



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Welcome to GHLA @ the Capitol, your weekly update about the 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.

Cobb County Postpones Short-Term Rental Ordinance Vote

The Cobb Board of Commissioners considered an amendment to their code this week that would impact short-term rentals such as HomeAway and Airbnb. The changes in the proposed ordinance include limiting rentals to 30 days, requiring owners to have an occupancy license, and hiring an agent to respond to complaints. The amendments were proposed by Commissioners Bob Ott of East Cobb and JoAnn Birrell of North Cobb, citing the need for regulation and oversight of a growing industry. The measure also imposes a limit of one adult per 390 square feet.

GHLA and GHLA's Cobb Hotel Council Members were present for the meeting and spoke to the Commissioners prior to the public hearing. GHLA's Cobb Hotel Council Chairman, Devin Heath, spoke in support of the amendment change during the first public hearing.

The Commissioners decided to hold off on the changes until the spring, citing that bills such as HB523 by Rep. Kasey Carpenter (R-Dalton) would have an impact on the ordinance should they be signed into law. The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) have characterized this as a preemption bill, prohibiting local government from treating these properties differently than other residential properties. Ultimately this issue is weighing individual rights with zoning and local control. The only thing attendees could agree on is that the issue is complicated.

In the interim, Commissioner Ott has decided to convene a task force to include pertinent staff in working on an ordinance. They have agreed to take additional input on the measure throughout that process. For more information on the proposed draft of the revision, please see [here](#).

Recess at the Capitol Slows Down Process

The budget week kicked off with a short apology tour. Kelly Farr, the director of the Office of Planning and Budget, came to apologize during a public meeting in front of the House for not taking more questions from House members during the first presentation.

Originally, Farr did not come prepared to accept questions on the Governor's Budget Proposal which left the Speaker of the House displeased, to say the least. The Speaker put out a statement afterward, indicating that he was offended and would not be resuming official business until February 18th. Farr's apology has been interpreted as an olive branch, and the legislators have responded well.

Appropriations Vice-Chair Clay Pirkle (R-Ashburn) said it feels more like a dialogue than a monologue this week. Farr met with the House budget staff for over an hour on Tuesday to outline some of the cuts in more detail. Appropriators held meetings throughout the week to dig into the numbers and respond to budget cuts.

While the focus of state agencies have been on finding efficiencies, \$70 million per year will come from eliminating 1,200 state government positions that have been vacant. While this may help the bottom line this year, many of those positions need to be filled eventually.

While agency heads had initially focused on emphasizing that they didn't think everyday Georgians would feel the impact of the cuts, they've now struck a more sympathetic tone after the reaction from House appropriators. Farr commented later in the week, "I realize a cut is a cut and it's difficult to take no matter how it is rationalized or not rationalized."

Pro Sports Pushes for Online Betting

The four professional sports teams in Atlanta have stated publicly that they will be introducing online sports gambling legislation this year. They did not indicate which legislator would push the bill on their

behalf.

The Braves, Falcons, Hawks and Atlanta United held a joint conference in front of the Atlanta Press Club this week to tout the benefits of the proposal. They believe it will more actively engage fans, and argue that it's already happening, but illegally.

Opponents have long argued that it will aid problem gambling within the state. The Faith and Freedom Coalition have argued this proposal creates a "pocket casino" giving one access all day. While there has been some legislation introduced, the support from lawmakers appears to be dwindling.

The NFL has estimated that nearly \$1.5 billion is being gambled illegally in Georgia. The Georgia General Assembly will convene from recess for Day 13 on Tuesday, February 18th. Over a quarter of session days are already behind us. A bill sponsor would have to be highly motivated and have the support of their Caucus after dropping a bill for this to become reality during the 2020 session.

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