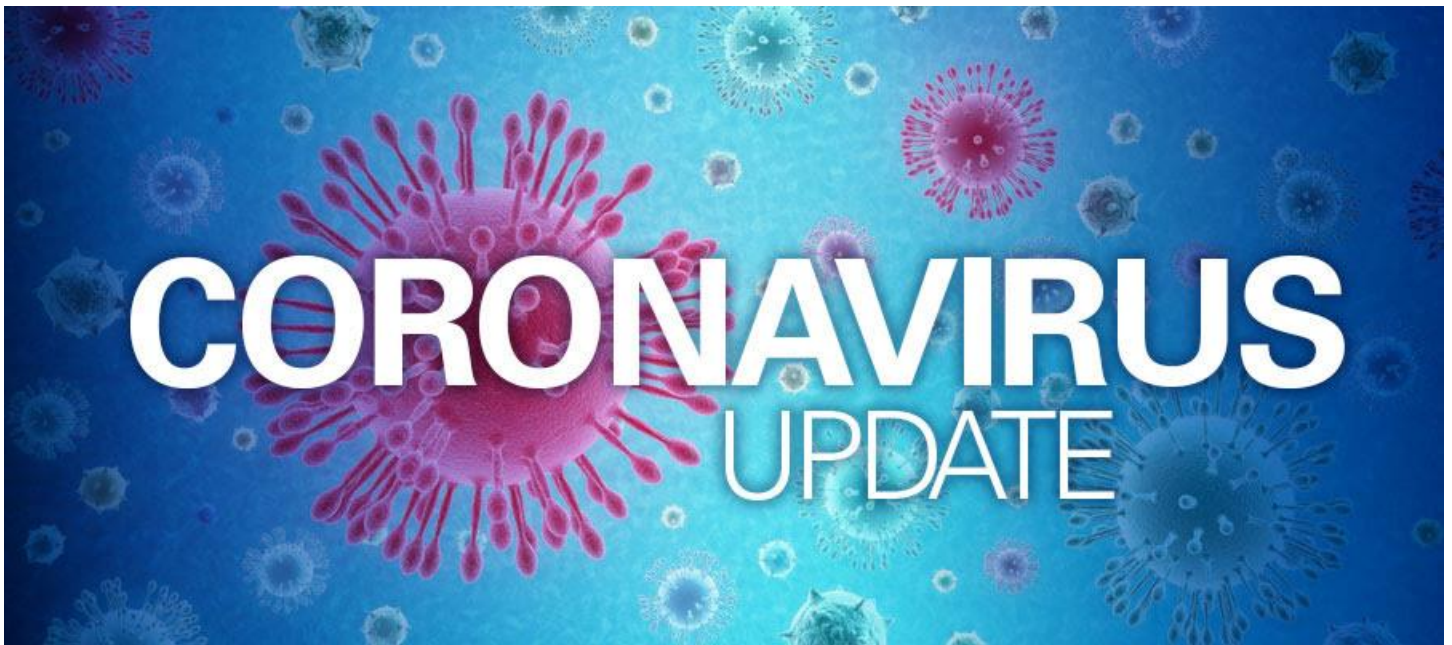
On Monday of last week, [Senate Bill 351](#) by Senator Ben Watson (R-Savannah) passed the Senate by a vote of 53-0; the bill has headed across the hall to the House, where it must go through a similar process to make it to the governor's desk. Senate Bill 351 would provide a referendum on the question of whether Georgia should continue changing the clocks for Daylight Savings Time. Changing to permanent Daylight Savings Time would require Congressional approval if the voters were to choose that; staying on Standard Time would not require Congressional approval. A similar piece of legislation in the House by Representative Wes Cantrell (R-Woodstock), [House Bill 709](#), is still awaiting a hearing in the House State Planning and Community Affairs Committee.

Distracted Driving

Following the passage of a committee substitute of [House Bill 113](#) by Representative John Carson (R-Marietta), last week the Senate worked to tackle distracted driving. Carson's bill, which is sitting in the House Rules Committee, raises fines for those caught using their phones while driving; prohibits teenagers from using their phones while driving for any reason, including navigation; and eliminates what many legislators call the "get out of jail free" provision, which allows first-time offenders to bring a receipt for a hands free device to a judge to have the citation dismissed. [Senate Bill 479](#) by P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville) was passed in the Senate Public Safety Committee Wednesday. Like the House version, the Senate version would require offenders to pay a fine between \$25 and \$100, but the Senate version removed the under-18 prohibition on cell phones. The bill now heads to the Senate Rules Committee before it can head to the Senate floor.

Testing in Public Schools

Last week the Senate voted unanimously to pass out [Senate Bill 367](#) by Senator P.K. Martin (R-Lawrenceville), which would cut the number of required tests in public schools. Earlier in the session, Governor Kemp held a press conference, flanked by both Republican and Democrats, in which he announced he would back legislation that would further reduce the number of tests required for public school students. This push for fewer tests came after Kemp's statewide tour last year in which he listened to the concerns of school leaders, teachers, and parents. Among the concerns the governor heard was the burdensome number of standardized tests that students are required to take each year. Senator Martin echoed these concerns in his presentation of the bill on the Senate floor, noting that the over-burdensome testing environment had been the number one complaint he had received since becoming Senate Education Chairman. In 2016, the legislature already reduced the number of mandatory standardized tests from 32 to 24, but this is still significantly higher than the 17 tests that are required by federal laws. The bill heads next to the House for consideration.



GACVB continues to monitor the ever-evolving COVID-19 (Coronavirus) information. On March 4, GACVB participated as a member of the U. S. Travel Association on an industry-wide call for updates from experts in health, security, economic and travel sectors for a holistic view of coronavirus developments, including the latest on the outbreak and response to the impact on inbound and domestic travel to the U.S. The participants included the CDC, COVID-19 Operations, Customs & Border Protection, Federal Aviation Administration, Department of Transportation, and Tourism Economics.

We are grateful for the information and resources provided by the U. S. Travel Association and Destinations International. Destinations International has launched a [Travel Industry Resource Page](#) regarding COVID-19.

GACVB is receiving updates from the Office of Governor Kemp and encourage all industry partners to stay up to date with information about COVID-19 at [Georgia Department of Public Health](#) and [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

Please take time to review this informational presentation produced by the Georgia Department of Public Health. [Link to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID 19\) Power Point presentation.](#)

For an opinion piece / overview attempt to provide some context and clarity around the COVID-19 outbreak as it relates to the meetings and events industry, [see this article in Meetings Today.](#)

Thank you to our coalition of member ally associations such as Georgia Restaurant Association (GRA) for assisting our local hospitality industry with continued recommendations, resources, and webinars concerning food service and restaurant readiness.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Emergency Preparedness and Response Toolkit for guides, talking points, and facts.](#)

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK (2019-nCoV)

SYMPTOMS* OF NOVEL CORONAVIRUS

Patients with 2019-nCoV have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness.

Symptoms can include

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

*** Symptoms may appear 2–14 days after exposure. If you have been in China within the past 2 weeks and develop symptoms, call your doctor.**



www.cdc.gov/nCoV

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U.S. TRAVEL
ASSOCIATION

[POSTER TO DOWNLOAD for your office and visitor center and share with staff and visitors](#)

U.S. Travel remains in close contact with authorities at the White House, Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Homeland Security and officials at several U.S. airports about ongoing developments and how our industry can be constructive partners to current efforts.

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 government relations recap associated with Winter Conference activities Feb. 24-26 in Valdosta

As the unified voice of Georgia's destination marketing and management organizations, GACVB advocates for the tourism industry at all levels.

**PLAN NOW FOR NEXT YEAR - SAVE THE DATES!
GACVB WINTER CONFERENCE
February 22-24, 2021
*Destination Partner Announced Soon!***

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