

April 3, 2017

The Georgia General Assembly adjourned for the year in the early morning hours of Friday, sending to Governor Nathan Deal a major slate of bills, including a failing schools turnaround program, a pilot program for highly autonomous vehicles, a children's hearing aid insurance mandate, and tax credits for music production firms, musical artists, and yacht owners.

Passed

The following bills passed both chambers of the General Assembly in its final week and will be reviewed by the Governor for signature or veto. The governor has 40 days from sine die to make his decisions.

Education

The legislature green-lighted the governor's second attempt to revive the state's chronically failing schools (HB 338), empowering a special statewide "chief turnaround officer" to address problem districts. At the discretion of the new school CTO, the staff of failing schools could be replaced or control of the district could be ceded to "successful" districts or nonprofit charter schools.

The General Assembly passed an additional pair of bills, one adopting charter schools recommendations from the Governor's Education Reform Commission last year (HB 430), and another creating a \$5 million annual tax credit for an "innovation" grant program (HB 237) that prioritizes schools on the target list for turnaround by the governor's CTO.

Transportation

A bill to clear regulatory hurdles for the operation of highly autonomous vehicles on certain public roads in Georgia unanimously passed the Senate. The bill (SB 219) gave the green light to driverless cars providing they register with the state and satisfy certain insurance thresholds.

Taxes

A slate of tax credit programs was adopted in the final week of session, including rebates for royalties paid to music artists (HB 196), credits for music production companies (HB 155) and breaks for yacht owners who make repairs in the state (HB 125). The General Assembly also adjusted the manner in which ad valorem tax on leased vehicles is assessed and collected (HB 340).

Immigration

The legislature moved to ban any funding for the state's colleges and universities that pointedly flout federal

immigration laws or declare themselves a sanctuary campus for undocumented students (HB 37).

Separately, lawmakers moved to create a Georgia Bureau of Investigation-maintained website publically indexing all undocumented immigrants who are released from federal prison in Georgia (HB 452/SB 1). The bill also strengthens the state's anti-terrorism laws.

Health

Georgia's private insurance providers will be required to cover the cost of hearing aids for the state's children under a new Senate mandate. The devices are already covered by Medicaid and were added in 2015 to the State Health Benefit Plan, which covers some 650,000 state employees.

Lawmakers also passed a bill (HB 249) requiring medical providers to check the state drug registry before issuing a prescription for opioids in an attempt to prevent "doctor shopping" by addicts and curb the state's opioid abuse epidemic.

Energy and environment

Lawmakers passed an update to the state's oil and natural gas regulations to expand the permitting process of hydraulic fracturing (HB 205).

Public safety

Legislation providing for the licensed carry of firearms on certain publicly owned properties and portions of public post-secondary educational institutions passed, despite the reservations of Governor Deal (HB 280). The bill is a near-facsimile of legislation that was vetoed last year by the Governor.

Under legislation that unanimously passed both houses (SB 141), carnival operations must now submit to safety and engineering inspections.

Did not pass

The following newsworthy bills are among those that failed to receive final passage in this year's General Assembly session but are eligible for consideration in 2018.

Education

HB 51 would have provided additional due process rights for students accused of sexual assault on college campuses and universities.

HB 217 would have increased to \$100 million from \$57 million the annual pool of available tax credits for private school scholarships.

Transportation

HB 160/SB 6 would have created a Georgia Commission on Transit Governance.

Taxes

HB 61 would have required online retailers to collect sales taxes like brick-and-mortar retailers.

HB 329 would have reduced the state income tax to a flat 5.4%.

HB 159, which would have been a major update to Georgia's adoption law, was tabled by the Senate in the final

Child welfare

minutes of the session amid efforts to add RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act)-like language.

Fun and games

HB 118 would have provided for the authorization and regulation of fantasy sports operations within the state.

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