

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update - March 2015– Session



Session Update- Week 11

Friday, March 27th we completed legislative day 38 of 40. With only 2 days left in the 2015 session, committee meeting hearings are coming to a close and legislators, interests groups and citizens are working hard to either pass or defeat legislation. As of Monday, March 23rd legislative council reported that they had drafted over 5,300 bills, amendments, and resolutions this session. With Sine Die nearing and negotiations still in the works, that number is sure to rise. Key pieces of legislation passed this week and now move on to Governor Deal for his final signature. Transportation agreements are still in the works, but with 2 days left, we are hoping to see something soon.

Opportunity School Districts

On Wednesday, March 25th, the House passed Governor Deal's proposal for Opportunity School Districts. Senate Resolution 287, coupled with Senate Bill 133, will authorize the state to take over or shut down low performing schools. Because the change is a Constitutional amendment, the resolution had to pass with two-thirds majority vote, at least 120 House votes. SR 287 barely hit the mark with a 121-47 vote in favor of the measure. SR 287 and SB 133 do not automatically make Opportunity School Districts the law of the land. The fate of this new plan is now in the hands of Georgia citizens who will vote on the measure during the 2016 elections. Proponents of the legislation believe that this will be an effective way to hold failing schools accountable. Those against the legislation fear loss of local control in education. For a number of years, the General Assembly has been focused on improving education in our state. And while we have made positive strides as far as funding and policy, Georgia still ranks very low in education compared to other states. We are hopeful that plans like these, will continue to improve our education system.

Medical Cannabis Bill Awaits Governor's Signature

House Bill 1, which allows the use Medical Cannabis Oil to treat certain illnesses, passed the Senate on Wednesday, March 25th. Efforts on this bill began last year when parents seeking a solution for child seizure disorders turned to the General Assembly for help. After the legislation failed to pass in 2014, many Georgia families moved to Colorado so that their children could access Cannabis Oil Treatments. Now that the oil will be available in Georgia, those families can return home. The health and well being of our citizens is a priority and we hope that individuals suffering from certain conditions will find relief. The legislation now moves to Governor Deal's desk for his signature before becoming law.

Insurance Coverage for Kids with Autism

Earlier in the session the Georgia Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 1, known as Ava's Law. SB 1 would allow for autism insurance coverage for children less than 6 years of age. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about one out of every 68 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder. Advocates of Ava's Law have been pushing for the legislation for 7 years. Thursday, their efforts were successful as Senate and House leadership announced in a press conference that a compromise has been made. The legislation must still go through the legislative process before moving on to Governor Deal's desk for his signature. If passed and signed, Georgia will become the 41st state in the country to pass reforms that require coverage for autism related medical services.

Solar Financing Passes Senate

The Solar Financing bill is closer to becoming law, passing in the Senate after a full floor vote on Friday, March 27th. House Bill 57 will make it easier for home owners and small businesses to finance solar panels. The legislation also allows for third party financing to those who are interested in using solar energy. This bill now heads to the Governor's desk for his signature.

State Soil and Water Conservation

Georgia's State Soil and Water Commission will be revamped with the passage of House Bill 397. The commission's main purpose is to advise farmers and developers on how to avoid soil erosion. Currently the agency stands alone, but HB 397 will move the commission under the Department of Agriculture. The bill will also allow the governor to appoint anyone of his choice to the five-member state board, rather than requiring the appointment of board members who are elected supervisors from the state's 40 soil and water districts. Governor Deal has attempted to remove the commission's budget over the last two sessions; however, after Georgia Farm Bureau objected the proposal, the Senate restored budget funding in 2014. Governor Deal once again removed funding this year and House Bill 397 was introduced. House Bill 397 awaits the Governor's signature before becoming law.

Thursday, April 2nd will be the last day of the 2015 session. We have made a lot of progress this year, but the work will continue after we adjourn. I will be hosting 2 Town Hall meetings, May 4th in Dodge County and May 7th in Telfair County, to brief you on everything that we accomplished this session. I would like to thank the Eastman-Dodge County Chamber of Commerce and the Telfair County Chamber of Commerce for assisting me in arranging the meetings. You will find details about the meetings on my website, www.jimmypruett.com. In the mean time, if you need anything please let me know. I am so grateful that you have given me the opportunity to represent you and I thank you for your continued support!

