

2024 Legislative Update Week 3



This week the legislature convened for its second full week of the 2024 Legislative Session after meeting for budget hearings last week. The House and Senate were in session Monday through Friday this week for Legislative Days 6 through 10. Committee action picked up considerably this week, as did the number of bills introduced each day.

The General Assembly will be back in session next week Monday through Thursday for Legislative Days 11 through 14. Members have only about a month remaining to shepherd their bills through the committee process and get them passed out of their chamber of origin for them to have a chance of passing this year—Crossover Day is set for Thursday, February 29.

Tax Cuts

On Wednesday, Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington) held a press conference to announce a package of proposed legislation to bring tax relief to Georgians.

- Representative Lauren Daniel (R-Locust Grove) is sponsoring [House Bill 1021](#), which would raise the child tax deduction from \$3,000 to \$4,000.
- Representative Matt Reeves (R-Duluth) is sponsoring [House Bill 1019](#), which would double the homestead exemption from \$2,000 to \$4,000.
- Ways and Means Chairman Shaw Blackmon (R-Bonaire) is sponsoring [House Bill 1024](#), which would remove the cap on the Revenue Shortfall Reserve, which would allow the state to save responsibly, build its reserves, and provide more taxpayer relief in the short-term and long-term.
- Governor's Floor Leader Lauren McDonald (R-Cumming) is sponsoring, [House Bill 1015](#), which would accelerate the cut to the state income tax from 5.75 percent to 5.39 percent, which would return approximately another \$1 billion to taxpayers.

Social Issues

There were a number of social issue-related bills that were introduced this week:

- [House Bill 943](#) by Representative Rick Jasperse (R-Jasper) would exempt firearms, ammunition, gun safes, and related accessories from sales and use taxes during an 11-day period each year. Senator Jason Anavitarte has already introduced a similar bill, [Senate Bill 344](#), in the Senate.
- [House Bill 971](#) by Representative Mark Newton (R-Augusta) would provide a tax credit for certain eligible expenses incurred for firearm safe handling instructional courses and firearm secure storage devices.
- [Senate Bill 365](#) by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) would require notification via email to the parent or legal guardian of a public school student each time their child obtains school library materials and would identify materials that are subject to the complaint resolution policy for materials “harmful to minors.”
- [House Bill 936](#) by Representative Josh Bonner (R-Fayetteville) was first read in the House Monday. The bill would require multiple occupancy restrooms and changing areas in public schools to be designated for exclusive use by males or females.
- [House Resolution 836](#) by Representative Kim Schofield (D-Atlanta) would amend Georgia’s constitution to provide that every individual has a fundamental right to reproductive freedom, and such right shall not be denied, burdened, or infringed upon unless justified by a compelling state interest. Minority Leader James Beverly (D-Macon) is the second signer on the bill, which has been assigned to the Rules Committee.

Sports Betting

This week Senator Clint Dixon (R-Buford) introduced a measure that would legalize sports betting in Georgia. The 12 bipartisan cosponsors of [Senate Bill 386](#) include Minority Leader Gloria Butler (D-Stone Mountain) and Governor’s Floor Leader Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia).

Several sports betting bills filed last session failed to receive final passage, including Senator Billy Hickman’s [Senate Bill 57](#), which would have allowed sports betting and fixed-odds betting on horseracing, which failed on the Senate floor; [Senate Resolution 140](#), authored by Senator Bill Cowsert (R-Athens), which proposed an amendment to the Georgia Constitution to legalize sports betting, and did not receive the requisite two-third majority required for a constitutional amendment; and [House Bill 380](#), sponsored by Representative Marcus Wiedower (R-Watkinsville), which would legalize sports betting and place it under the purview of the Georgia Lottery. House Bill 380 was never called up for a floor vote on Crossover Day.

There are two schools of thought regarding the legalization of sports betting in Georgia. If an amendment to the state constitution is required to authorize sports betting, it would require two-thirds majorities in both the House and Senate and would then require a majority of voters to agree. Last year former chief justice of the Georgia Supreme Court Harold Melton wrote a legal opinion stating that “sports betting can be legalized as a state-run lottery for educational purposes solely through legislative action,” meaning that a constitutional amendment would not be required since there is already a constitutional amendment to allow for the Georgia Lottery.

Elections Bills

Of the dozens of pieces of legislation introduced this week, many of them were related to the oversight and administration of elections in Georgia. Some of the measures introduced this week include:

- [House Bill 948](#) by Representative Martin Momtahan (R-Dallas), [House Bill 998](#) by Representative Mitchell Horner (R-Ringgold) and [House Bill 975](#) by Representative John LaHood (R-Valdosta), which would prohibit bar codes, QR codes, and other machine codes on ballots printed by electronic markers.
- [Senate Bill 367](#) by Senator Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville), which would eliminate drop boxes for absentee ballots.
- [Senate Resolution 454](#) by Senator Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville), which proposes an amendment to Georgia’s constitution that would clarify that only citizens of the United States have a right to vote in elections in the state.
- [House Bill 986](#) by Representative Brad Thomas (R-Holly Springs), which would establish the criminal offense of election interference with a deep fake and solicitation. This piece of legislation was specifically mentioned by Speaker Jon Burns in his remarks at the Georgia Chamber’s Eggs and Issues breakfast during the first week of the session. Senator John Albers (R-Roswell) introduced a similar measure in the Senate, [Senate Bill 392](#).
- [House Bill 974](#) by Representative John LaHood (R-Valdosta), which would require the Secretary of State to maintain and establish a statewide system for the posting of scanned paper ballots.

Another election-related piece of legislation saw movement in the committee process this week. [Senate Bill 358](#), sponsored by Senate Ethics Committee Chairman Max Burns (R-Sylvania) was passed by substitute in the Ethics Committee this week. The bill, which was introduced during the first week of session, removes the secretary of state from the State Elections Board and gives the State Elections Board the authority to investigate election officials. The bill is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones.

Antisemitism Legislation

Last session, Representative John Carson (R-Marietta) and Representative Esther Panitch (D-Sandy Springs), who is the only Jewish member of the General Assembly, introduced [House Bill 30](#), which would provide a legal definition of ‘antisemitism’ in Georgia Code and would add any antisemitic actions to Georgia’s hate crimes statute. The measure was passed by the House last session, but had not yet been considered by the full Senate. After a lengthy hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee this week, the measure was passed and was then considered by the full Senate on Thursday. The Senate passed the bill 44 to 6 and immediately transmitted it back to the House for final passage. The House went on to pass the measure 129 to 5 later Thursday afternoon and it is now on its way to Governor Kemp’s desk.

Tort Reform Protections for Gun Manufacturers and Property Owners

This week Senate Majority Caucus Leader Jason Anavitate (R-Dallas) announced his intention to introduce the Second Amendment Lawsuit Protection Act, which would provide liability protection to property owners and gun manufacturers against frivolous lawsuits. The measure comes following the passage of Senator Anavitate’s constitutional carry legislation last session. He said the bill “aims to protect gun manufactures domiciled in Georgia so they can continue to build these constitutionally protected tools unmolested by trial lawyers. This legislation will provide strict immunity protection under state law to protect against changes in federal law or out of state lawyers looking to harm Georgia’s businesses.” Senator Anavitate plans to file the legislation in early February.

Senate Special Committee on Investigations

This week Senate Transportation Chairman Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) introduced legislation to establish the Senate Special Committee on Investigations. This legislation comes in response to a series of public reports, court filings, and allegations of misconduct involving Fani Willis, the District Attorney of the Atlanta Judicial Circuit. The proposed legislation seeks to establish the Senate Special Committee on Investigation, which would be made up of nine members, including three from the minority party. The committee would be assigned to conduct a legislative investigation and would have the power to call any party to testify under oath.

Tax Credits

This week Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome) introduced [Senate Bill 366](#), the “Tax Expenditures Transparency Act of 2024.” The bill creates the Joint Committee on Taxation and Economic Development, which would meet in odd-numbered

years to investigate and review the fiscal and economic impact of tax credits and exemptions that have been the subject of an economic analysis in the prior calendar year. The committee would then submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker.

Legislator Retiring

On Thursday, Representative Pedro Marin (D-Duluth) held a press conference to announce his retirement from the House. Representative Marin was first elected to serve House District 96 in 2002. After 22 years of service, Representative Marin will not seek reelection for another term.

Marin's colleagues in the House and Senate have just over a month to decide if they will seek reelection this year. All 180 House seats and 56 Senate seats will be on the ballot this year. Anyone wishing to run for any of those seats must officially qualify to do so at the State Capitol the week of March 4.