
Redistricting Bills Failed to Pass

"The General Assembly shall apportion the Senate and House districts. Such districts shall be composed of contiguous territory. The apportionment of the Senate and of the House of Representatives shall be changed by the General Assembly as necessary after each United States decennial census."

– The Constitution of the State of Georgia, Article III

S.R. 23 to create a Citizens' Redistricting Commission is a proposed constitutional amendment to change the above-quoted section of the *Constitution of the State of Georgia*. If passed, it would authorize seven appointees to draw legislative districts for Congress, and the Georgia House and Senate, subject to General Assembly approval. If legislators reject the Commission's proposal twice, the General Assembly would continue to draw district boundaries for Georgia's congressional delegation and the General Assembly. It did not pass.

S.B. 20 would implement the constitutional change, if S.R. 23 passes. Representative Elena Parent (D) introduced both bills on January 14th, and they remain alive for action in 2016.

ACTION – Oppose S.R. 23 & S.B. 20. Contact the Senate Reapportionment & Redistricting Committee in 2016.

From Clean Slate in 2015 to Over-Load in 2016

When Georgia's 180 representatives and 56 senators convened for the 2015 legislative session, their legislative plate was empty, except for dozens of pre-filed bills and resolutions awaiting official introduction. Though some were not introduced this session, they are not dead.

Since 2015 was the first half of the current two-year term for legislators in the Georgia General Assembly, bills and resolutions introduced this session remain alive for the 2016 session, *unless* they passed both House and Senate or were defeated in either House or Senate this year. House bills and resolutions that remain alive for the 2016 session have been recommitted for action in 2016. Also, bills and resolutions that passed the Senate into the House were sent back to their respective House committee, if they were not passed or defeated on the House floor.

Senate bills and resolutions carried into the 2016 session will be recommitted on January 11, 2016, the first day of next year's session. House bills that passed the House into the Senate remain in the Senate for recommitment to the appropriate Senate committee on January 11th.

Do bills become law without the governor's signature?

Yes. Bills that pass both House and Senate become law on July 1st, unless they are vetoed. Others become law when they're signed by the governor, or as directed in the bill. Through April 2nd, the governor had signed nine bills and issued an executive order concerning H.B. 1.

Extensive Legislative Back-Log for the 2016 Session

The Preliminary Final Composite of the Georgia House of Representatives listed 2,565 bills and resolutions introduced or pre-filed for the 2015 General Assembly. Those that did not pass, and were not defeated, carry into the 2016 session. They may or may not be acted upon.

Troublesome Bills That Passed

S.R. 7, introduced January 14th by Senator Renee Unterman (R), would impose additional penalties for these offenses: keeping a place of prostitution, pimping, pandering, pandering by compulsion, solicitation of sodomy, masturbation for hire, trafficking of persons for sexual servitude, or sexual exploitation of children. The additional fines would go into the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund. This change in the law condones juvenile sexual acts by deeming participants under age 18 to be “victims,” even if they are perpetrators. No provision is made to distinguish between *deliberate* sex offenders and *forced* sex offenders.

ACTION – Vote NO on November 2016, unless a bill passes to determine who IS and who IS NOT a victim.

S.B. 8 also introduced January 14th by Senator Renee Unterman (R) is the regulatory bill that would implement S.R. 7, if it is ratified on the November 2016 ballot. S.B. 8 creates an eight-member Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund Commission and a Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund for the Commission to administer.

A *major loophole* is the absence of a method for determining which offenders under age 18 are actual victims of trafficking. Since law enforcement officers cannot hold juveniles in custody for any period of time if they are involved in a crime listed in S.R. 7 outlined above, there is no time to determine who is a victim¹ and who is voluntarily involved in sexual offenses. Since proposed amendments to allow research time were rejected, amendments are needed in 2016.

ACTION – Ask for a bill to be introduced in 2016 to detain under-age sex offenders until victim status is verified.

H.B. 1 was pre-filed by Representative Allen Peake (R) and, officially, introduced January 27th. It passed the General Assembly March 25th. Two days later the governor signed an executive order instructing the Public Health Department and the Board of Regents of the University System to prepare for implementation of the law as soon as he signs it.

Accordingly, the Public Health Department must write procedures, rules and regulations and create a registry for persons authorized to possess low THC oil. To register, patients must be under treatment for cancer, Lou Gehrig’s disease, multiple sclerosis, seizure disorders, Crohn’s disease, mitochondrial disease, Parkinson’s or sickle cell anemia.

The Board of Regents will create, or work with others to develop, a low THC oil research program which is expected to produce data about potential treatment for childhood seizures and other debilitating conditions.

The Georgia Composite Medical Board will draft patient waivers and physician certifications to allow possession of 20 fluid ounces of low-THC cannabis oil. Unauthorized possession will be a misdemeanor, or felony, depending on the amount of oil involved. Ten classes of research personnel will have permits to personally possess 20 fluid ounces (2½ cups) of low THC oil.

A 17-member Georgia Commission on Medical Cannabis will be appointed to determine how to regulate medical cannabis in Georgia and report to the governor and General Assembly in time for 2016. Enacting H.B. 1 is not the end! Their sights are set on growing marijuana.

ACTION – Watch H.B 1’s impact. S.B. 185 & S.B. 198 remain alive for 2016; both legalize recreational marijuana.

¹ Current law: “Code Section 16-5-46. Sexual servitude means: (A) Any sexually explicit conduct or performance involving sexually explicit conduct for which anything of value is directly or indirectly given, promised to, or received by any person, which conduct is induced or obtained by coercion or deception or which conduct is induced or **obtained from a person under the age of 18 years.**” [Under-age sex is called “servitude,” whether it’s sex-by-choice or by force. Since no one under 18 can be kept in custody for sex acts, officials have no time to research who IS or is NOT a victim.]

Passed: School Superintendent, State-Wide Shadow School District

When Governor Deal announced his vision for k – 12 education voters did not know he would introduce legislation to create a state-wide Opportunity School District to be controlled by a shadow *state school superintendent appointed by him*. But that's what he did, and it passed.

S.R. 287 authorizes creation of a state-wide Opportunity School District (OSD). This proposed constitutional amendment was introduced February 19th by Senator Butch Miller (R), one of the governor's floor leaders. It passed by two-thirds majority votes in the General Assembly, so it will be subject to voter ratification in 2016. Upon its ratification, the governor would appoint a "shadow" school superintendent to identify, take over, or close, or reconstitute, or re-staff, manage and control 20 "failing" public schools, annually (up to 100). Schools could be rotated in and out, without input from the elected state school superintendent.

The constitutionally elected state school superintendent would lose authority over the selected schools. Instead of giving local schools and districts real control and flexibility, as the governor said his plan would do, it strips control from the elected school superintendent and locally elected school boards, thereby weakening voter power, and over-riding local control.

The question for the 2016 General Election Ballot is worded to elicit a YES, by asking: "Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended to allow the state to intervene in chronically failing public schools in order to improve student performance?" Every voter will vote YES, but, practically, NOBODY will know the underlying truth – local control will diminish and an appointee of the governor will encroach on the elected state school superintendent's authority.

S.B. 133 authorizes the establishment of the governor's state-wide Opportunity School District (OSD). This bill by Senator Butch Miller (R) would provide the necessary regulations to implement the constitutional changes authorized in S.R. 287.

ACTION: Vote NO on 2016 ballot to retain local control and protect the authority of the elected superintendent.

Did Not Pass: Sexual Orientation Bills Targeting Schools & Adults

H.B. 40, by Representative Keisha Waites (D) would *require public and private schools* to give *sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity* civil rights status in instances of bullying, the definition of which includes expressions of negative opinions.

STATUS: Remains in House Juvenile Justice Committee for action in 2016.

H.B. 142, by Representative Simone Bell (D), would require schools or programs to adopt LGBT-affirming policies. LGBT is short for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual. Schools without such policies would not be eligible for student scholarship funds.

STATUS: Remains in House Education Committee for action in 2016.

S.B. 47, by Senator Vincent Fort (D), requires UNEQUAL treatment under several Georgia laws by more harshly punishing offenders who commit crimes that are, or are perceived to be, based on the victim's sexual orientation.

STATUS: Remains in the Senate Non-Civil Judiciary Committee for 2016.

H.B. 323, by Representative Karla Drenner (D), would add "sexual orientation" to State government employment nondiscrimination policies. It defines sexual orientation as "a person's actual or perceived heterosexuality, *bisexuality, homosexuality, or gender related identity or expression*," and elevates sexual lifestyles to civil rights status.

STATUS: Remains in the House Judiciary Committee for 2016.

Students, DL for Illegals, Foreign Law, & Gambling

H.B. 209, Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Act was amended in this bill by Representative Wes Cantrell (R). It now requires parents to be provided specific written notice of options available to them when their child's disability is identified at the initial IEP meeting.

STATUS: Passed. Unless it is vetoed, it will become law on July 1, 2015.

H.B. 296, by Representative Randy Nix (R), adds another classification of "special needs" that qualify students for college scholarships. Current law authorizes scholarships for students with a *clinical disability*, but H.B. 296 extends such scholarships to "limited English proficient" (which is *not* a clinical disability) students who are lawful refugees, as defined by the federal Immigration and Nationality Act. Such refugee students won't have to meet the one-year residency required of clinically disabled students. To prove refugee status, parents must show the student's valid I-94 document and proof of residency in the school residency area.

Curiously, between 2011 and 2013, in the U.S. territory of San Juan, Puerto Rico, where both English and Spanish are official languages and 84 percent claim they don't speak English very well, 218 residents received disability benefits because they could not speak English.

STATUS: S.B. 296 passed the House 115-16 and is in the Senate Education & Youth Committee for 2016 action.

S.B. 6, by Senator Josh McKoon (R), would prohibit the issuance of drivers' licenses to illegal aliens. Under the federal DACA amnesty edict, 15,000 illegals have been issued Georgia driver's licenses, with thousands more expected. Absent an age limit for DACA, illegals in their 40s claim DACA status, which has been extended to their parents, as well.

STATUS: Retained in the Senate Public Safety Committee for the 2016 session.

H.B. 171, by Representative Dustin Hightower (R), prohibits the enforcement and use of foreign law by any court, arbitration panel, administrative agency, or tribunal, and prohibits re-filing in a foreign court, wherein constitutional rights may be violated.

STATUS: A committee hearing was granted, but it remains in the House Judiciary Committee for action in 2016.

S.R. 80 introduced by Senator William Ligon January 28th demands the revision of the new Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH) framework that (a) reflects a radically revisionist view of U.S. history; (b) emphasizes negative aspects of U.S. history, while omitting or minimizing its positive aspects; and (c) minimizes discussion of the U.S. Founding Fathers, the (d) principles of the Declaration of Independence, (e) religious influences on U.S. history, as well as (f) additional long-time topics of APUSH.

STATUS: It passed the Senate, but was recommitted to the House Education Committee for action in 2016.

Left in Committee: Horse Racing, Pari-Mutuel Gambling & Casinos

H.R. 1 & H.B. 2 Horse Racing & Pari-Mutuel Gambling introduced Feb. 10th & 12th by Representative Harry Geisinger (R) are in the Regulated Industries Committee for 2016.

S.R. 135 Pari-Mutuel Wagering on Horse Racing by Senator Brandon Beach (R) passed the Senate Regulated Industries & Utilities Committee March 9th and remains alive for 2016.

H.R. 811 Study Committee on Casino Gambling by Representative Kidd (I) was introduced March 27th and remains alive in the Regulated Industries Committee for 2016.

H.B. 677 & H.R. 807 Six Licensed Casino Resorts introduced March 26th by Representative Ron Stephens (R) remain alive in the Regulated Industries Committee for 2016.

Georgia Insight is a conservative publication financed entirely by its recipients.