



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



May 22, 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.

Senate Begins In-Person Meetings

The Senate will begin holding its first in-person meetings next week since the General Assembly suspended activity in mid-March due to COVID-19. Legislators will begin their work on the FY2021 budget that is expected to include \$3.5 billion in cuts due to a plummet in tax revenue collections.

Chairman Blake Tillery (R-Vidalia) plans to have the chairs of each subcommittee in attendance as well as budget staff. Other lawmakers are encouraged to participate via live stream, as is the public. Budget-writers have asked state agencies to send in plans to cut their operating budgets by 14%, and many of these plans would require workers to be furloughed.

The Senate has scheduled subcommittee meetings next week for Education, Agriculture, Criminal Justice, and Economic Development. To watch these committee meetings live, please visit [here](#).

Governor Kemp Provides Weekly COVID-19 Update

Governor Kemp provided an update on Thursday afternoon from the State Capitol, joined by several public officials including the Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey. Much of the question and answer period hinged on the recent data reported by DPH, with Dr. Toomey admitting that what data may prove useful to an epidemiologist may not work for everyone.

DPH is working with software developers to improve how the state's COVID data is presented to the public and explained why data sometimes operates on a lag. Dr. Toomey explained that when DPH receives a positive it is sometimes inadvertently reported by both the provider and the public health department. They are working to ensure the public has an accurate picture of Georgia's COVID-19 impact which is sometimes easier said than done.

The CDC's goal is to test at least 2% of the population, which Georgia has exceeded. The confusion now lies with the different types of test results. Georgians took umbrage with the fact that the state was combining both positive COVID tests and antibody tests. Dr. Toomey has committed to ensuring that these data are separated out and not aggregated to include past infections.

The Governor was also joined by Georgia Emergency Management's Director Homer Bryson, Georgia National Guard Adjutant General Tom Carden, Georgia Department of Public Safety Commissioner Col. Gary Vowell, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Mark Williams and Georgia Department of Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black.

All of the public officials acknowledged that Memorial Day weekend is typically a kickoff for a busy season here in Georgia. They each urged that Georgians exercise caution when operating boats, driving on the highways, and visiting their loved ones this holiday weekend.

Vice President Mike Pence Visits Georgia

Vice President Mike Pence is set to meet with Governor Brian Kemp in Atlanta today to discuss the state's easing of economic restrictions. While initially met with criticism, the relaxation of restrictions has not yet created the surge in infections that public health experts predicted. Restaurant executives will join them for a roundtable at the Waffle House headquarters in Norcross.

Despite the widely publicized remarks of President Trump on Georgia's reopening, Governor Kemp has regularly expressed his gratitude for the White House's task force and their support during the pandemic. During yesterday's press conference, he thanked the White House for sending much-needed supplies to Georgia, such as 14,000 face shields, 749,000 gloves, and over 35,000 gowns to nursing homes.

Vice President Pence will be discussing Georgia's plans now that other states are looking to follow the state's lead in cautiously reopening the economy.

AHLA outlines action needed by Congress to help industry survive economic impact worse than Great Depression

With new data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) showing staggering job loss to the hospitality and leisure industry, the American Hotel & Lodging Association today released a "Roadmap to Recovery," calling on Congress to prioritize relief for hotel workers and small businesses in the next stimulus package. The April Jobs Report showed the hospitality and leisure industry was the hardest hit, losing 7.7 million jobs—nearly as many jobs as the next four sectors combined.

AHLA is urging Congress to provide immediate assistance in these four areas:

- Help hotels retain and rehire employees by extending the Paycheck Protection Program, offering employees direct tuition assistance or tax credits, and expanding the Employee Retention Credit
- Protect employees and guests through tax credits for cleaning equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Keep hotel doors open by providing relief for hotel commercial mortgages and increasing the size and flexibility of PPP loans
- Incentivize Americans to travel again when it's safe with a new, temporary travel tax credit and restoring the entertainment business expense deduction

"The hospitality industry is in a fight for survival," said Chip Rogers, president and CEO of AHLA. "We are grateful to the leadership of both parties during one of the most difficult health and economic challenges we have faced. We are urging Congress to do even more to help the hotel industry so that our small business hotel operators can keep the lights on and retain and rehire employees."

COVID-19 continues to devastate the hotel industry: 2020 is projected to be the worst year on record for hotel occupancy, and experts estimate it will be at least 2022 before hotels return to their 2019 occupancy and revenue levels. So far, the impact of COVID-19 on the travel industry has been nine times worse than September 11. In a recent survey of AHLA members, more than 8 in 10 hotel employees said they have had to lay off or furlough workers. Only 37 percent have been able to rehire any staff through economic relief measures such as PPP.

With a presence in every congressional district in America, hotels are central to getting our economy back on track and supporting millions of jobs. Prior to the pandemic, hotels were proud to support one in 25 American jobs—8.3 million in total—and contribute \$660 billion to U.S. GDP. A representative hotel with 100 occupied rooms per night supports nearly 250 jobs in the community and generates \$18.4 million in guest spending at neighborhood shops and restaurants. Hotels also generate \$186 billion in local, state, and federal taxes each year.

"While the hotel industry was one of the first affected by the pandemic, we have collectively stepped up to serve our communities during this public health crisis. We need Congress to continue to prioritize the industries and employees most affected by the crisis, so we can retain and rehire the people who power our industry, our communities and our economy," concluded Rogers.

[Click here to read AHLA's letter to Congress.](#)

[Click here to download the hotel industry's Road Map to Recovery one-pager.](#)

AHLA Safe Stay Program Endorsed by Hospitality Leaders in All 50 States & Canada

As states across the country navigate reopening and hotels begin to safely welcome back guests, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) announced that hospitality leaders across North America have endorsed Safe Stay, AHLA's enhanced industry-wide cleaning guidelines. AHLA's Partner State Associations, who represent the hotel industry in each state across the country, as well as leading hospitality organizations in the U.S. and Canada representing the depth and breadth of the hotel industry, endorsed the new cleanliness guidelines which were developed by industry leaders and public health officials to meet the new health challenges of COVID-19.

[Click here for the full press release.](#)

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