



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



**April 24, 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.

## **“Reviving a Healthy Georgia” Is First Step to Opening Georgia’s Economy**

On Thursday evening, Governor Brian Kemp signed a new executive order that takes incremental steps towards opening businesses back up in Georgia. There is a list of guidelines for restaurants that intend to open on Monday and for healthcare providers that are looking to provide non-emergency services. As an example, no more than ten patrons would be allowed per 500 square feet, employers must screen employees for illness, and all employees must wear face masks. The details can be found on page 7 to 9 of the "Reviving a Healthy Georgia Executive Order." For businesses that feel they can meet the list of mandates, it is a promising start for an economy that was essentially put on hold so many weeks ago. You can access a copy of Governor Kemp's most recent Executive Order here – [“Reviving a Healthy Georgia Executive Order.”](#) This link will take you to the webpage that carries all of the [2020 Executive Orders](#).

While the executive order outlines ways for businesses to operate during COVID-19 crisis, the state of emergency has been extended further until May 7 due to recent storm damage throughout the state. Barbershops, hair salons, spas, tattoo parlors, and bowling alleys may also open with limited operations.

The order also lays out requirements for commerce, organizations, and non-profits that can reasonably maintain social distancing. The Governor's office has been working in concert with public health experts on taking these measured steps towards limited operations. Kemp had been a small business owner before his life in the public eye and believes that businesses will prioritize the safety of employees and customers alike. During his address earlier this week, he commented that it is incumbent on companies to show their customers they can operate safely during this time. He has made it clear that he believes in his citizens' ability to abide by guidelines while supporting the local economy. If you have questions about business operations, please visit the Georgia Department of Economic Development's newest [“Guidelines for Businesses”](#) for more information and guidance.

## **Georgia Lawmakers Consider Returning in Mid-June**

This week Senate and House leadership have been discussing various dates to return to finish out the 2020 legislative session. All signs point to restarting on June 11 with some suggesting May 15 as a closer, but viable, option. Not only would the June 11 date take them past the June 9 primary, but it would conveniently coincide with the April revenue figures. These numbers will help lawmakers begin the process of writing the 2021 spending plan.

The legislative session has been suspended since March 13, leaving hundreds of proposals in limbo. While it's certainly possible the General Assembly will take up these non-budgetary measures, their only legal requirement is to pass a balanced budget by June 30.

When the General Assembly resumes, they will begin the arduous process of negotiating the budget while balancing their risk of COVID exposure. Some officials in Georgia have been consulting with NCSL to examine how other states have successfully held sessions while respecting social distancing recommendations. Almost half of all state legislatures have postponed or amended their rules to continue to meet remotely. Some have met in larger venues that will allow them to adhere to social distancing, such as sports arenas. Other states have decided to vote by proxy.

This budget negotiation will again require state agencies to make budget reduction plans as the state faces a \$4 billion revenue shortfall over the next 15 months. The newly minted Senate Appropriations Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) is already working to understand how the agencies prioritize their

programs, and Speaker Ralston has indicated he believes subcommittee hearings will begin in just a few weeks.

### **Legislative Tracking Update**

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

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