



2025 Week 7 Legislative Update

Legislators were in session every day this week (Feb. 24–28) except Tuesday for Legislative Days 22 through 25. Tuesday served as a Committee Work Day. With Crossover Day—Legislative Day 28—quickly approaching on Thursday, March 6, the countdown is on for House and Senate members working to pass their bills this session. Any bill that does not make it out of committee and pass at least one chamber before adjournment next Thursday will be effectively dead for the 2025 session, unless its language is successfully attached to a related bill later this year.

Amended Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

This week, the Senate approved its version of the Amended Fiscal Year 2025 (AFY25) budget with a 55-1 vote. On Wednesday, Appropriations Committee Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) presented House Bill 67 on the Senate floor, outlining key changes the Senate made to the House's version. One of the most notable adjustments was the addition of substantial funding for Hurricane Helene recovery, reallocating resources from various areas originally recommended by the governor and House.

Key Highlights of the Senate's AFY25 Budget:

- **Hurricane Helene Recovery:** An additional \$125 million, bringing the total storm damage funding to \$750 million, with some funds allocated through nonprofits and competitive grants.
- **Water Resources:** The Senate agreed with the House and governor's recommendation of \$502 million for the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority to develop additional surface water resources for Georgia's coastal region and added \$200 million for other counties to apply.
- **Medical Education:** Maintained \$25 million each for Mercer School of Medicine and Morehouse School of Medicine to address rural doctor shortages.
- **School Safety:** \$50 million for school safety grants, translating to nearly \$70,000 per school this year.
- **State Employee Retirement:** \$500 million to strengthen the State Employees' Retirement System.
- **Emergency Communications:** \$5.75 million to fund Next Gen 911.



- **Medical Residency Expansion:** An additional \$20 million to expand residency programs in middle and southern Georgia.
- **Legislative Budget Cuts:** A \$200,000 reduction in State Senate funding.
- **Tax Refunds:** Maintained the plan to refund \$250 per individual and \$500 per married couple who pay state income taxes.
- **Freight & Infrastructure:**
 - \$500 million for freight and logistics.
 - \$800,000 for additional rail upgrades to reduce truck congestion.
 - \$15 million for local road and infrastructure projects.
 - \$53 million to the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank.
- **Election Equipment:** The Senate eliminated the Secretary of State's plan for new scanners and machines, redirecting those savings to storm relief.
- **Corrections Facility:** Maintained funding for the design of a new corrections facility.
- **Olympic Cauldron Relocation:** The Senate rejected the \$833,000 proposed by the House to move the Olympic cauldron to Centennial Park.

Following its 55-1 passage, the Senate immediately transmitted the AFY25 budget back to the House for consideration.

Tort Reform

After passing the Senate last week with a 33-21 vote, Senate Bill 68, one of Governor Kemp's tort reform measures, was assigned to the House Rules Committee for consideration.

On Wednesday, Rules Committee Chairman Butch Parrish (R-Swainsboro) announced the creation of a subcommittee dedicated to lawsuit reform bills, stating, *"We are going to pass substantive, meaningful tort reform this session."*

Subcommittee on Lawsuit Reform Members:

- Representative Rob Leverett (R-Elberton), Chairman
- Speaker Pro Tempore Jan Jones (R-Milton)



- Majority Leader Chuck Efration (R-Mulberry)
- Rules Committee Chairman Butch Parrish (R-Swainsboro)
- Judiciary Committee Chairman Stan Gunter (R-Blairsville)
- Appropriations Committee Chairman Matt Hatchett (R-Dublin)
- Representative Mark Newton (R-Augusta)
- Representative Al Williams (D-Midway)
- Minority Caucus Whip Sam Park (D-Lawrenceville)
- Minority Caucus Chairman Tanya Miller (D-Atlanta)
- Representative Stacey Evans (D-Atlanta)

On Thursday afternoon, the newly formed Subcommittee on Lawsuit Reform held a hearing on Senate Bill 68. President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon) presented the bill, highlighting that nuclear verdicts cost Georgians over \$5,000 per household annually. He argued that rising insurance premiums—caused by Georgia’s legal landscape—are forcing businesses to close and making it harder for Georgians to access healthcare and groceries.

This initial meeting was a hearing only, meaning the bill still requires a formal committee vote to advance in the legislative process.

On Thursday, the Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 69, the Georgia Courts Access and Consumer Protection Act, also sponsored by President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon). The bill aims to regulate third-party litigation financing in Georgia by:

- Banning hostile foreign adversaries (e.g., China and Russia) from financing lawsuits against Georgia companies to gain intellectual property or push political agendas.
- Prohibiting litigation funders from influencing legal strategy or taking the plaintiff’s entire recovery.
- Ensuring plaintiffs are informed of their rights.
- Increasing transparency by requiring litigation financiers to register with the Georgia Department of Banking and Finance and comply with consumer protection guidelines.



On Friday, Senate Bill 69 was assigned to the House Subcommittee on Lawsuit Reform for further consideration.

Religious Freedom Restoration Act

On Thursday the Senate Judiciary Committee took up [Senate Bill 36](#), the *Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA)*, sponsored by Senator Ed Setzler (R-Acworth). The legislation, backed by 33 Republican cosigners, would prevent state and local governments from burdening a person's exercise of religion, even if the burden arises from a generally applicable rule. The bill's language mirrors the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which does not currently apply at the state or local level. A similar bill from Senator Setzler passed the Senate last session but failed to advance in the House.

On Thursday, the Judiciary Committee approved the measure, making it eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for consideration on the Senate floor.

Sports Betting

On Thursday afternoon the Senate Regulated Industries Committee considered [Senate Resolution 131](#), a proposal to amend Georgia's constitution to legalize sports betting and casino gaming.

Sponsored by Senator Carden Summers (R-Cordele), the resolution would establish a gaming commission to regulate and tax these activities. Under the proposal:

- The General Assembly would create a system for issuing at least eight casino gaming licenses.
- Sports betting and casino gambling would be taxed at 20% of gross income, with revenue deposited into the newly created Georgia Gaming Proceeds Fund.
- The first \$2 billion in revenue would be evenly distributed among Georgia's county governments.
- At least 5% of proceeds exceeding \$2 billion would be allocated to addiction prevention and treatment programs.

When put to a committee vote, a majority of members opposed the measure, preventing it from moving forward.

Red Tape Rollback



On Wednesday the Senate considered [Senate Bill 28](#), the *Red Tape Rollback Act of 2025*, sponsored by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming). The legislation, a priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, aims to streamline state regulations and reduce bureaucratic burdens. The bill would require all state agencies to conduct a comprehensive review of their rules and regulations every four years. Agencies would also need to assess the economic impact of proposed rules and submit reports to the General Assembly when a rule is expected to cost individuals, businesses, or local governments more than \$1 million over five years. Additionally, state agencies would be directed to reduce compliance and paperwork burdens on small businesses whenever feasible. The legislation would also give lawmakers the ability to request a “Small Business Impact Analysis” for pending bills.

The measure passed the Senate 33-21 and has been assigned to the House Budget and Fiscal Affairs Oversight Committee for further consideration.

Transgender Athletes

On Thursday the House considered [House Bill 267](#), the *Riley Gaines Act*, sponsored by Representative Josh Bonner (R-Fayetteville). The legislation would prohibit biological males from competing on sports teams designated for girls and women at all levels. It would also require separate changing facilities, bathrooms, and locker rooms for athletic events, and it would prevent athletic scholarships designated for women from being awarded to biological males. Additionally, private schools that compete against public schools would be required to follow the same standards outlined in the bill. As a legislative priority for Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington), the measure passed the House 102-54 after a lengthy floor debate.

A similar piece of legislation that originated in the Senate, [Senate Bill 1](#), known as the *Fair and Safe Athletic Opportunities Act*, is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. The bill has already passed the Senate 35-17 and has been assigned to the House Education Committee for consideration.

Lieutenant Governor’s Legislative Priorities

On Wednesday, the Senate approved [Senate Bill 79](#), the *Fentanyl Eradication and Removal Act*, a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones this session. Sponsored by Senator Russ Goodman (R-Cogdell), the bill would impose stricter criminal penalties for fentanyl-related offenses. The measure would remove fentanyl from Georgia’s existing statutes on possessing, selling, distributing, manufacturing, and trafficking opiates, creating a separate schedule of offenses specific to fentanyl and its related substances. Currently, possession penalties apply to amounts starting at one gram, but under this bill, fentanyl mixtures combined with any other drug



would be weighed in their entirety under the fentanyl schedule. The legislation passed on the Senate floor 50-3 and now moves to the House for consideration.

This week the Senate Education and Youth Committee approved [Senate Bill 152](#) sponsored by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming), by a narrow 6-5 vote. The measure would expand the provisions of the *Promise Scholarship Act* to include the biological and adopted children of foster parents. Last session, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 233, known as the *Georgia Promise Scholarship Act*, which provides a \$6,500 per student scholarship for families to cover qualified education-related expenses outside the public school system for students attending the lowest-performing public schools in the state. Senate Bill 152 builds on this initiative and is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones this session.

Protections for IVF

On Thursday, the House unanimously passed [House Bill 428](#), a measure sponsored by Representative Lehman Franklin (R-Statesboro) that would codify protections for in vitro fertilization (IVF) in Georgia. The legislation is a priority for Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington), who praised its passage, stating, *“I’m incredibly proud of today’s passage of HB 428, which ensures Georgians struggling with infertility will never have to question their ability to seek medical assistance with starting or growing their families.”* Representative Franklin, the bill’s sponsor, shared his personal connection to the issue, saying, *“Thanks to the assistance of IVF, my wife and I are expecting our first daughter later this year. I’m grateful to my colleagues in the House for their support of this legislation that will preserve the life-changing miracle of IVF for every Georgia family.”*

The measure now moves to the Senate for consideration.

Chronic Absenteeism

On Wednesday the Senate unanimously passed [Senate Bill 123](#), a measure aimed at addressing chronic absenteeism in schools across Georgia. Sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon), the bill takes a localized approach, working with families, administrators, and chronically absent students to review individual cases and find targeted solutions.

The legislation would require local boards of education to implement policies for identifying and intervening with chronically absent students, focusing on the root causes of their absences. It would also task school climate committees with developing a comprehensive framework to improve student attendance. Additionally, the bill would establish localized attendance review teams responsible for determining effective strategies to reduce absenteeism and reporting their progress to the General Assembly.



The measure now moves to the House for consideration.