
Committees are the Best Place to Amend, Stop or Pass Legislation

Recently, someone asked why should anyone be interested in what happens in the Georgia General Assembly. Simply put, legislators determine how we are governed. They pass bills and resolutions that become laws that affect our lives, hopefully for the better, sometimes not so much or, perhaps, they diminish our liberties and increase the power of government.

When introduced, bills are given numbers, so they can be identified and tracked as they proceed through committees and, possibly, onto the House and Senate floors for passage or defeat. All legislators are assigned to committees (many to several committees) where bills are debated, amended, rewritten and passed as substitute bills or favorably reported in the original version. Committees are the best place to get legislation passed, stopped, or amended. Members are especially accessible when they have public hearings for speakers to present the pros and cons.

However, the House and Senate have a major committee stop-gap or gate-keeper, their Rules committee that works as a clearing house to decide which bills live or die. Rules Committees may amend a piece of legislation or hold it in committee (kill it), or pass it onto the House or Senate floor for passage or defeat. Committees are keys to the legislative process.

The master keys are the (a) Senate Rules Committee – one of 29 standing committees in the Senate – and (b) the House Rules Committee – one of 42 standing committees in the House. The list of Senate Rules Committee members remained the same from last session, while the House Rules Committee added three members, dropped one and the vice chairman switched positions with another member.

Now in Rules

H.B. 1271 Right to Display the U.S. Flag, introduced by Representative Rhonda Burchett February 8, 2022, went to the Judiciary Committee February 11, where a substitute version passed February 11th. Lines 33 – 35 state, “No covenant adopted after July 1, 2022, shall prohibit the display of the official flag of the U.S.A. through the use of an attachment to the structure of a building, provided that any such flag is not larger than four and one half feet by six feet.” Now, the Rules Committee decides whether or when the 180 House members will vote on it.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Since the Rules Committee has 37 members, please call Representatives Richard Smith Ch., 404 656-5141; V-Ch., Ballinger, 656-7153; Jasperse, Sec., 656-7153; Democrats Beverly, 656-5058; Drenner, 656-0202; and Holcomb, 656-6372; plus Republicans Rich, 656-5024; Kelley, 656-5024; Carson, 656-7855; and Setzler, 656-5143.

H.B. 1274 Antisemitism Defined, introduced February 8, 2022 by Representative John Carson, requires state agencies and departments to use the definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance May 26, 2016, when considering evidence that a victim or group of victims or any property suffered discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call House Rules Committee Representatives listed under H.B. 1271 above.

Monument for Justice Clarence Thomas

S.B. 326 Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas Monument, pre-filed December 10, 2021, then officially introduced February 8, 2022, provides for placing within the capitol building or grounds a monument in honor of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, subject to the availability of funds. It would be designed, procured, and placed by the Capitol Art Standards Commission (CASC), upon final approval by a six-member monument committee of legislators. Two to be appointed by the House Speaker, two by the Lieutenant Governor and two by the Governor, who would appoint one each from the House and Senate. No public funding would be used, but private gifts and donations from individuals, organizations, or foundations would be accepted and expended by the CASC as provided in this Code section. The monument would be procured and placed as soon as practicable, but not before the state has been granted any intellectual property license necessary for the purposes of this Code section. This passed the Senate 32 – 21 on February 7, 2022 and is in the House State Properties Committee. Senators in the Democrat Party cast the 21 votes against the monument.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call State Properties Committee Representatives Greene, Ch., 656-9210; Dunahoo, V-Ch., 656-0152; Pirkle, Sec., 656-7850; Buckner, 656-0116; and Gilliard, 656-7859;

Weapons Carry

H.B. 917 Lifetime Weapons Carry & Possession, introduced January 14th by Representative Mike Cameron, would authorize a county probate judge to issue a weapons carry license or renewal license that is valid for life to that county's domiciled applicants that have been sworn, investigated and paid the \$200.00 fee. A reduced fee of \$100 would be authorized for three classifications, including active or retired emergency medical technicians. Every five years from the license issuance, the license holder would submit an application for a background check review (\$20.00 fee) including fingerprints or the license would be suspended until it is submitted. Non-U.S. citizens must provide proof of eligibility per 18 U.S.C Section 922(y). No weapons carry license would be issued or could be maintained by anyone under age 21 except for individuals at least age 18 or those providing proof that basic training in the U.S. Armed Force had been completed.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call Public Safety & Homeland Security Representatives J Collins, Ch., 404 657-5803; Mathis, V-Ch., 656-0152; Lott, Sec., 651-7737; Clark, 656-7857; Crowe, 656-0325; Evans, 656-0109; Frazier, 656-0265; Glanton, 657-1803; Gravley, 656-5025; Grene, 656-9210; Hitchens, 656-7855; Holcomb, 656-6372; Jackson, 656-0314; Jasperse, 656-7153; Jenkins, 656-0188; Lumsden, 656-7850; Neal, 656-6372; Petrea, 656-5115; Powell, 463-3793; Taylor, 656-7857; Werkheiser, 656-5132; and Williams, 656-0254.

S.B. 478 Weapons Carry in a Park, Historic Site, or Recreation Area, introduced February 8th by Senator Jeff Mullis, is composed of 27 pages that outline extensive changes to the Official Code of Georgia Title 16 offenses against public order, and safety relating to transportation passenger safety; Title 27 relating to game and fish; Title 40 relating to parking for persons with disabilities; and Title 43 relating to professions and business, including the issuance of weapons permits for private detective businesses. It addresses weapons carry as related to telemarketing, computer activities and home repair or improvement work, personal ID cards for justices, security of cards, disrupting General Assembly sessions or related meetings, Capitol Square buildings, and certain other related matters.

ACTION – Study the 27-page S.B. 478 and discuss it with Senate Judiciary Committee Senators Strickland, Ch., 463-6598; Cowsert, V-Ch., 463-1366; Kennedy, Sec., 656-0045; Hatchett, 656-7454; Harold Jones, 656-0036; Kirkpatrick, 656-3932; Parent, 656-5109; Rhett, 656-0054; Tillery, 656-5038; and Watson, 656-7880.

Education's Hot Topics

S.B. 514 Unmask Georgia Students Act, introduced February 14th by Senator Clint Dixon, protects parental rights and affects the following taxpayer-funded schools in Georgia:

A. Schools under local control: No local board of education, school superintendent, administrator, teacher or school personnel shall (a) make or enforce a rule that students must wear face coverings on school property, (b) unless parents are allowed to opt-out their children. (c) No reason to opt-out is required and (d) adverse disciplinary or academic repercussions are prohibited. These tax-funded schools are governed by locally elected school boards.

B. Schools controlled by charters: No governing body of a charter school or a state chartered special school shall (a) make or enforce a rule requiring students to wear face masks or face coverings in any area of a school or school grounds or other property owned or operated by the charter school, (b) unless a parental right to exempt children is included, and (c) disciplinary or academic repercussion is prohibited against exempted students. If passed, this Act would stand repealed in its entirety on June 30, 2023. Such schools are tax-funded and controlled by a charter – contract – but are not governed by an elected local school board.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call Senate Education & Youth Committee Senators Payne, Ch., 463-5402; Anavitarte, V-Ch., 656-0085; Sims, Sec., 463-5259; Albers, 463-8055; Brass*, 463-1376; Dolezel, 656-7127; Halpern, 463-1351; Jackson, 463-5261; James, 463-1379; McNeill 656-9644; Parent, 656-5109; and Tippins*, 657-0406. (*Ex Officio)

H.B. 888 Intellectual Freedom of Students, Faculty & Staff, introduced January 13th by Representative Brad Thomas specifies curricula approved for use in Georgia schools. But it, also, prohibits state agencies, local boards of education or public elementary or secondary school administrators, teachers, or other personnel from compelling any individual to affirm, adopt, adhere to, profess, or promote concepts in violation of federal and state anti-discrimination laws. By prohibiting “the inclusion of certain concepts in courses” in public elementary and secondary schools, it prohibits the teaching or promotion of critical race theory (CRT) or any component thereof, although the National Education Association encourages educators to teach CRT, regardless of laws against it. NEA passed a resolution in 2021 that promises to pay for the legal defense of educators sued for teaching CRT or its components.

Beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, public elementary and secondary schools must include and maintain on the homepage website a link with a detailed (a) list of primary instructional materials used in all courses available at the school, including, but not limited to, the title, author, creator, and publisher of any book, periodical, treatise, article, recording, software, webpage, or paper. Also, (b) all primary instructional material and supplementary or ancillary materials used or proposed by the school must be available for review on site upon request by any parent or guardian of an enrolled student. (c) The school must accommodate the review no less than 24 hours before the materials are used. (d) No later than July 1, 2022, complaint resolutions must be available. Complaints received by a school must be acted upon within five school days of their receipt. Lines 58 – 129 outline the curricula required by this legislation.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call Education Committee Representatives Dubnik, Ch., 656-0213; Erwin, V-Ch., 656-0188; Belton, Sec., 656-3947; Benton, 656-5126; Cantrell, 656-0152; Carter, 656-0220; Cheokas, 463-7853; England, 463-2247; Evans, 656-0109; Glanton, 657-1803; Hill, 656-0325; Howard, 656-6372; Jasperse, 656-7153; Jan Jones, 656-5072; Todd Jones, 463-2246; LaRiccia, 651-7737; Mainor, 656-0126; Nguyen, 656-0314; Nix, 656-5146; Paris, 656-0109; Rich, 656-5087; Setzler, 656-5143; Wade, 656-0188; and Wilson, 656-6372.

Recess, 4-H, School Boards

H.B. 1283 Quality Basic Education Act, Mandatory Recess, introduced by Representative Demetrius Douglas February 8th, (a) requires elementary schools to schedule a daily 30-minute recess for K – 5 pupils beginning in school year 2022 – 2023. Recess would not be scheduled for physical education days, inclement weather or conflicts beyond teachers’ control. It must be supervised unstructured activity, outdoors, if possible, indoors if necessary. (b) Local school boards would write policies that allow or prohibit such break-time for grades 6 – 8.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call Education Committee Representatives listed under H.B. 888 on page 3.

H.B. 1292 Rights of Students in 4-H Activity, introduced February 10th by Representative Rick Jasperse requires students participating in 4-H activities or programs (a) to be credited as present at school in the same manner as an educational field trip and (b) not be counted absent (excused or unexcused) for a day, portion of a day, or school days missed. (c) A school principal or his designee may request proof that the student actually participated in the program.

ACTION – SUPPORT. Call Education Committee Representatives listed under H.B. 888 on page 3.

S.B. 477 Local Boards of Education Nonpartisan Election, introduced by Senator Nikki Merritt February 10th, asks the Secretary of State to include on the November 2022 ballot this NONBINDING ADVISORY REFERENDUM question: “Shall local boards of education in Georgia all be elected on a nonpartisan basis without party designation on the ballot?”

ACTION – OPPOSE. Removal of candidates’ party affiliation from the ballot would deprive voters of critical information needed to choose like-minded school board members to manage and control education for children in the district. Call Ethics Committee Senators Burns, Ch., 656-7856; Burke, V-Ch., 656-0040; Harold Jones, Sec., 656-0036; Anavitarte, 656-0085; Butler, 656-0075; Dugan, 656-7872; Gooch, 656-9221; Harbison, 656-0074; Harrell, 463-2260; Hatchett, 656-7454; Miller, 656-6578; Robertson, 463-3931; and Strickland, 463-6598.

Democrats introduce Transition-Specific Public Assistance Healthcare Bill

H.B. 1332 Gender-affirming & Gender-reassignment Medical Care & Social Services introduced February 14th by Representative Matthew Wilson says, “healthcare services that are ordinarily or exclusively available to individuals of one sex” cannot be denied or limited, simply, because a covered person identified as the other sex when enrolling for insurance or had or is undergoing gender transition. Medicaid insurance contractors cannot deny/limit gender transition coverage, such as facial surgery, hormone therapy, hysterectomy, mastectomy, orchiectomy, phalloplasty, vaginoplasty or vocal training, as defined in H.B. 1332.

Although no one is empowered to assign sex at birth, line 20 mentions “the person’s assigned sex at birth,” line 22 says, “the sex the person was assigned at birth.” Lines 31-32 state, “Transgender status means the status of a person who identifies as a gender different from the sex assigned to the person at birth.” All such statements disregard ultrasounds showing biological features that prove sexual identity is evident months before the baby is born.

This requires taxpayers to fund confidential, ongoing, multiple, life-changing treatment and surgery, and unlimited services to anyone of any age to change the “sex assigned at birth.”

ACTION – OPPOSE. Call House Health & Human Services Committee Representatives Cooper, Ch., 656-5069; Newton, V-Ch., 656-0254; Gaines, Sec., 656-0298; Barr, 656-7857; Barron, 656-0325; Bennett, 656-0202; Beverly, 656-5058; Cheokas, 463-5753; Dempsey, 463-2248; Douglas, 656-7859; Drenner, 656-0202; Frye, 656-0265; Hatchett, 656-5025; Hawkins, 656-7855; Hogan, 656-0178; Howard, 656-6372; Hutchinson, 656-0287; Jasperse, 656-7153; Sheila Jones, 656-0126; Kelley, 656-5024; LaHood, 656-0188; Lott, 651-7737; Mathiak, 656-0298; Mitchell, 656-0126; Parsons, 463-7853; and Petrea, 656-785

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