

Georgia Weekly Legislative Update

DENTONS

February 1, 2016

The Georgia House of Representatives last week approved the governor's amended budget for fiscal year 2016, a constitutionally required midpoint balancing act of available revenue, and set an adjournment date for the 40-day legislative session.

The budget adjustment comprises expanded funds for K-12 public education, including millions in grants for school systems to improve internet connectivity and to finance live online instruction and expand digital resources.

Lawmakers in the House will now shift their focus from the current fiscal year to the following fiscal year, of which criminal justice reform and renovation is a marquee element of the \$23.7 billion proposal.

Both chambers moved to set sine die, the final day of the legislative calendar, for Thursday, March 24.

Political interest within and without the capitol continues to be driven by Representative Allen Peake's proposal to allow the local cultivation and distribution of non-euphoric medical marijuana, which the Legislature last year approved for the treatment of a handful of acute medical conditions like Parkinson's disease and severe seizure disorders.

Critics were to have an opportunity last week to stake out their opposition to the proposal, but the hearing was postponed when Peake signaled he would introduce a substitute bill with slight technical changes.

And while Las Vegas-style casinos continue to face long odds this year in the legislature, a proposal to allow horse racing and pari-mutuel betting cleared its first hurdle last week, earning approval from the Senate's Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee, and moves now to the Rules Committee for consideration.

Elsewhere under the Dome, SB 276, legislation that would mandate that companies and state agencies alert consumers and state officials in cases of data theft, has drawn swift opposition of the business community. Opponents like the Georgia Chamber of Commerce said the "punitive measures" in the bill would strain economic development across the state.

And finally Governor Nathan Deal announced that the State Charter School Commission of Georgia, a state-level independent charter school authorizer, received a perfect score in the annual review by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. The SCSC was one of only 31 charter school authorizers nationally to receive perfect marks.

Happening this week under the Dome

Having cleared the lower chamber, the FY 2016 amended budget—known in the capitol as the "little budget"—will this week move to subcommittee hearings in the Senate.

Opponents to Rep. Peake's cannabis cultivation bill are expected to get their moment in the sun—a half-day of

hearings in House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee—after the Macon Republican’s adjusted version is filed.

A host of House Appropriations subcommittees will convene to review the governor’s 2017 budget recommendations.

Senator Brandon Beach is expected to introduce legislation to allow for MARTA rail expansion into Atlanta’s northern arc pending voter approval in Fulton and DeKalb Counties.

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