
Legislative Lowdown prepared by GACVB &



Legislation potentially affecting Georgia's Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The House and Senate were scheduled to be in session the first week of February for legislative days 10 through 13, but on Wednesday the 5th, the legislature passed a new adjournment resolution, adjourning for the week and rescheduling Day 13 for February 18. The purpose of the prolonged recess is to spend more time working on this year's high stakes budget.

Budget

The budget is the only constitutionally required action item for the legislature each year, but this year's budget is especially challenging following the governor's directive for state agencies to reduce their overall budgets 4 percent for Fiscal Year 2019-2020 and 6 percent for Fiscal Year 2020-2021. It is not uncommon for the House to take a week-long recess in January to hold Appropriations hearings and work on crafting the budget. This year, because of the backdrop of budget cuts and lagging state revenues, House Leadership insisted on a two-week recess and the Senate agreed to the long break. As a result, subcommittees of the House Appropriations Committees have held numerous hearings this week.

Lawmakers grappling with the budget received some positive news this week related to the money that the State is bringing in. Tax collections were up 4.5 percent last month compared to January 2019. The Georgia Department of Revenue collected about \$2.36 billion in taxes in January of this year, which is an increase of \$100.8 million over the same month a year ago.

The Appropriations Committee is divided up into subcommittees to allow members the ability to focus more on specific budget areas. House Appropriations subcommittees include Economic Development, Public Safety, Higher Education, Health and Human Services, and others. The subcommittees will continue to review presentations and data and prepare reports for the consideration of the full committee so the House can develop their version of a final state budget.

Short Term Vacation Rentals and Lodging Taxes

There are two bills directly related to STVRs this session; House Bill 448 by Matt Dollar (R-Marietta) and [House Bill 523](#) by Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton). *Neither bill was addressed in subcommittee or committee this week due to the recess.*

HB 448 is not new as it was introduced in February of 2019, and has been discussed by study committees for a few years. It has undergone significant changes as a result of that public input. 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, for tourism marketing, and for convention centers. Because of the tax implications of the bill it is in the House Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

The most recent action on HB 448 was taken in 2019. That version of the bill can be found [HERE](#). Potential substitute language is currently being circulated. If you would like for us to email you that proposed language, please email your request to Jay@GACVB.com.

[HB 523](#) was also introduced in 2019, but it has been scrutinized less since it's introduction. The sponsor offered the bill as a remedy to over regulation of STVRs and it could be described as a pre-emption bill since it severely limits or eliminates the ability of local governments to regulate STVRs that are rented for less than eight days. The bill was passed out of the House Regulated Industries Committee on Tuesday, February 4, and next heads to the House Rules Committee before it can head to the floor for a full vote in the House. The Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) have both taken positions of opposition to the bill. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce has taken a position of support.

A February 4 news story from WABE regarding HB 523 - [State Lawmakers Advance Bill To Prevent Short Term Rental Bans, Restrictions](#)

Religious Liberty

On Tuesday, Senator Marty Harbin (R-Tyrone) filed [Senate Bill 368](#), which 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. Though he has not yet commented on this piece of legislation, Governor Kemp has made it a legislative priority this session to increase the ease of adoption in Georgia. Senator Harbin has introduced similar legislation in past years.

A February 5 news story from WABE regarding SB 368 - [Bill Would Let Adoption Agencies Deny Placements Based On Religious Beliefs](#)

Sports Marketing

Two bills related to attracting and hosting sports events to Georgia have been introduced by Representative Ron Stephens (R-Savannah), [HB 740 – Creation of a Sports Marketing Fund](#) and [HB 827 – Creation of Georgia Major Sporting Event Reimbursement Fund and Board](#)

[HB 740](#) - Creation of a Sports Marketing Fund, is intended to create a Sports Marketing Fund and Sports Marketing Board to provide funding to sports commissions and be managed by the Georgia Department of Economic Development as the oversight agency. The sports marketing fund

would be administered through a grant process to registered sports commissions meaning certified by the department as the non-profit sports commission reporting to a local chamber or visitors bureau and charged with the bid process of attracting sports events to a municipality.

[HB 827](#) – Creation of Georgia Major Sporting Event Reimbursement Fund and Board, in summary, was introduced to create a fund for non-recurring sports events to allot money not exceeding one-third of the cost of hosting the event towards the preparation, presentation, and execution of each event.

Daylight Savings

A bill that would give Georgians the option to vote on doing away with daylight savings time was heard in committee this week, but did not receive a vote. Representative Wes Cantrell (R-Woodstock) introduced [House Bill 709](#) last session, noting that he receives a large number of phone calls from constituents complaining about the time change and citing the increase in traffic accidents that correspond with the time change. The bill has received a great deal of attention, though some members have expressed concerns about its potential to adversely affect business with other states. Senator Ben Watson (R-Savannah) introduced similar legislation in the Senate. Senate Bill 351 has a long list of co-sponsors from both parties.

Georgia Outdoor Projects - An Update

A variety of land conservation, restoration and parks projects across the state would land the first round of funding through the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act voters approved in November 2018...read more on this February 12, 2020 story from the Capitol Beat News Service [Panel Approves First Round of Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Projects.](#)

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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