



April 4, 2025 - SINE DIE

Welcome to GHLA @ the Capitol, your weekly update about news you need to know related to Georgia's lodging industry and the 2025 General Assembly. GHLA's legislative team will be your eyes and ears under the Gold Dome.

GHLA Legislative Highlights

This week, the legislature convened for legislative days 38 through 40, with Tuesday and Thursday designated as committee workdays. Legislative day 40 marks an essential procedural milestone: Sine Die, which signals the closing of the 2025 legislative session. This is the final day for the House and Senate to pass bills that will become law. Since this is the first year of the legislative biennium, any bill that did not receive final passage will return to its respective committee to start the process anew next year. The GHLA team will provide another update on which bills successfully passed and which ones were left behind.

Senate and House Study Committees to Make Georgia the Number One State for Tourism

Georgia's diverse tourism offerings—from its picturesque coastal retreats and mountain escapes to vibrant metro areas and charming small towns—attract visitors from all over. The state also boasts a strong sports culture with major teams, while its natural attractions, including beaches, mountains, and scenic trails, further enhance its appeal.

Tourism is a cornerstone of Georgia's economy, generating a significant economic impact. In 2023, the industry contributed \$79.7 billion to the state's economy, producing more than \$5 billion in state and local taxes, and supporting roughly 463,000 jobs. Efforts to increase hotel stays, promote in-state travel, and encourage weekend getaways and staycations have all played a role in stimulating local economies and creating new business opportunities.

Looking ahead, Georgia is poised for even greater exposure with the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup, where the state will host eight matches. Each match is expected to generate \$4.6 million in global media coverage, further cementing Georgia's status as a premier travel destination. However, despite this opportunity, Georgia currently ranks last in tourism marketing funding—a challenge that the state is eager to address.

In a significant step forward, [SR 323](#), creating the Senate Study Committee on Making Georgia the No. 1 State for Tourism, was adopted by the Senate. Mirroring this important action, [HR 883](#) passed unanimously out of the House Economic Development & Tourism Committee on Thursday. The resolution proposes the formation of a study committee that will focus on

identifying tourism growth opportunities throughout Georgia. These committees will explore how to boost tourism in both small towns and large cities.

By addressing these areas, the initiative seeks to propel Georgia to become the No. 1 state for tourism. The study committee's findings and recommendations will play a crucial role in shaping the future of tourism in Georgia, ultimately helping to unlock new economic potential for the state in the years to come. This initiative seeks to help Georgia become the No. 1 state for tourism, positioning it for even greater economic success in the coming years.

Tort Reform Update Final Passage

The Governor's Tort Reform Package received the final procedural motion this week with a bipartisan vote. [SB 69](#) by Sen. John Kennedy, part two of Governor Kemp's tort reform package, seeks to confront the growing, unregulated third-party litigation funding (TPLF) industry by strengthening consumer protections and mitigating possible foreign influence in the judicial system. Tort Reform was GHLA's #1 priority this session, and the team has been monitoring the legislation closely. Both [SB 68](#) and [SB 69](#) now sit on the Governor's desk, waiting to be signed into law.

SB 69 introduces strict regulations on litigation financing in Georgia, requiring all financiers to register with the Department of Banking and Finance and disclose any foreign affiliations. The bill limits financiers' influence over legal decisions, prohibits referral fees, and mandates transparency by making litigation funding agreements discoverable in court. It also sets clear contract requirements and consumer disclosures, with violations rendering agreements void—and willful violations punishable by felony charges. Additionally, litigation financiers can be held jointly liable for court-imposed costs or sanctions related to the cases they fund.

What SB 68 Means for Georgia's Business Community

Overview:

[SB 68](#) represents a significant step forward in modernizing Georgia's civil justice system. Backed by Governor Kemp, this sweeping legislation addresses long-standing legal loopholes and curbs costly lawsuit abuse—ultimately creating a fairer legal environment for businesses, healthcare providers, and consumers alike. For hoteliers and property owners, these reforms offer stronger legal protections, greater clarity, and reduced liability exposure in a variety of legal situations.

Key Highlights for Hotel Operators & Property Owners:

Bans Anchoring in Jury Awards

Prevents attorneys from suggesting excessive, unsupported dollar amounts for non-economic damages in closing arguments. Jurors must rely on actual evidence, not emotion-driven tactics.

Streamlines Motion to Dismiss Process

Limits unnecessary legal costs by pausing expensive discovery while motions to dismiss are under review. Frivolous lawsuits can be identified and resolved earlier, with courts required to act within 90 days.

Prevents Strategic Late Dismissals by Plaintiffs

Shifts the deadline for voluntary dismissal to 60 days after a defendant responds—closing a loophole that allowed plaintiffs to reset litigation unnecessarily.

Eliminates Double Recovery of Attorney’s Fees

Stops attorneys from collecting multiple awards for the same work, ensuring more reasonable and transparent legal fee recovery.

Allows Seatbelt Evidence in Auto Injury Cases

Empowers juries to consider whether a plaintiff was wearing a seatbelt, leading to fairer determinations in vehicle-related liability claims—important for hospitality operations involving shuttles or valet services.

Reforms Premises Liability Standards

Offers greater clarity on when businesses can be held liable for criminal acts by third parties. Ensures hoteliers and property owners are only held responsible when they fail to meet their legal duty of care—while still preserving protections for victims under other legal frameworks.

Ends Phantom Medical Damages

Ensures awards for medical expenses reflect actual costs paid, not inflated billing figures. This limits exaggerated claims and allows more accurate damage assessments in injury cases.

Introduces Bifurcated Trials (Liability First, Damages Second)

Enables courts to split trials into two distinct phases—first determining liability, then assessing damages. This helps juries make clearer, more focused decisions. Judges retain discretion in certain cases, including those with lower damage thresholds or emotional trauma.

Bottom Line for Hoteliers:

SB 68 creates a more balanced legal landscape that protects Georgia businesses from meritless claims and outsized judgments, while still upholding accountability where it’s due. These reforms support long-term stability, reduce litigation costs, and provide clearer standards for liability—particularly important in the hospitality industry, where guest safety, property access, and third-party interactions are everyday concerns. Importantly, this new environment is expected to encourage lower insurance premiums and expand access to insurance providers—helping hotels better manage risk, reduce overhead, and improve operational predictability in an increasingly competitive market.

Religious Freedom Restoration Act Received Final Passage

Setzler, the bill’s author, emphasized that [SB 36](#) directly mirrors the federal RFRA law passed in 1993 with broad bipartisan support. He explained that while the federal law offers protections against federal action, it does not apply to state-level issues—creating what he called a “hole in the constitution” that only state legislatures can fill. Georgia remains the only Republican-led state in the nation without these protections, which even deep-blue states like Massachusetts have enacted.

He presented a map highlighting that every state surrounding Georgia has a state-level RFRA and noted that within Georgia, only federal institutions like military bases and prisons currently guarantee these rights. He shared real-life examples where RFRA laws have protected individuals of various faiths, including minority religions, and emphasized that the bill does not affect local non-discrimination ordinances.

Cole Muzio of Frontline Policy joined the group and delivered a pointed message to legislators, stating that voters “have long memories” and that passage of this bill is a priority in both primary and general elections.

Setzler addressed concerns from the business community, making clear that SB 36 contains no new provisions beyond what exists in federal law. At the request of the Governor’s Office, language was added to clarify that judges cannot be sued—making it even more aligned with the federal version. He also directly responded to media and business groups’ questions about the necessity of the bill by citing a Supreme Court ruling which confirms that the federal RFRA does not apply unless states pass their own version.

After a lengthy and heated discussion in the House Chamber on Wednesday night, SB 36, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, was narrowly adopted by the House with a vote of 96-70. Governor Kemp signed the bill this morning.

Clarification of Innkeeper - Guest Relationships in Georgia

[HB 61](#) did not make it out of Senate Rules in time for consideration this session. Our team is working diligently to find a new path forward for this important piece of legislation through the final hours of the session. If it does make it through to the floor today, it will be alive for consideration in the 2026 session.

It would simply clarify innkeeper-guest relationships in Georgia:

- Clear Stay Agreements: Guests enter into a contract stating their stay period and removal terms, with a copy given 24 hours before expiration.
- Innkeeper’s Rights: After expiration, innkeepers can deny access, secure belongings, and charge reasonable storage fees.
- Guest Removal: If a guest refuses to leave, hotels can file a legal notice, and law enforcement must remove them as trespassers immediately.
- Guest vs. Tenant: A guest remains a guest, no matter how long they stay, unless both sides sign a written tenant agreement.
- Late Payments: Accepting late payments doesn’t create a landlord-tenant relationship or stop removal.

Watch for our full Sine Die recap next week.

Legislative Tracking Update

House Bills:

[HB 874](#) - Georgia Taxpayer Privacy Protection Act; enact

[HB 875](#) - Property; tenant seeking to limit public access to records of the court relating to dispossession actions to be sealed under certain circumstances; provide

[HB 876](#) - Property; provide residential tenants with the right to complete repairs required by landlord and offset rental installments by the reasonable cost of such repairs under certain circumstances

[HB 879](#) - Motor vehicles; penalty for violations captured by school bus camera; provisions

[HB 880](#) - Income tax; reduce tax rate that may be reached under certain conditions

[HB 883](#) - Commerce and trade; standards for display of electricity dispensed by electric vehicle charging stations; revise and provide

[HB 887](#) - Patriots in Trades Act; enact

[HB 892](#) - Professions and businesses; prohibit massage therapy businesses from operating during certain set hours

[HB 896](#) - Hall County; levy an excise tax

[HB 899](#) - Property; transfer-on-death deeds; modify certain provisions

[HB 902](#) - Insurance; transparency and accountability in rates and rate regulation after enactment of tort reform law; provide

[HB 903](#) - Georgia Administrative Procedure Act shall apply to all executive branch agencies; provide

[HB 910](#) - Georgia Lottery Game of Sports Betting Act; enact

[HB 911](#) - Torts; prohibit individuals from bringing defamation actions against another individual who makes a communication regarding an incident of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination; provisions

[HB 914](#) - Commissioner of Labor; ensure certain employees receive comparable pay for comparable work in jobs which require comparable skill, effort, and responsibility; authorize

[HB 919](#) - Conservation and natural resources; outdoor stewardship; eliminate reductions in appropriations

[HB 920](#) - Hate-Free Heroes Act; enact

House Resolutions:

[HR 847](#) - House Study Committee on Evaluating Funding for Public Health; create

[HR 883](#) - House Study Committee on Making Georgia the No. 1 State for Tourism; create

[HR 884](#) - President of the United States and Congress; increased state autonomy to allow for creation of innovative solutions to work disincentives and reform of social safety net programs; urge

[HR 885](#) - House Study Committee on Election Procedures; create

[HR 947](#) - House Study Committee on Five Points MARTA Station Permit Issuance; create

Senate Bills:

[SB 368](#) - "Northeast Regional Water Authority Act"; enact

[SB 372](#) - Department of Banking and Finance; removal of references to reputational risk from any Department of Banking and Finance guidance, rule, examination manual, or similar document; provide

Senate Resolutions:

[SR 493](#) - Children First Trust Fund; creation; authorize General Assembly - CA

[SR 533](#) - Senate Study Committee on Enhancing Public Safety and Civic Health; create

[SR 545](#) - Senate Paid Student Teaching Study Committee; create

[SR 553](#) - Senate Study Committee on Funding for Charter School Capital Improvements; create

GHLA Full Legislative Tracking Update

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