

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Session Week Four — 2016



Thursday, February 4th marked day 16 of 40 legislative days. That means by the end of next week, session will be halfway over! As we move towards day 40, we continue to work on legislation that will benefit our great state. This week was a productive in the House as we passed legislation aimed at improving education, Georgia's workforce and public safety officer benefits.

House Bill 801

As many of you know, a number of our college students gain access to higher education through the HOPE scholarship program. In order for a student to maintain HOPE throughout their college career, they must maintain a certain GPA. The problem with our current HOPE program is that it does not take into account the more difficult courses found in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Because of this, students have been deterred from taking this curriculum in fear of losing their HOPE funding, leaving a gap in Georgia's needed workforce. In hopes of fixing this problem, we passed House Bill 801. HB 801 adds an additional 0.5 point to a B, C or D in STEM courses at any of the state's public campuses. That is the same bump now awarded to high school students who enroll in advanced courses. We are hoping that this legislation will encourage Georgia students to enroll in those courses they would traditionally avoid. I believe this is a fantastic opportunity for Georgia students and I look forward to future reports of improvement in the area of STEM. The bill now moves to the state Senate for further consideration.

House Bill 402

Great news for Georgia businesses is on the horizon as they now have the opportunity to save five percent on their worker's compensation insurance premiums. How can businesses take advantage of that savings? House bill 402 is a measure that gives incentive to local businesses that participate with local public school systems for K-12 work based learning programs. Work based learning programs allows students age 16 and older to participate in a structured learning environment at an employer's job site for a portion of the school day, while receiving academic credit. This work based learning program is an excellent way to teach students the true value and responsibility of employment, while rewarding those businesses willing to participate in the program. I am pleased to report that HB 402 was heard, vetted and passed unanimously out of the Industry and Labor subcommittee of which I am Chairman. HB 402 now awaits its fate in the Senate.

Public Safety Measures

Last week we passed two initiatives in the House that will benefit Georgia's public safety officers. The first was House Bill 421 which will bring more disability benefits to community supervision officers who become permanently disabled from external violence or injury while in the line of duty. Under HB 421, deputy conservation rangers with the Department of Natural Resources, parole officers with the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, probation officers with the Department of Corrections, and any community supervision officer with the Department of Community Supervision would be eligible for a monthly disability compensation of \$5.00 per month for each year of creditable service.

Public Safety Measures Continued....

The bill also calls for a minimum monthly disability retirement benefit equal to two percent of their monthly earnings beginning the month their permanent disability occurred until mandatory retirement age.

The second measure passed was House Bill 690. HB 690 ensures public safety officers recoup their years of service by allowing members of certain organizations to claim creditable service towards retirement if he or she previously worked for a local law enforcement agency for up to five years. Officers in the Uniform Division of the Department of Public Safety Department that are eligible for this benefit include:

- Conservation rangers with the Department of Natural Resources
- Officers or agents of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation,
- District attorney Investigators paid from state funds

Alcohol and tobacco officers or agents of the Department of Revenue

In order to be eligible to claim those retirement years, officers must be vested in the state's Employee Retirement System (ERS) for at least 10 years and ineligible for a defined contribution retirement or pension plan while employed at the local law enforcement agency. Public safety officers do so much for our community, I am pleased that we were able to come up with a few ways to show our appreciation.

As the halfway point to session draws near, I will continue to update you on everything happening under the Gold Dome! My door is always open to those who have questions and concerns regarding proposed legislation. It is a pleasure to serve you and I am grateful that you allow me to serve as your representative on Capitol Hill. God bless each and every one of you and may God continue to bless the great state of Georgia!



Jimmy Pruet
Georgia House of Representatives, District 149