

2025 Week 3 Legislative Update



Legislators were in session Monday through Thursday last week for Legislative Days 6 through 9.

Tort Reform

Flanked by dozens of small business leaders from across the state, legislators, and other state leaders on Thursday morning, Governor Kemp announced details of his comprehensive tort reform package. He reemphasized the importance of passing meaningful tort reform this session, again suggesting he would call a special session later this year if it is not accomplished before *Sine Die* on April 4. He noted the package would take the form of two bills and both would be carried by President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon).

In his press conference, Governor Kemp said his package of tort reform legislation will level the playing field in Georgia's courtrooms, ban hostile foreign powers from taking advantage of consumers and legal proceedings, stabilize insurance costs for businesses and consumers, and increase transparency and fairness.

The legislation will address:

- **Premises liability:** Ensures property owners and businesses are only held liable for what they directly control.
- **Phantom damages:** Requires the plaintiff to only seek damages in the amount actually paid for a medical bill, rather than the inflated amount that is currently introduced in evidence.
- **Anchoring:** Eliminates the ability to arbitrarily anchor pain and suffering damages to a jury, and instead allowing juries to use their own discretion. The legislation would not place any limit on the jury's discretion.
- **Bifurcated trials:** Permits a party in a case to move for bifurcation of the trial, so that liability must be established before the jury hears evidence detailing the extent of the plaintiff's damages.
- **Admissible seatbelt evidence:** Removes the current exclusion from the evidence code that prevents the defendant from showing evidence the plaintiff was not wearing his or her seatbelt in an auto accident.
- **Eliminating double recovery of attorney's fees:** Closes a loophole that allowed plaintiff's counsel to recover their fees twice for the same lawsuit.
- **Eliminating plaintiff dismissal during trial:** Amends the timeline for voluntary dismissal, which would put an end to the practice of plaintiffs dismissing a case and refile in a more favorable jurisdiction to them.

- **Motion to dismiss timing changes:** Changes the civil practice act to allow a defendant to file a motion to dismiss in lieu of an answer, which would cut down on discovery expenses while a motion to dismiss is pending.
- **Reforming third party litigation funding:** Bans hostile foreign adversaries like China and Russia from financing suits against Georgia companies to gain intellectual property or to pursue their own political agendas. It also prohibits litigation funders from having any input into the litigation strategy or from taking the plaintiff's whole recovery and making sure plaintiffs are aware of their rights. It increases transparency when it comes to third party litigation for all parties by requiring any litigation financiers to register with the Georgia Department of Banking and Finance and establishing basic guidelines for litigation funds that protect consumers and plaintiffs.

Governor Kemp's Other Legislative Priorities

This week the governor's floor leaders introduced several pieces of legislation that are priorities for Governor Kemp this year.

[House Bill 111](#), introduced by Representative Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville), would accelerate the decrease in the state income tax from 5.39 percent to 5.19 percent for 2025. As part of previously passed legislation, the income tax rate will continue decreasing 0.1 percent each year until it reaches 4.99 percent.

[House Bill 112](#), introduced by Representative Lauren McDonald (R-Cumming), would provide for a one-time tax credit for all Georgia taxpayers who filed returns in 2023 and 2024. Single taxpayers would receive \$250, married taxpayers filing jointly would receive \$500, and taxpayers filing as heads of household would receive a \$375 rebate.

[House Bill 113](#), also introduced by Representative Lauren McDonald this week, would strengthen restrictions on purchases made by the state or state agencies from foreign entities that are considered security threats. The measure would expand the power of the Georgia Technology Authority to include evaluating security risks involved with technology-related purchases.

[Senate Bill 42](#), introduced this week by Senator Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia) on behalf of First Lady Marty Kemp, is the administration's tenth piece of legislation to fight against human trafficking. Currently, the conduct prohibited by Georgia's human trafficking statute against minors is substantially similar to the conduct prohibited by the crime of keeping a place of prostitution, pimping, and pandering against minors. Rule of lenity, a legal principle asserting courts should apply the more favorable sentence to defendants when the law is ambiguous, could lead to judges awarding lesser sentences to offenders as a result of this loophole. This legislation seeks to close that potential loophole.

Social Issues

[Senate Bill 36](#), the 'Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act,' or 'RFRA' was introduced this week by Senator Ed Setzler (R-Acworth) and includes 33 Republican signers. The proposed legislation would restrict state and local governments from burdening a person's exercise of religion, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability. The bill's language mirrors a federal RFRA law that does not currently apply at the state or local levels. A similar bill from Senator Setzler was passed by the Senate last session, but it did not make it out of the House for final passage.

Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Ben Watson (R-Savannah) introduced [Senate Bill 30](#) this week, which would prohibit the prescription and administration of certain medical procedures and treatments for minors related to gender dysphoria. The bill would expand the prohibition to include both irreversible and reversible treatments, including hormone replacement therapy. The bill would remove the exception for minors who were already receiving hormone replacement therapy before July 1, 2023. It explicitly allows the parents and guardians of minors who receive these prohibited treatments and procedures to seek civil or criminal remedies. The bill, which has 30 Republican cosigners, has been assigned to the Health and Human Services Committee for consideration.

[Senate Bill 39](#), introduced this week by Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia), would specifically prohibit coverage for expenses associated with gender-affirming care under the State Health Benefit Plan or with any state funds. It would specifically prohibit healthcare facilities owned or operated by the state and healthcare providers employed by a state agency from providing gender-affirming care. The measure, which includes two Democratic signers, Senators Freddie Powell Sims (D-Dawson), and Ed Harbison (D-Columbus), has been assigned to the Insurance and Labor Committee for consideration.

Gun-Related Legislation

Several more gun-related bills were dropped this week in addition to the handful introduced in the first week of session.

[Senate Bill 47](#), introduced this week by Senator Jason Anavitarte (R-Dallas), would create an 11-day sales tax holiday in October on firearms, ammo, gun safes, and gun accessories such as stocks, barrels, and scopes. The bill has been assigned to the Senate Finance Committee for consideration.

[Senate Bill 49](#), sponsored by Senator Elena Parent (D-Atlanta), would establish the offense of making a firearm accessible to a child under 17. Exemptions would include supervised access for hunting or if the child gained access to the firearm by illegally entering the property. The measure would also require firearms dealers to post signage about unsecured firearms. The bill has been assigned to the Judiciary Committee for consideration.

[Senate Bill 53](#) by Senator Emanuel Jones (D-Decatur) would establish a program within the Department of Public Safety to educate the public on the safe storage of firearms. The measure was assigned to the Public Safety Committee for consideration.

Government Efficiency and Transparency

This week Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) introduced [Senate Bill 28](#), the 'Red Tape Rollback Act of 2025,' which is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. The legislation would require all state agencies to complete a top-to-bottom review of all agency rules and regulations every four years. Agencies would be required to account for the economic impact of all proposed rules and provide economic reports to the General Assembly when major rules are proposed. State agencies would also be directed to reduce compliance and paperwork burdens on small businesses, when feasible. Under the measure, legislators would also have the ability to request a "Small Business Impact Analysis" for pending legislation. The measure has been assigned to the Economic Development and Tourism Committee.

Senator Marty Harbin (R-Tyrone) introduced [Senate Bill 46](#), the ‘Government Serves the People Act.’ The measure seeks to improve government service delivery by creating a new position within the Georgia Technology Authority called the State of Georgia Government Service Delivery Lead. This individual would be responsible for coordinating government-wide efforts to improve service delivery. Each agency head would also be required to appoint a lead agency service delivery official who would be responsible for implementing service delivery improvements within their agency. The bill has been assigned to the Government Oversight Committee for consideration.

On the House side, this week Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington) announced continued government transparency efforts, which will be conducted through the House Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight Committee. The committee, which will be chaired by Representative Steve Tarvin (R-Chickamauga), will conduct reviews of state agencies to determine their compliance with code and to ensure that legislative intent was considered during the rule-making process. The committee is also tasked with leading efforts to reduce burdensome bureaucratic regulations and demand transparency and efficiency from state agencies.

Immigration

This week Senator Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) introduced [Senate Bill 21](#), which would waive sovereign and governmental immunity for local governments, officials, and employees if they violate the prohibition on sanctuary cities. It would also require sheriffs, jailers, and deputies to honor immigration detainer requests issued by the Department of Homeland Security. The bill has been assigned to the Public Safety Committee for consideration.

Medicaid Expansion

This week Senator David Lucas (D-Macon) introduced [Senate Bill 50](#), the “PeachCare Plus Act of 2025” to expand Medicaid in Georgia. The bill’s cosigners include three Republicans—Senator Carden Summers (R-Cordele), Senator Russ Goodman (R-Cogdell), and Senator Sam Watson (R-Moultrie).

The bill would expand Medicaid eligibility to those earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, require the Department of Community Health to submit a waiver to the federal government for the PeachCare Plus Program no later than October 31, 2026, and would create an 11-member advisory commission to oversee the process. The bill has been assigned to the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee.

Governor Kemp has made it clear that he is opposed to a full expansion of Medicaid in Georgia. During the first week of session, he announced a proposed change to the Georgia Pathways program that would provide Medicaid coverage to parents and legal guardians in households with incomes at or below 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level who have children ages 0 to 6. This proposal would extend Medicaid coverage for new mothers after their one-year postpartum period expires and would provide previously unavailable coverage to eligible new fathers.

Artificial Intelligence

This week Senator John Albers (R-Roswell) introduced [Senate Bill 37](#), the ‘AI Accountability Act.’ The bill would require all governmental entities to develop and maintain artificial intelligence system usage plans and create the Georgia Board for Artificial Intelligence, a 12-member board appointed by the Governor,

Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker, to oversee AI-related matters. The measure has been assigned to the Economic Development and Tourism Committee for consideration.

[House Bill 147](#), introduced this week by Representative Brad Thomas (R-Holly Springs), would require the Georgia Technology Authority to conduct an annual inventory of artificial intelligence systems used by state agencies by the end of 2025 and develop and establish policies and procedures for AI systems by the end of 2026. The bill has been assigned to the Technology and Infrastructure Innovation Committee.

Truck Weights

This week Representative Steven Meeks (R-Screven) introduced [House Bill 164](#), which deals with truck weights. The final version of [House Bill 189](#) that was passed during the 2023 legislative session increased the allowable weight limit for big trucks from 84,000 to 88,000 pounds for vehicles hauling agricultural and forest products. The bill also allows local law enforcement the ability to enforce weight limits on local roads; increases the monetary penalties for overweight vehicles on roads and posted bridges; and restricts vehicles receiving the higher variance from traveling outside of a 150-mile radius of the farm or point of origin, and from traveling in metro Atlanta counties designated as non-attainment areas. With the exception of the increased penalties, the provisions of the bill have a July 1, 2025 sunset.

House Bill 164 would remove the sunset on the provisions of House Bill 189, which would allow the increased truck weight to be permitted permanently for areas where it currently applies.