

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update - March 2015– Session



Session Update- Week 9

Hello to all of my friends in District 129! Here is the latest report from the Georgia General Assembly. Last week on Capitol Hill was “Crossover Week” as we completed days 28 through 30. Friday, March 13th, members of the General Assembly worked frantically to get bills passed out of their respective chamber. Now that Crossover Day is over, we will begin to review a number of Senate Bills that have been sent to us for consideration. Key issues such as transportation, solar financing and medical cannabis oil await their fate in the Senate chamber. If the Senate does not pass these bills by legislative day 40 then they will not be up for consideration again until the 2016 session. The House passed a number of key bills last week as we continue to work hard for Georgia!

House Votes to Legalize Fireworks

On Monday, March 9th, in a 119-49 favorable vote, the House passed House Bill 110 which would legalize the sale of fireworks in Georgia. Under current law, sparklers are the only type of fireworks sold in the state. Firework legislation has been under consideration for a number of years in the General Assembly. Supporters of the legislation contend that Georgia is losing revenue to bordering states that allow the sale of fireworks. Opponents of the bill, mainly hospitals and physicians have voiced concerns that the measure poses a danger to children who do not know how to handle them safely. If fireworks are legalized, sales would be regulated by the state insurance commissioner, who also serves as Georgia’s chief fire marshal. The legislation also states that retailers would be required to pay an initial licensing fee of \$5,000. The annual renewal fee is set at \$1,000. The bill is now under consideration in the state Senate.

House Passes “Hidden Predator Act”

House Bill 17 sets out to change Georgia’s current statute of limitations pertaining to those who are victim to sexual abuse as children. As of now, a child sex abuse victim may only bring action against his or her abuser up to five years after the victim turns 18 years old. Current law also states that neither the victim nor their guardian can access police or other investigation records in which the victim is the subject of. House Bill 17 would expand the statute of limitations, from 5 years to 30 years. The legislation would also allow for “retroaction”, providing a two-year time frame for sexual abuse victims, whose civil claims were blocked by the statute of limitations in the past, to file a case against their perpetrator. Additionally, the bill would allow for victims and guardians to access investigation records. This bill will be a great help to those that have “feared” coming forward about abuse in the past and we hope that this will help the justice system in finding child predators that pose a threat in our communities. The bill will now move to the Senate for review.

Solar Financing Plan

The Solar Financing bill is closer to becoming law, passing out of the Senate Regulated Industries Committee on Thursday, March 12th. House Bill 57 was passed overwhelmingly by the House earlier this session, making it easier for home owners and small businesses to finance solar panels. Solar panels are used to generate electricity and studies have shown that the use of these panels conserves energy and saves money for users. The legislation allows for third party financing to those who are interested in using solar energy. The bill is a compromise between Georgia Power, MEAG, the EMCs, and the solar power companies. This bill now heads to the Senate Rules Committee where they will determine if the bill will receive the opportunity for a Senate floor vote.

Senate Passes Weaker Medical Marijuana Bill

One of the hottest debates over the last two years has been Georgia's position on medical marijuana, particularly medical cannabis oil. House Bill 1, Haleigh's Hope has been passed by the House but is still awaiting action in the Senate. On Friday, March 13th the Senate overwhelmingly passed Senate Bill 185, which is a weaker version of House Bill 1. HB 1 would allow for those suffering from diseases such as cancer, Lou Gehrig's disease, seizure disorders, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, mitochondrial disease, fibromyalgia, Parkinson's disease and sickle cell disease the ability to access medical cannabis oil. Senate Bill 185 is a much more limited bill and would allow only children suffering from seizures to participate in a clinical trial that is currently underway at the Georgia Regents University in Augusta. Senator Renee Unterman, Chairman of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee has commented that the elements of HB 1 and SB 185 will be consolidated into a single bill by the end of session. A major concern over the use of medical marijuana is current federal law, which prohibits it. Last week in a bipartisan effort, US Senators introduced historic legislation to legalize medical marijuana on a federal level, allowing states to set their own policies. If the measure passes, states will no longer struggle with the decision of choosing the well being of citizens over current federal law.

As we head into the final stretch of this year's session, please contact me any time with your concerns! I am here to represent you and by doing so, it is important for me to hear from you. As always, thank you for allowing me to serve you and thank you for your support. The encouragement and prayers that you have sent my way helps me get through this demanding time of the year. I would not make it without you! It is a pleasure to work for the betterment of our district and I am honored that you have chosen me to be your voice under the Gold Dome.

