



2025 Week 5 Legislative Update

Legislators were in session Monday through Thursday this week for Legislative Days 14 through 17. The Senate took up a handful of contentious bills this week, which made for several long days of debate on the floor, but at this point in the session, most bills are still making their way through the committee process. Several committees held hours-long meetings to consider legislation, including the Senate Judiciary Committee, which debated Governor Kemp's tort reform measures for more than five hours.

The House has turned its attention to the Fiscal Year 2026 budget after passing their recommendations for the Amended Fiscal Year 2025 budget, [House Bill 67](#), last week. House Appropriations subcommittees will continue meeting next week as they work to finalize their FY26 budget recommendations. This week their Senate colleagues held Appropriations subcommittee hearings focused on the AFY25 budget.

Legislators have about two and a half weeks left to get their bills passed out of their assigned committee and chamber of origin—Crossover Day is March 6. The General Assembly will reconvene for Legislative Day 18 on Tuesday.

Speaker Burns's chief of staff and former House member Terry England is recovering from a serious heavy machinery accident on his home farm in Barrow County that happened over the weekend. As Terry recovers, Speaker Burns named Chris Riley as his interim chief of staff through the end of the 2025 Legislative Session. Chris Riley served as chief of staff to Governor Nathan Deal from 2011 to 2018. Speaker Burns said this week that "while we're deeply saddened by the circumstances of this transition, Chris brings a wealth of experience and knowledge that will be invaluable as we continue our work on behalf of the people of our great state."

Tort Reform

Senate Bills 68 and 69 were presented by President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon) and debated in a marathon five-hour Judiciary Committee on Monday evening. Governor Kemp has been clear that tort reform is his top priority this session—he has said he will call a special session later this year if comprehensive tort reform legislation is not passed before the legislature adjourns on April 4.

[Senate Bill 68](#) proposes comprehensive changes in provisions regarding civil practice, evidentiary matters, damages, and liability in tort actions. The version of the legislation presented in committee on Monday was a substitute that reflects compromise language in several sections.

- Section 1: Noneconomic Damages
 - Allows attorneys to argue the monetary value of noneconomic damages only after the close of evidence, as long as it is supported by the evidence and does not include references to arbitrary or unsubstantiated anchors.
- Section 2: Answers and Discovery
 - Sets deadlines for answers and motions and introduces a potential 90-day stay of discovery after a motion to dismiss is filed.
 - A motion to dismiss triggers a potential 90-day discovery stay, requiring the court to rule within that timeframe. This aims to resolve preliminary legal issues before costly discovery.
- Section 3: Dismissal of Actions
 - The proposed change would only allow the plaintiff to voluntarily dismiss the lawsuit and refile it once. A second voluntary dismissal acts as a final judgement, preventing any further attempts to bring that case.
- Section 4: Attorney's Fees
 - Prevents attorneys from recovering fees multiple times
- Section 5: Seatbelt Admissibility
 - Current law bars the admissibility of seatbelt usage as evidence of negligence or causation. The legislation would provide that the failure to wear a seatbelt *may* be considered as evidence.
- Section 6: Negligent Security
 - Currently, business owners can be held liable for the actions of third parties on their premises. The changes would set the standards for when a negligent security claim can be brought, creating differing standards (invitee, licensee, trespasser). The bill mandates the apportionment of fault among all potentially responsible parties, including the property owner/occupier, the third party who committed the wrongful act, and any other contributing factors, in negligent security claims.
 - The substitute includes a carve-out for human trafficking victims attempting to bring a claim.
- Section 7: Special Damages
 - Adds a new section limiting recoverable medical expenses to those that are reasonable and customary. Sets specific rules for how insured plaintiffs can recover medical expenses. Includes provisions for the recovery of certain insurance premium costs under specific conditions.
- Section 8: Trial Bifurcation

- Currently, juries hear about liability and damages in a single trial. This bill would allow either party to elect to separate these two distinct aspects of trials. If passed, trials could be bifurcated so that juries could consider the liability question first and damages later.

After Senator Kennedy's presentation of the bill, advocates for and against the legislation were each allotted one hour for testimony. Small and mid-size business owners spoke in favor of the legislation, as did the Georgia Hospital Association, Independent Insurance Agents of Georgia, and Insurance Commissioner John King. Commissioner King testified that the legislation would encourage competition in the insurance market and that it would, at a minimum, slow the rate of increase for the cost of insurance. Personal injury attorneys, negligent security attorneys, and the Georgia Trial Lawyer Association testified in opposition.

After a contentious committee debate, Senate Bill 68 ended up passing by a vote of 8 to 3 along party lines.

[Senate Bill 69](#), the 'Georgia Courts Access and Consumer Protection Act,' would regulate third-party litigation financing practices in the state. It would ban 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 would also prohibit 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 would increase 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.

There was significantly less committee testimony and debate on Senate Bill 69, and the measure passed out of committee 10 to 1.

Senate Bills 68 and 69 are now both eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for a vote on the Senate floor.

Governor Kemp's Priorities

In addition to the two tort reform measures, several other bills that are priorities for Governor Kemp saw movement this week.

[House Bill 111](#), which is being carried by Representative Soo Hong (R-Lawrenceville), would accelerate the reduction 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 decrease 0.1 percent each year until it reaches 4.99 percent.

[House Bill 112](#), which is being carried 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 tax rebate.

House Bills 111 and 112 were passed out of the Ways and Means Income Tax Subcommittee earlier in the week and were then approved by the full Ways and Means Committee. The measures must be selected by the Rules Committee to be considered on the House floor.

[House Bill 113](#), also being carried by Representative Lauren McDonald, is intended to strengthen restrictions on future 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. The bill was passed out of the House Governmental Affairs Committee on Wednesday and is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee.

On Monday the House Education Committee passed [House Bill 192](#), the 'Top State for Talent Act,' which is being carried by Representative Matthew Gambill (R-Cartersville). The bill would incorporate the Georgia MATCH program into individual graduation plans for students beginning in 9th grade; align existing career-tech and academic credentials with the high demand career list; and include a return on investment analysis measuring the effectiveness of the state's secondary and postsecondary programs.

Social Issues

On Tuesday the Senate considered [Senate Bill 39](#), sponsored by Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia), which would specifically prohibit the coverage of expenses associated with gender-affirming care under the State Health Benefit Plan or with the use of any state funds. It would prohibit healthcare facilities owned or operated by the state and healthcare providers employed by a state agency from providing gender-affirming care. Senate Bill 140 from 2023 banned gender transition procedures for minors, but a recent settlement required the State Health Benefit Plan to cover transgender-related care. The bill was amended in committee to include a January 1, 2026 effective date. After a lengthy debate on the Senate floor on Wednesday, the measure passed 33 to 19. It now heads to the House for consideration.

Another measure related to transgender treatment cleared a legislative hurdle this week. [Senate Bill 30](#) by Health and Human Services Chairman Ben Watson (R-Savannah) 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. It ultimately was favorably reported out of committee, so it is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee to receive a floor vote.

This week Senator Marty Harbin (R-Tyrone) introduced [Senate Bill 120](#), which would prohibit public schools, local education agencies, public colleges and universities, and the Technical College System of Georgia from promoting, supporting, or maintaining any programs or activities that advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond what is required by the equal protection clause of the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions. The legislation proposes withholding state funding and state-administered funding from postsecondary institutions that violate the provisions of the bill. If passed, the bill would take effect July 1, 2025 and apply to schools beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. The measure, which includes 16 Republican cosigners, has been assigned to the Higher Education Committee for consideration.

Gun Sales Tax Holiday

There have been a number of gun-related pieces of legislation introduced so far this session. On Wednesday the Senate considered a measure by Senator Jason Anavitarte (R-Dallas) that would create a sales tax holiday for guns. [Senate Bill 47](#) proposes an 11-day sales tax exemption on the sale of firearms, gun safes, ammo, and other accessories beginning the second Friday of October each year. The version of the bill that came out of the Finance Committee included a 2030 sunset. After a lengthy debate on the Senate floor, the measure passed 31 to 21. It now heads to the House for consideration.

Government Efficiency and Transparency

On Wednesday the Senate Government Oversight Committee approved [Senate Bill 46](#), the 'Government Serves the People Act.' The measure by Senator Marty Harbin (R-Tyrone) 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.

Another bill passed by the Government Oversight Committee, [Senate Bill 96](#), would eliminate several state boards that have been inactive for several years. Any critical functions and responsibilities would be transferred to the appropriate state agency or another state board that is active. The legislation, which is being carried by Governor's Floor Leader Drew Echols (R-Gainesville), is cosigned by 22 Republicans.

Immigration

On Thursday the Senate took up [Senate Bill 21](#) by Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia), 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 a custodial authority, which includes sheriffs, wardens, chiefs of police, and others, to honor immigration detainer requests issued by the Department of Homeland Security. After a lengthy

debate on the floor, the Senate voted to pass the bill 33 to 18. It now heads to the House for consideration.

Another bill introduced by Senator Tim Bearden (R-Carrollton) this week, [Senate Bill 116](#), would require the collection of DNA samples from any individual in a detention facility charged with a misdemeanor or felony who is subject to an immigration detainer notice. Current law requires a DNA sample to be collected from individuals convicted of a felony. The measure, which includes 12 Republican cosponsors, has been assigned to the Public Safety Committee for consideration.

[House Bill 319](#), introduced this week by Representative David Clark (R-Buford), would provide penalties for state and local officials and employees who knowingly and willingly violate any state law related to concealing, harboring, or shielding an illegal alien guilty of a criminal offense. Government officials or employees found in violation of the law would be subject to prosecution by the Attorney General and could be removed by the Governor. The bill has been assigned to the Judiciary Non-Civil Committee for consideration.

School Choice for Foster Families

This week Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones announced one of his priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session: expanding school choice to foster families. Last session the General Assembly passed [Senate Bill 233](#), the 'Georgia Promise Scholarship Act,' which provides a \$6,500 per student scholarship to families for qualified education-related expenses outside of the public school system for students who attend the lowest performing public schools in the state.

[Senate Bill 152](#), introduced by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) this week, would extend the provisions of the Promise Scholarship Act to the biological and adopted children of foster parents. The measure has been assigned to the Education and Youth Committee for consideration.