

Under the Gold Dome



District 149 Legislative Update – Session Week Eight — 2016



The eighth week of the 2016 legislative session began with Day 30, Crossover Day. Crossover Day is typically one of the longest days of our legislative session and this year was no exception as the House passed 48 measures during 12 hours of floor debate. We worked hard to ensure that meaningful and significant legislation had a chance to be heard and voted on by the full body of the House. All measures passed now await their fate in the Senate, who must vote on the legislation prior to midnight on Day 40.

Medical Cannabis Oil Treatment Expansion

House Bill 1, Haleigh’s Hope, which was signed into law in 2015 would be expanded with the passage House Bill 722. Haleigh’s Hope currently allows Georgians with certain medical conditions to possess low THC cannabis oil without prosecution. HB 1 included nine qualifying medical conditions permitted to possess cannabis oil, containing a maximum of 5 percent low THC and a maximum amount of 20 fluid ounces of cannabis oil. HB 722 expands the state’s current medical cannabis law by adding to the list of qualifying conditions permitted to legally possess cannabis oil. The following conditions added are as follows:

- Autism
- Epidermolysis Bullosa
- HIV
- Peripheral Neuropathy
- Tourette’s Syndrome
- Terminal Illness

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

The Bill also allows manufacturers of low tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) oil in other states to ship oil directly to Georgians who have properly registered with the state’s Department of Public Health. Further, to promote safe usage, administration, and safer conditions for all citizens, HB 722 puts low THC oil into our code section related to driving under the influence. Since the passage of HB 1, we have heard positive feedback from families and patients across Georgia, all claiming the allowance of this treatment option has been life changing.

Spaceport Camden

Individuals dreaming of traveling to space may have the opportunity under [House Bill 734](#)! HB 734 is an exciting push to bring the commercial space industry to Georgia. The legislation will make Georgia competitive as a “space friendly state”, bringing in an estimated \$330 billion per year space industry.

Under the legislation, the Georgia Space Flight Act (GSA), would define procedures for commercial space flight activity, allowing Georgia to be more competitive with our neighboring states. Modeled after legislation in Texas, Limited Liability for Space Flight Activities, the GSA would create a liability shield to protect space flight entities, while informing those willing to participate in the program of their rights.

Spaceport Camden Continued....

In short, the bill would limit a willing space flight participant's ability to sue for damages related to spaceflight activities, and would not protect against injuries suffered by non-consenting third parties. Space flight participants would also be required to provide informed consent and a signed written waiver at least 24-hours before space flight activity. Limited liability protection is the foundation of the bill, and mirrors federal regulations.

The proposed site located in Camden County would have a direct economic impact on Camden, Charlton, and Glynn counties, as well as a significant impact on STEM related job growth and tourism for the state. Fostering economic development and scientific cultivation will continue to drive our great state in the right direction and I look forward to see the positive outcome of this legislation in the future.

Disabled Veterans Homestead Exemption Program

Additional assistance is on the way for disabled Veterans as we passed House Bill 862 unanimously. The legislation updates current law to allow disabled veterans to qualify for the homestead exemption on their ad valorem taxes. This bill would allow any veteran given honorable discharge determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to qualify for the exemption if they meet the following criteria:

- Individuals deemed 100 percent disabled

Individuals currently compensated at the 100 percent level as unemployable

Additionally, any veteran entitled to receive a statutory award from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs may also qualify for the exemption if they have suffered the loss of any limbs or eye-sight.

Prior to the passage of this legislation, requirement for receiving the homestead tax exemption was difficult for disabled veterans to achieve. Clarification of the language will expand access of the homestead exemption by allowing all of our disabled veterans the opportunity to qualify. We are hopeful the passage of HB 862 allows more veterans to take advantage of this cost-saving exemption, which they have certainly earned through their military service.

Fallen Heroes Bill

The Fallen Heroes Bill, House Bill 54, also passed unanimously and is aimed at honoring public service officials killed in the line of duty by providing cost free college tuition to their children. This legislation supplements the existing Georgia Law Enforcement Personnel Dependents Grant, covering additional tuition expenses. Grants would be issued to children of the following:

- Law enforcement officers
- Firefighters
- Emergency medical technicians,
- Prison guards employed by the state or other public employer

HERO Operators attending public Universities in Georgia who meet certain criteria

This bill also allows voluntary grant contributions from Georgia taxpayers by adding a donation option to certain Georgia filing forms. I was pleased to support HB 54 and I am grateful for the opportunity to give back to our families who have suffered the loss of a loved one, working to protect all of our Georgia citizens.

Kinship Care Measures

The House continued efforts to improve kinship caregiver conditions by passing two measures aimed at providing additional resources to our kinship community. House Bill 934 would authorize the Department of Human Services to provide a separate link or portal on its website specifically for kinship caregivers.

Kinship Measures Continued.....

The link or portal would provide kinship care participants additional information for Georgia's public assistance benefits, as well as those benefits available to children in their care.

Often times, the financial stress of adding another person to the household income leaves kinship givers struggling to make ends meet. We hope to lessen additional cost burdens with the passage of House Bill 957, which would require judges and clerks of the probate courts to publicly post a court document excusing an individual from paying court fees at the time providing; they can prove they don't have the money to pay required fees. HB 957 also mandates that all probate courts make affidavits of indigence available to the public so that kinship caregivers are aware of this option and aren't faced with unnecessary financial burdens.

We are confident that adequate information and education on these programs will help the thousands of children in kinship care while providing additional support for the family. HB 934 and HB 957 help us accomplish these goals.

Now that the Crossover Deadline has passed, we will be turning our attention to the many Senate bills that are under review. Can you believe that there are only 9 days remaining in the 2016 legislative session? As your representative, your thoughts, opinions and concerns on important issues are essential to my decision-making process. Please feel free to contact me anytime with, as I always appreciate your input. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your voice under the Gold Dome and I hope you will stop by and say Hello to me and Casey if you are near Capitol Hill!



Jimmy Pruet
Georgia House of Representatives, District 149