



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



March 27, 2020

Welcome to GHLA @ the Capitol, your weekly update about news you need to know related to Georgia's lodging industry and the 2020 General Assembly. GHLA's legislative team will be your eyes and ears under the Gold Dome.

CARES Act Passes U.S. Senate and U.S. House: Awaits President's Signature

On Wednesday, the Senate passed the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act by a vote of 96-0. At approximately 1:30 PM today the House passed the measure and it is expected to be signed by President Trump shortly. It cannot be stated enough how your messages to your elected officials influenced the speed of this bill's passage. AHLA estimates that members across the country contacted Congress 100,000 times on Phase Three. For reference, AHLA normally has about 1,000 contacts from the states combined on any given issue.

The CARES Act is the third bill to move through Congress as a part of the stimulus packages. As always, your GHLA team is hard work providing the best possible representation for all hotels in Georgia. We greatly appreciate the Governor's office and local leaders for their thoughtful response to this crisis.

Some key links are below for more information:

- ["Phase 3" Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act Summary \(CARES ACT\) CV-3 \(S. 3548\)](#)
- A comprehensive CARES Act Summary can be found [here](#).
- We are maintaining a COVID-19 resource page with realtime information for hoteliers at [GHLA.net/C19](#).

"Shelter in Place" Orders and the Industry

GHLA has been working with elected officials in response to "Shelter in Place" orders across the state. Hotels and lodging establishments must be included in the designation as essential businesses, and the team has been acting swiftly in response to a patchwork of Executive Orders that will hamper our ability to be part of the solution. Because federal guidance has limited hotel openings to 'those where hotels are used for COVID-19', it has been mission-critical to educate policymakers on why further clarity is needed.

GHLA has ensured that decisionmakers understand that hotels that choose to remain open are havens for domestic violence victims, those in the military, employees, and first responders.

Across the nation, hotels are providing relief to overburdened healthcare systems. Some hotels are serving as shelters for those with mild symptoms or for hospital employees that need to stay closer to work. Some check-ins are those that need to stay away from an immunocompromised family member. Without hotel space available, these individuals have few options available.

While hotels are typically the epicenter of travel, they are now being repurposed as part of a pandemic solution. The designation as an essential business must be made clear to help fight the spread of Coronavirus. Please let GHLA know if you need assistance with any local officials or ordinances.

Governor's Statewide Town Hall

On Thursday, March 26th, several television stations worked in collaboration to offer a widely broadcast Governor's Statewide Town Hall. This one-hour special allowed Governor Kemp, Department of Public Health (DPH) Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey, and Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms to come together and provide a comprehensive update of the state's actions in response to the Coronavirus.

Thus far, 1,643 Georgians have tested positive, and 56 Georgians have succumbed to the virus. Five members of the Senate and two members of the House have tested positive, but all seem to be in stable condition.

As of Monday, March 23, the Governor has issued a “shelter in place” order for the medically fragile. He has closed bars and restaurants for sit-in service, limited social gatherings, and pushed public school openings back until April 24th. His Administration is encouraging people to practice social distancing and stay at home.

During the Town Hall, the Governor explained why he has decided not to issue a statewide shelter-in-place order. The Governor commented that he’s been relying heavily on the advice of medical experts, as many counties in Georgia are still without a single reported case of the virus. He is looking to allow local governments to decide which measures work best for them, given the circumstances. Responses to this decision have primarily fallen on party lines, with Republicans embracing the Governor’s leadership during the crisis, and Democrats criticizing the decision not to issue a statewide order.

At the end of his remarks, the Governor acknowledged that he knows Georgians are hurting. He has joined Governors around the country to push Congress to sign the CARES Act, the third phase of the economic stimulus package that will go to the states. He believes the stimulus will prevent some of the massive financial casualties that will result from the pandemic.

Some additional highlights from the Town Hall are as follows:

- Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security has a plan for when first responders fall ill;
- The state is working to increase testing rates, an issue the country is struggling with;
- Georgia has gotten its first massive shipment of protective equipment for medical professionals; they expect a second shipment within the next few days;
- The DPH is working with GEMA to increase the number of ventilators available. They are gathering ventilators from technical colleges around the state;
- Social distancing seems to be helping “flatten the curve” in Georgia; and,
- 10 counties make up 60% of the cases in Georgia thus far.

Transportation Committee Meets to Discuss Airport Concerns

This week, the Atlanta City Council’s Transportation Committee met remotely with John Selden, the General Manager of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. Selden acknowledged that the Coronavirus has significantly impacted air travel over the last two weeks. Atlanta’s airport typically sees 2,600 full flights per day; we are now down to 1,200, mostly empty flights. Eight thousand passengers were screened yesterday compared with the typical 70,000. Most flights appear to be U.S. citizens returning from international destinations and domestic consolidation among airport hubs is expected.

Despite the domestic travel impact, cargo business is proliferating, and the FAA requires the airport to remain open to support deliveries. Selden commented that operations would be scaled to meet the demands of passengers.

The Councilmembers asked him to discuss screening procedures for COVID-19. Selden said that domestic passengers are not screened, and most of their resources go towards testing those returning from China, Iran, and Europe. The airlines and the State Department screen upon departure and return.

While the outlook in the near-term may sound grim, Selden comments that the airport has excellent liquidity, and costs will scale down to meet the demands of passengers. The airport receives grants from the FAA, and the airport’s charter prevents them from closing due to a lack of passengers. The stimulus package will provide enough funds to protect the future of the airport and maintain their current operations.

Possible Primary Delay in Georgia

This week, House Speaker David Ralston called for a delay in the presidential primary due to the Coronavirus. He’s taken the step of asking Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to move the May 19th election until June 23rd at the earliest.

The Secretary of State has been quickly weighing solutions that can divert 6.9 million active voters from waiting together at the polls. This week he announced that Georgia would be allowing absentee ballots. He remains hopeful that pushing the primary back another month will allow the situation to improve and prevent additional public health concerns from waiting at the polls.

While the Georgia General Assembly agreed to a one-month delay, the Speaker has said that in light of the current circumstances, we should not be voting until the summer. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State is limited to a 45-day postponement during an emergency, meaning this measure would require a vote.

A copy of Speaker Ralston's letter can be found [here](#).

Legislative Tracking Update

Please [click here to go to our Legislative tracking page](#) for the complete list of bills we are watching.

[Visit our main page.](#)

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