

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Session Week Three — 2016



The Georgia General Assembly has completed 12 of 40 legislative days. The closer we come to day 40, the more hectic the Capitol becomes. 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! With only 28 session days left, we have our work cut out for us as hot topic issues such as gambling, religious freedom and gun control make for interesting and heated debate.

House Passes 2016 FY Amended Budget

Thursday, January 28th, we voted unanimously to pass the amended state budget for fiscal year 2016 out of the House. The amended budget allocates nearly \$23 billion, which is about \$1.1 billion larger than the budget we originally adopted last year. Approximately 85 percent of the “new money” comes from the 2015 Transportation Funding Act and an increase in lottery sales. The budget includes \$204 million put towards K-12 public school systems and \$758 million for transportation projects. The amended budget now heads to the Senate for further consideration.

Horse Racing Bill Moves Forward

Senate Bill 264, which would legalize pari-metuel betting on horse racing moves forward as it cleared the Senate Regulated Industries Committee on Wednesday. The Committee also approved Senate Resolution 135, a constitutional amendment that, if passed, would eventually allow citizens to vote on horse racing during the general election in November. Revenue generated from horse racing will be designated for education funding. What the funding formula from generated revenue will be is unclear, as there is debate on whether the money should be put towards “merit-based” scholarships or “need-based” scholarships.

Campus Carry

Thursday, January 28th saw the introduction of House Bill 859, which would make it legal to carry firearms on college campuses. The bill would not allow guns in “buildings or property used for athletic sporting events or student housing, including, but not limited to, fraternity and sorority houses.” The bill has been referred to the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee for further consideration.

Religious Freedom

As expected, Religious Freedom legislation aimed at strengthening First Amendment rights on the state level are on the rise. Thus far, we have seen a number of bills brought forth. We can expect heated debate regarding these issues to carry on through the close of session. Last week I signed on as a bill sponsor for House Bill 816, which allows for voluntary prayers during certain school activities. This is a bi-partisan effort among house members and I feel very strongly that if a student wishes to pray, they should be allowed to do so voluntarily.

Look at Page 2 for a listing of Religious Freedom measures that have been brought forward.

Religious Measures Continued...

Religious Freedom Bills Under Consideration

SB 129- RFRA is intended to provide the same level of protection of religious freedom from state and local governments that the Federal RFRA offers from the federal government.

SB 284- FADA is intended to prevent the government from discriminating against any person on the basis of their sincerely held religious belief in traditional marriage.

HB 757- Pastor Protection Act would ensure that Pastors/Rabbis are protected from being forced to perform same sex marriages.

HB 756- Protect Religious Freedom Act would allow businesses to refuse event participation that would violate their religious beliefs.

HB 816- Student Religious Liberty Act would protect those who want to voluntarily participate in prayer during certain school activities.

As you can see, with the number of tough issues ahead this session, we have our work cut out for us! In close, I want to thank you for allowing me to represent you. I also want to personally thank those of you that have offered kind words and encouragement throughout my time in office. As we make our way through session, your support means a great deal and reminds me daily of my primary task- ensuring that YOU have a voice at the Capitol. If you ever need anything, please reach out to me at anytime.



Jimmy Pruett
GA Representative of the 149th District