

## Week 5 Legislative Update 2024



On Monday, many of those who serve and work under the Gold Dome made their way to Columbus to pay their respects to Chairman Richard Smith. Chairman Smith, who was first elected to the House in 2004, passed away in his sleep last week after a battle with the flu. The General Assembly altered its legislative calendar to allow members, staffers, and lobbyists to attend the funeral on Monday.

The General Assembly convened for session this week Tuesday through Friday for Legislative Days 15 through 18. This week was a busy one for legislators, with just two and half weeks left until Crossover Day. Bills that do not successfully make it through the committee process and out of the chamber in which they originated by February 29 are effectively dead this session and must be reintroduced in 2025.

The legislature will be back in session next week Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday for Legislative Days 19 through 22.

### **Amended Fiscal Year 2024 Budget**

House and Senate members are now one step closer to completing their only constitutionally required action item each year of passing a balanced budget. On Wednesday the House took up [House Bill 915](#), the Amended Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

The House agreed with most of the budget recommendations proposed by Governor Kemp, including \$1.5 billion for the Georgia Department of Transportation to maintain roadways and accelerate construction on shovel-ready projects; \$250 million for water and sewer projects across the state; \$300 million for a salary increase for state employees and teachers; \$178 million for a new dental school at Georgia Southern; and \$50 million for the construction of a new medical school at the University of Georgia.

House additions to the AFY24 budget include \$2 million for the construction of the Anne Frank Education Center; \$250,000 for the Public Service Commission to upgrade the pipeline safety database; \$250,000 for the upgrade of the Public Service Commission's consumer response database; and an additional \$200,000 for statewide healthcare specialty assessments to evaluate gaps in the specialties of neurology, psychiatry, rheumatology, and endocrinology.

The AFY24 budget passed the House Wednesday afternoon by a vote of 161 to 2, with one Democrat and one Republican dissenting. It was immediately transmitted to the Senate so that Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) and his committee could immediately get to work on their budget recommendations. Once the Senate approves its own version of the AFY24 budget, a conference committee made up of three House members and three Senate members will be appointed so that the two chambers can work through the differences in their budget recommendations.

The House began hearings on the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, [House Bill 916](#), the following morning at 7 AM.

### **Tax Credits**

On Wednesday afternoon House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Shaw Blackmon (R-Bonaire), Senate Finance Committee Chairman Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome), Speaker Jon Burns, and Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones held a press conference to roll out proposed changes to several tax credits following an off-session review panel.

Proposed changes to tax credits discussed in the press conference included suspending Georgia's data center tax credit; making a handful of administrative changes to the film tax credit; and reducing the carryforward period on a number of other tax credits.

At the press conference, Speaker Burns emphasized the importance of "transparency, accountability, and efficiency" by "ensuring that any tax credit issued has a strong ROI for the taxpayer, helps create jobs, and invests wisely in our local communities."

Two of the bills that will address tax credits were dropped on Wednesday afternoon, and there are more measures forthcoming. [House Bill 1180](#), sponsored by Creative Arts and Entertainment Committee Chairman Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton), would increase the minimum spend requirement for a production to be eligible to receive the film tax credit from \$500,000 to \$1 million; impose additional requirements for productions to receive the 10 percent uplift; and limit the amount of tax credits transferred per year to 2.5 percent of the Governor's revenue estimate for the corresponding fiscal year.

[House Bill 1181](#), sponsored by Chairman Chuck Martin (R-Alpharetta), would reduce the carryforward period for dozens of tax credits. It would also place a December 31, 2029 sunset on a number of tax credits.

### **Tort Reform**

This week the Senate Judiciary Committee favorably reported a measure that limits how individuals injured in accidents with big trucks can sue insurance companies. Under the bill, lawsuits could still be brought against an insurance company in some instances, for example, if the driver or the business is insolvent or bankrupt, or if the driver or company cannot be located to be served with the lawsuit. [Senate Bill 426](#), sponsored by Appropriations Chairman Blake

Tillery (R-Vidalia), is a legislative priority for Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones. The measure is now eligible for selection by the Rules Committee for a Senate floor vote.

Representative Will Wade (R-Dawsonville) introduced the 'Data Analysis for Tort Reform Act' this week. [House Bill 1114](#) states that "frivolous and excessive tort litigation hinders economic growth and job creation and makes goods and services more expensive for all Georgians." The measure would require the Insurance Commissioner to request data from insurers to make findings on the impact of tort lawsuits and the assessment of tort related risks. Data that the Insurance Commissioner could request includes the number of tort lawsuits filed against an insurer, the total attorneys' fees and court costs for such tort lawsuits, and the total value of the incurred claims from any tort lawsuits. The Insurance Commissioner would then be responsible for making certain determinations regarding the assessment of tort related risks by insurers, including the degree to which tort related risk is reflected in insurance premiums, the specific aspects of tort related risk that have the largest monetary impact on insurance premiums, and the potential impact of any changes to tort law on insurance premiums.

### **"Georgia Women's Bill of Rights"**

This week Representative Jodi Lott (R-Augusta) introduced [House Bill 1128](#), the "Georgia Women's Bill of Right." The measure specifies that men and women are biologically distinct. It provides legal definitions of a female and male and defines 'sex' as the "biological state of being a male or female, in the context of reproductive potential or capacity." Further, it states that "an individual's sex can be observed or clinically verified at or before birth and in no case is an individual's sex determined by stipulation or self-identification." The measure has been assigned to the House Judiciary Committee for consideration.

### **Governor Kemp Priorities**

One of Governor Kemp's legislative priorities received final passage this week and is now eligible for his signature. [House Bill 130](#) was sponsored by Governor's Floor Leaders Matthew Gambill (R-Cartersville) in the House and Bo Hatchett (R-Cornelia) in the Senate. The measure will create a program to repay up to \$20,000 in educational loans for up to 800 peace officers in exchange for five years of service to help recruit and retain law enforcement officers. Because the bill was tweaked slightly in the Senate, it required a final 'agree' motion by the House this week, which was unanimous.

Another legislative priority for Governor Kemp, [House Bill 982](#), was passed by the House this week by a vote of 161 to 1. The measure, which was carried by Governor's Floor Leader Matthew Gambill (R-Cartersville), would require the State Workforce Development Board to publish a High-Demand Career List to identify careers most critical to the state's current and future workforce needs. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

The Senate took up another legislative priority of Governor Kemp's this week. [Senate Bill 362](#), sponsored by Governor's Floor Leader Mike Hodges (R-Brunswick), would provide requirements

relative to employee representation by a labor organization for employers to receive certain economic development incentives from the state. Governor Kemp specifically mentioned the legislation during his remarks at the Georgia Chamber's annual Eggs and Issues breakfast during the first week of the session. After a lengthy debate on the Senate floor on Thursday afternoon, the measure was passed by a vote of 31 to 23. Next it heads to the House for consideration.

### **Tax Relief**

Earlier this session, Speaker Jon Burns Burns (R-Newington) held a press conference to announce a package of proposed legislation to bring tax relief to Georgians. The House passed three of those measures unanimously on Thursday. Next they will head to the Senate for consideration.

- [House Bill 1021](#), by Representative Lauren Daniel (R-Locust Grove), which would raise the child tax deduction from \$3,000 to \$4,000;
- [House Bill 1019](#), by Representative Matt Reeves (R-Duluth), which would double the homestead exemption from \$2,000 to \$4,000; and
- [House Bill 1015](#), sponsored by Governor's Floor Leader Lauren McDonald (R-Cumming), which would accelerate the cut to the state income tax from 5.75 percent to 5.39 percent, returning approximately \$1 billion to taxpayers.

### **Gun Sales Tax Holiday**

There have been a number of gun-related pieces of legislation dropped so far this session. Several seek to provide a sales tax holiday for guns and related items, such as gun safes. This week the Senate passed [Senate Bill 344](#), by Senator Jason Anavitarte (R-Dallas). The bill provides for a five-day sales tax holiday in October for the sale of firearms, ammunition, gun safes, trigger locks, and related accessories, including, but not limited to, stocks, barrels, scopes, and magazines. The five-day sales tax holiday would start on the second Friday of October each year and would go through 2029. The measure passed along party lines in the Senate and has been assigned to the Ways and Means Committee in the House for consideration.