



2025 Week 11 Legislative Update

Legislators convened last Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday for Legislative Days 35–37, with Wednesday reserved for committee work. Time is running out for lawmakers to move their bills across the finish line for the 2025 session. The House and Senate will reconvene this week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for the final three days—Sine Die is set for Friday, April 4.

Any measure that passes both chambers before adjournment will head to Governor Kemp's desk for review. He and his team will then have 40 days to decide whether to sign or veto each bill.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

The legislature moved closer to fulfilling its only constitutionally required duty this week with the Senate's passage of its Fiscal Year 2026 budget recommendations. On Thursday morning, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved [House Bill 68](#), and the full Senate passed the measure on Friday.

During the floor presentation, Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) outlined key differences between the House and Senate versions of the nearly \$38 billion budget. Highlights include:

- Full restoration of Governor Kemp's \$141 million recommendation for the Georgia Promise Scholarship, which had been significantly reduced by the House;
- A cash-funded approach to projects, instead of a bond package as proposed by the House;
- \$170 million for Department of Corrections staffing and security—between the governor's \$125 million and the House's \$250 million proposals;
- Delayed funding for Super Bowl LXII (2028) and the 2031 NCAA Final Four, allowing the state to earn interest on those funds; and
- \$76 million for the State Employees' Retirement System, up from the House's \$23 million, to offset inflation for state retirees.

The Senate budget also included a list of the top 11 tax credits and exemptions. Chairman Tillery encouraged members to consider these figures as part of broader discussions about potentially eliminating the state income tax.

The Senate passed the budget 48–7. It now returns to the House, which is expected to insist on its version when lawmakers reconvene Monday. At that point, the Lieutenant Governor and



Speaker will likely appoint a six-member conference committee to reconcile the differences and finalize the budget for Governor Kemp's consideration.

Tort Reform

Following the passage of Governor Kemp's sweeping tort reform bill, [Senate Bill 68](#), the House turned its attention this week to another key legal reform measure: [Senate Bill 69](#), the *Georgia Courts Access and Consumer Protection Act*.

On Tuesday, the House Subcommittee on Lawsuit Reform heard from President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon), who presented the bill. SB 69 targets third-party litigation funding—arrangements where non-party financiers fund lawsuits in exchange for a stake in any judgment. Kennedy emphasized the lack of consumer protections and noted growing concerns about foreign involvement in the U.S. legal system through such funding.

The bill requires third-party financiers to register with the Department of Banking and Finance and outlines specific limitations and penalties for violations. Subcommittee Chairman Rob Leverett (R-Elberton) introduced a substitute version, which was approved by both the Rules Subcommittee and the full Rules Committee.

On Thursday, the House passed SB 69 by a vote of 98–69. The Senate took it back up on Friday and unanimously approved the amended version, meaning the bill will need one more vote in the House before heading to Governor Kemp's desk.

Social Issues

On Wednesday morning the House Judiciary Committee convened for another meeting on [Senate Bill 36](#), the 'Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act,' or 'RFRA,' by Senator Ed Setzler (R-Acworth). The legislation would restrict state and local governments from burdening a person's exercise of religion, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability. The bill includes language from the federal RFRA law that does not currently apply at the state or local levels. An amendment approved by the committee during a lengthy hearing last week would provide local governments with notice that a person intends to file a lawsuit. During this week's hearing, committee members voted to remove *ante litem* notice and approved the measure with the same language that passed out of the Senate. Next the bill must be selected by the House Rules Committee to receive a vote on the floor.

On Tuesday the House Education Committee considered [Senate Bill 1](#), the 'Fair and Safe Athletic Opportunities Act' by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming). The committee substitute version of the bill that was passed incorporated language from Representative Josh Bonner's (R-Fayetteville) [House Bill 267](#), the 'Riley Gaines Act of 2025,' including the bill's title. Addressing transgender



individuals competing in sports is a top legislative priority for both Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones and Speaker Jon Burns. The measure seeks to regulate participation in school and college sports based on biological sex and would prohibit self-identification of sex for sports participation. The bill would mandate that sports teams are designated as male, female, or co-ed, and would prohibit males from participating on female teams and females from participating on male teams. It would also require multiple-occupancy restrooms, changing areas, and sleeping quarters to be designated for only males or females. The legislation also establishes private causes of action, which would allow students to sue school systems if the provisions of the proposed legislation are not followed. The legislation was passed by the House Education Committee and must next be selected by the Rules Committee to receive a vote on the House floor.

On Wednesday the House Public and Community Health Committee took up [Senate Bill 30](#) by Senator Ben Watson (R-Savannah). The version of the bill that was passed by the Senate would prohibit the prescription and administration of puberty-blocking medications for minors related to gender dysphoria. A committee substitute version of the bill that was introduced on Wednesday would allow the prescription and administration of puberty blockers for minors if the minor is diagnosed with gender dysphoria by two behavioral health professionals, the minor's parents or guardians provide written consent, and the minor undergoes quarterly psychological counseling throughout the treatment. The bill would allow minors being treated with puberty blockers before July 1, 2025 to continue treatment without the requirements included in the bill. The measure would also allow a parent or guardian to bring civil action against a physician if the provisions of the bill are violated. The bill specifies that a physician who prescribes or administers puberty-blocking medication in accordance with the requirements cannot be subject to civil liability. After a lengthy hearing, the committee substitute version of the bill was passed. It must be selected by the House Rules Committee to make it to the floor for a vote.

[Senate Bill 39](#) by Senator Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) would specifically prohibit the coverage of expenses associated with gender-affirming care under the State Health Benefit Plan or with the use of any state funds. The measure was approved by the House Health Committee on Tuesday by one vote. On Thursday, the bill was recommitted to the House Committee. It is now scheduled for another hearing on Monday.

In Thursday's Senate Education Committee meeting, Representative Brent Cox's (R-Dawsonville) [House Bill 127](#) was stripped and replaced with language from Senator Marty Harbin's (R-Tyrone) [Senate Bill 120](#). The original House bill would have increased the number of leave days that teachers and other school personnel may take for personal or professional reasons from three days to five days. The language that was added from Senate Bill 120 would prohibit public schools, local education agencies, public colleges and universities, and the Technical College



System of Georgia from promoting, supporting, or maintaining any programs or activities that advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The bill must next be selected by the Senate Rules Committee to receive a vote on the floor.

Gun Legislation

On Friday morning the Senate Finance Committee took up [House Bill 79](#) by Representative Mark Newton (R-Augusta), the 'Firearm Safe Handling and Secure Storage Tax Credit Act.' The legislation would allow a taxpayer to claim a tax credit of up to \$300 for eligible expenses related to firearm safe handling instructional courses and firearm secure storage devices. The committee substitute version of the bill would remove the tax credit for firearm safe storage devices, but would retain the proposed tax credit for safe handling instructional courses. The substitute also included language from [Senate Bill 47](#), by Senator Jason Anavitate (R-Dallas), which would allow a 4-day tax exemption on the sale of firearms, gun safes, ammo, and other accessories. Senator Anavitate's original bill proposed an 11-day tax exemption period. An amendment by Senator Greg Dolezal (R-Cumming) in committee removed the provision that the tax credit could only be used by an individual one time so that an individual could receive the \$300 tax credit for a firearm safe handling course up to once per year. The substitute version of the bill was approved by the Finance Committee. It must next be selected by the Senate Rules Committee to receive a floor vote.

Immigration

On Wednesday the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee passed [Senate Bill 21](#) by Senator Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia). The measure, which received a hearing in the House committee several weeks ago, would waive sovereign and governmental immunity for local governments, officials, and employees if they violate the state's prohibition on sanctuary cities. It would also require a custodial authority, which includes sheriffs, wardens, chiefs of police, and others, to honor immigration detainer requests issued by the Department of Homeland Security. Next the measure must be selected by the Rules Committee to receive a vote on the House floor.

School Safety

On Monday the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on [House Bill 268](#), chaired by Senator Bill Cowser (R-Athens), convened to consider the House's comprehensive school safety legislation, which is sponsored by Representative Holt Persinger (R-Winder). A committee substitute version of the bill was introduced in Thursday's Judiciary Committee meeting that removed several provisions from the original version of the House bill and incorporated language from Senator Jason Anavitate's (R-Dallas) [Senate Bill 17](#), 'Ricky and Alyssa's Law.' Senator Anavitate's language that was added would require mobile panic alert systems in all Georgia public schools and would



require accurate mapping of school facilities that can be shared with law enforcement for improved emergency response.

The version of the bill that passed out of committee would also:

- Require expedited transfer of records from a student's previous school when he or she transfers;
- Establish state grants to fund qualified student advocacy specialists;
- Require law enforcement agents to report criminal actions committed by school-aged children to their schools;
- Require training for teachers and students on behavioral health awareness;
- Create an anonymous reporting pathway to alert school officials of potentially dangerous behavior; and
- Require a threat management plan to be developed in schools.

The committee substitute version of House Bill 268 passed out of the Judiciary Committee unanimously. It must next be selected by the Senate Rules Committee to receive a floor vote next week.

Protections for IVF

This week [House Bill 428](#) received final legislative approval after the Senate approved the measure 53 to 1 and the House agreed to the Senate version on Friday. The legislation, sponsored by Representative Lehman Franklin (R-Statesboro), would codify protections for in vitro fertilization (IVF) in Georgia. The legislation is a priority for Speaker Jon Burns (R-Newington) and for Representative Franklin, whose wife is expecting their first child as a result IVF. The measure is now on its way to Governor Kemp's desk for his consideration.

Truck Weights

On Thursday the Senate took up [House Bill 164](#) by Representative Steven Meeks (R-Screven). The legislation would remove the sunset from [House Bill 189](#) (2023), which allowed large trucks carrying agricultural and forestry products to weigh up to 88,000 pounds outside of the metro Atlanta nonattainment area. House Bill 164 also explicitly gives local law enforcement officers the authority to enforce truck weight limits on county roads and on bridges within county or municipal systems. It would also require local law enforcement officers to be properly trained in commercial motor vehicle weight laws.

The measure was approved 55 to 1 by the Senate this week and next heads to Governor Kemp's desk for his consideration.



Chronic Absenteeism

On Tuesday the House passed [Senate Bill 123](#) by President Pro Tempore John Kennedy (R-Macon) 160 to 1. The bill, aimed at addressing chronic absenteeism in schools across the state, would establish a localized approach, working with families, administrators, and those identified as chronically absent when reviewing individual cases. The bill would require local boards of education to implement policies for identifying and intervening with chronically absent students, ensuring a focus on the root causes of their absences. The measure would require school climate committees to develop a comprehensive framework for improving student attendance. It would also establish localized attendance review teams to determine the most effective strategies for reducing absenteeism. The Department of Education would be required to submit a report to the General Assembly, detailing county-by-county compliance with the bill's requirements, including student attendance rates and discipline data. The measure now heads to Governor Kemp's desk for his consideration.

Cell Phones in Schools

On Tuesday the Senate approved [House Bill 340](#) by Representative Scott Hilton (R-Peachtree Corners) 54 to 2. The 'Distraction Free Education Act' would prohibit students from kindergarten through eighth grade from accessing personal electronic devices during the school day. Local school systems would be required to develop and implement policies to address electronic device storage, emergency communication protocols, and consequences for violations. Next the bill heads to Governor Kemp's desk for his consideration.