

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update- February 2015– Session



Session Update- Week 5

The Georgia General Assembly has completed 15 of 40 legislative days. The closer we come to day 40, the more hectic the Capitol gets! Just imagine 236 legislators, 2000 lobbyists and bus loads of visitors on the third floor of one building. All of whom have a purpose for being there, coupled with a looming deadline! Despite the fast pace and crowded hallways we have managed to get a lot of work done for the good of Georgia citizens and district 149. We successfully passed a number of bills this week that will now head to the Senate for review.

House Bill 57- Solar Power Free Market Financing Act

After months of negotiations between Georgia Power, EMC, MEAG and the solar industry, HB 57 was passed unanimously by the House. This bill will make it easier and more affordable for residences and small businesses to put up solar panels. Although the bill does not allow tax breaks or credits, it does allow third-party financing plans for home and small business owners, allowing them to pay for the panel over time. If approved by Governor Deal and the Senate, this measure will provide Georgians with more energy options, while lowering monthly power bills. According to a report released Thursday by the National Solar Foundation, Georgia's solar industry created jobs six times faster than the overall state economy. The report also ranks the state as having the 14th largest solar-power workforce with 2,900 employees split between manufacturing, installation of solar panels and administration and sales. That represents a 13 percent increase over the past year. All in all, the solar industry is great news for Georgia!

House Bill 86- Georgia Adult and Aging Services Agency

More than a million Georgians – or roughly 1 out of 10 people in the state – are 65 or older. This week the House took a proactive step to improve the quality of life for Georgia's aging population. The bill creates the Georgia Adult and Aging Services Agency, which will take on the responsibility of improving services, ensuring that the needs of older citizens and those with disabilities are properly met. The bill would also move the current Division of Aging Services out of the Department of Human Services, creating a standalone agency which will allow the state to better focus on its services for those individuals dealing with Alzheimer's and dementia. With Georgia's growing senior population, this bill is necessary to ensure that they receive the full care and attention that they deserve. HB 86 is now in the hands of the Senate.

House Bill 91- More High School Diplomas on the Horizon

Prior to 2011, Georgia high school students were required to pass the Georgia High School Graduation test. Although this test was deemed unnecessary and was eventually phased out of school requirements, it still stands as a barrier to those students who previously failed the examination. Students who completed all high school requirements, but did not pass the test, will now be able to receive their diplomas. This is great news on the education front as former students will now have the opportunity to attend post secondary institutions. This bill will also help Georgia prepare its workforce for our growing economy.

Equal Opportunity School Districts

On Wednesday, Senate Floor Leaders introduced legislation to create the "Opportunity School District". This initiative is part of Governor Deal's proposed education changes. The resolution would allow the state to temporarily step in to assist failing schools.

Opportunity Schools Continued....

The failing schools would have to show ongoing problems in scoring below 60 on Georgia's Department of Education College and Career Performance index for three consecutive years. There is also a limit of 20 schools per year that will be allowed to participate in the new "district". Schools in the "Opportunity School District" will remain at least 5 years, but no more than 10 years. Similar laws have passed and proved successful in Tennessee and Louisiana. The "Opportunity School District" will need public approval so you can expect to see it on the ballot in upcoming election cycles.

House Bill 239- Livestock Liability Protection

Georgia law currently provides liability relief for equine and llama owners while visitors are on their property. House Bill 239 would extend the current liability protections to include livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, and swine). Expansion of this liability protection will hopefully encourage farmers to continue educating and informing the public about how livestock is raised. This bill is also an avenue to increase local livestock shows / sales which are great economic generators for our rural communities. In order to benefit from increased liability, livestock owners would be required to post specific language warning visitors the owner is not liable for injuries normally associated with working around livestock.

District 149- Constituent Services Expansion

I am pleased to announce that Sheila Wilcox will be volunteering her time to help me with constituent services in Telfair and Wheeler Counties. Telfair County residents can reach Sheila the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month, 10am-1pm, at the local Chamber of Commerce office in McRae. We are still working out details for Sheila's visits to Wheeler County and will let you know as soon as we have a set schedule. If Telfair County or Wheeler County residents have any concerns or questions, please reach out to Sheila during business hours. I am so fortunate to come from a district where folks are willing to volunteer their time for the betterment of our communities. Having Sheila will be a huge help to me in servicing all of our residents in District 149 and I am grateful to her for taking the time to do so!

Sheila Wilcox: 478-308-1046

As always, I am continuing to fight for the betterment of Georgia and District 149. As session comes close to the half-way point it is very important for me to receive input and concerns from our citizens. If you need anything at all or have questions concerning legislation, please contact my Capitol office and we will get you taken care of! Thank you for allowing me to represent and serve you as I am truly honored to have the opportunity to do so.

