



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



GHLA Final Capitol Update | 2026 Legislative Session Recap

Welcome to GHLA @ the Capitol, your weekly update about news you need to know related to Georgia's lodging industry and the 2026 General Assembly. GHLA's legislative team will be your eyes and ears under the Gold Dome.

A message from GHLA's President and CEO

As we close out another historic legislative session for your GHLA, I want to take a moment to thank each of you who showed up when it mattered most. Your engagement, your advocacy, and your willingness to step up made all the difference.

I also want to recognize our Governmental Affairs "Dream Team," Jay Morgan and Trent Nesbit, who worked tirelessly on your behalf to deliver meaningful, lasting change for Georgia's hotel and tourism industry.

This year was truly like no other. Together, we pursued the passage of 10 pieces of legislation and supported several more—an effort that is simply unheard of in our space. I'm proud to share that the majority of our priority measures have passed and are now awaiting the Governor's signature.

Be sure to thank Jay and Trent the next time you see them. The behind-the-scenes work in the halls of the Capitol was like none other, and your Governmental Affairs team was truly put through the ringer.

Because of the team's efforts and your support, the Human Trafficking Training and Prevention Act passed, and we can confidently say there is NO Room for Trafficking in Georgia. The Destination Protection Act 2.0 passed, adding critical CVB protections to ensure hotel-motel tax dollars go to their intended purpose, putting heads in beds. The Historic Rehab Tax Credit passed, doubling the allocated credit and creating new opportunities for hotel growth and development. In addition, we advocated the passage of legislation combatting predatory ADA website claims, protecting hoteliers from

frivolous lawsuits and empty settlements; legislation creating a cause of action for hotels to recoup damages when laws are not enforced; legislation establishing a study committee on free and fair markets, including how to combat fraudulent booking scams; legislation creating a Georgia statewide music office; and additional funding for tourism marketing in both the Amended Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027 budget. And so much more.

But just as important as what we accomplished this session is the foundation we've built for 2027. The work doesn't stop when the session ends; in many ways, it's just beginning.

This "off-season" will be critical. We will be building and strengthening relationships with elected officials across the state, many of whom will be entering office for the first time in 2027. At the same time, we will be growing support in every corner of Georgia, because it will take all of us to make history again.

Your GHLA showed its strength this year. Now it's time to show our strength in numbers.

We know our priorities for 2027, and we're starting today. With your continued support, we will pass the strongest No Pay, No Stay legislation in America. We will make Georgia the first state in the nation to pass the Stop Online Booking Scams Act. And we will secure a guaranteed revenue stream for tourism marketing.

That work starts now, and it starts with you.

Thank you for being part of this effort and for everything you do to move our industry forward.

Sincerely,

Chris Hardman
President & CEO
Georgia Hotel & Lodging Association

2026 Legislative Session Overview

The 2026 Legislative Session was largely defined by one central question: how should Georgia deliver tax relief with a surplus exceeding \$10 billion on hand?

Both chambers agreed relief was warranted, but they differed on structure and scale. Lawmakers ultimately approved HB 463, reducing the state's income tax rate from 5.19 percent to 4.99 percent this year, with a path to lower it further to 3.99 percent over the next eight years if economic benchmarks are met. The bill also increases the standard deduction to \$30,000 for married couples and \$15,000 for single filers, while exempting up to \$1,750 in tips and \$1,750 in overtime pay from taxation. On the property tax side, the House's broader overhaul under HB 1116 failed to clear the Senate, but a scaled-back framework passed through SB 33, allowing expanded sales tax options for property tax relief and limiting annual growth of individual property assessments to the rate of inflation. Together, these measures represented meaningful movement on both income and property tax relief, though neither chamber secured its full original proposal.

Beyond tax policy, lawmakers approved a \$38.5 billion FY 2027 budget, including \$70 million for statewide literacy coaches and \$100 million in additional funding for the Employee Retirement System. Other notable measures included HB 38 expanding need-based college aid, SB 211 strengthening early literacy standards, SB 68 addressing insurance market reforms, and HB 181 increasing penalties for certain child exploitation offenses. High-profile proposals such as sports betting, major voting system changes, and permanent adoption of Atlantic Standard Time failed to reach final passage before Sine Die. In the midst of this complex and politically charged environment, GHLA successfully advanced a historic slate of industry priorities.

GHLA Major Legislative Victories

SB 570 – Georgia Human Trafficking Prevention Training Act

Achieved Final Passage – Sent to the Governor

Senate Bill 570 represents one of the most significant wins for GHLA this session.

The legislation amends Georgia law governing inns and short-term rental properties to require annual human trafficking awareness training for all on-site employees of inns and third-party managers of short-term rental properties. Training must be completed within 60 days of employment and annually thereafter.

The Attorney General's Office, in consultation with GHLA and other stakeholders, is tasked with developing or approving a standardized curriculum. The training must include:

- Definitions of human trafficking and commercial exploitation
- Identification of at-risk individuals

- Signs of labor and sex trafficking
- Reporting protocols
- Contact information for the National Human Trafficking Hotline

The bill also requires operators to adopt formal reporting policies and maintain employee training records. Civil penalties for willful noncompliance range from \$500 to \$2,000 per violation.

Importantly, the legislation includes liability protections, clarifying that the training requirement does not create a private cause of action against hotels.

Effective July 1, 2026, this law firmly establishes Georgia’s hospitality industry as a national leader in human trafficking prevention.

SB 430 (with HB 1179 Language) – Destination Protection Act 2.0

Achieved Final Passage – Sent to the Governor

Senate Bill 430 strengthens oversight and accountability for hotel-motel tax dollars.

The legislation removes the prior revenue threshold that limited applicability of the Hotel Motel Tax Performance Review Board, ensuring broader statewide oversight. It also requires the Board to meet quarterly, establishes clearer criteria when evaluating changes to destination marketing organizations, and strengthens enforcement procedures when noncompliance is identified.

The bill further clarifies eligible uses of tourism product development funds, including expanded recognition of museums and related institutions.

For GHLA members, this legislation ensures that local governments cannot arbitrarily redirect tourism dollars away from legitimate destination marketing efforts. It reinforces statutory guardrails that protect CVBs and guarantees that hotel-motel tax revenue continues to drive visitation and economic impact.

HB 376 – Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Expansion

Achieved Final Passage – Sent to the Governor

House Bill 376 dramatically expands Georgia’s Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program.

The bill increases the aggregate annual cap for certified structures (other than historic homes) from \$30 million to \$60 million. It also raises the maximum per-project cap from \$10 million to \$15 million for projects creating significant employment.

For certified historic homes, the bill maintains a \$100,000 cap per structure but preserves enhanced benefits for properties located in designated target areas.

This expansion significantly increases available capital for adaptive reuse projects, historic hotel renovations, and redevelopment initiatives in both urban and rural communities.

The enhanced credit structure positions Georgia as one of the most competitive states in the Southeast for historic redevelopment investment.

HB 295 – Property Owner Enforcement

Protection Achieved Final Passage – Sent to the Governor

House Bill 295 creates a new enforcement mechanism allowing individuals aggrieved by local government violations of certain statutory prohibitions to petition the superior court for mandamus relief.

Specifically, the legislation authorizes expedited mandamus actions where local governments fail to comply with laws related to immigration enforcement and sanctuary policies.

While politically contentious, this bill provides property owners, including hospitality operators, with an enforceable remedy when local governments decline to execute mandatory statutory obligations.

The measure reinforces the principle that state law must be uniformly enforced and provides a clear procedural path to judicial review.

HB 1470 – ADA Website Litigation Reform

Achieved Final Passage – Sent to the Governor

House Bill 1470 addresses predatory litigation practices under the Americans with Disabilities Act related to website accessibility claims.

Under the bill, if a claimant brings an ADA website lawsuit that is adjudicated against them, involuntarily dismissed, or dismissed for lack of standing, the defendant business may recover:

- Actual damages or statutory damages of \$10,000 (whichever is greater)
- Reasonable attorney's fees
- Treble damages if the claimant was previously notified and refused to dismiss

Actions must be brought within two years of judgment, and the statute is narrowly constructed to target abusive filings.

For hoteliers facing serial ADA website claims, this legislation provides meaningful deterrence and recourse against frivolous lawsuits.

Additional Supported Wins

While our Major Legislative Victories represent the centerpiece of the session, several additional measures supported by GHLA also achieved passage.

HB 651 – School Zone Speed Camera Reform

House Bill 651 strengthens oversight and transparency for automated speed enforcement cameras in school zones. The legislation clarifies operational requirements, tightens evidentiary standards, and increases accountability for municipalities utilizing automated enforcement systems.

For hospitality operators located near school zones, this bill helps ensure that enforcement programs are administered fairly and consistently, reducing the risk of improper citations affecting guests and visitors.

SB 478 – Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund Expansion

Senate Bill 478 increases annual funding capacity for the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund, which supports conservation, parks, and outdoor recreation infrastructure.

Outdoor recreation remains a significant driver of tourism in Georgia. Expanded stewardship funding enhances Georgia's natural assets, strengthens rural tourism economies, and increases visitation to destinations that rely heavily on lodging infrastructure.

SR 890 – Senate Study Committee on Protecting Free and Fair Markets

Senate Resolution 890 establishes a study committee to examine market distortions, fraudulent booking practices, and emerging threats to consumer transparency in online commerce.

This resolution creates a formal legislative vehicle to examine issues including online booking scams, deceptive third-party reservation platforms, and marketplace manipulation. GHLA views this study committee as a critical foundation for advancing comprehensive online booking protections in 2027.

Bills That Ran Out of Time

While this session delivered historic wins, several high-priority GHLA initiatives did not achieve final passage. In each case, the work begins immediately for 2027.

HB 61 – “No Pay, No Stay”

House Bill 61 sought to clarify Georgia law regarding the distinction between an innkeeper–guest relationship and a landlord–tenant relationship. The bill would have provided clear statutory authority for law enforcement to remove individuals who refuse to pay for lodging yet claim tenant rights in order to remain on property.

The legislation aimed to close a loophole increasingly exploited by bad actors who check into hotels, stop paying, and attempt to invoke tenant protections never intended for short-term lodging.

HB 61 passed the Senate and gained bipartisan support. However, in the final days of session, broader tax negotiations and larger political dynamics prevented the bill from being brought off the House table for final agreement.

This issue remains one of GHLA’s top priorities. Over the coming months, GHLA will work with legislators, law enforcement leaders, housing stakeholders, and industry partners to refine the strongest and most balanced “No Pay, No Stay” framework in the country. Work on 2027 legislation begins immediately.

SB 416 – Stop Online Booking Scams Act

Senate Bill 416 would have created new consumer protections targeting fraudulent third-party booking websites and deceptive reservation platforms that misrepresent themselves as affiliated with hotels.

The legislation aimed to require clear disclosures by third-party booking platforms, prohibit misleading domain name practices, and establish enforcement mechanisms for deceptive conduct.

Although the bill generated strong interest and stakeholder engagement, it did not advance before Crossover Day.

Online booking scams continue to harm both consumers and hotel operators. GHLA is already coordinating with national partners, technology stakeholders, and legislative leaders to refine and advance comprehensive booking transparency legislation in 2027. This remains a top-tier initiative moving forward.

SB 522 – Rental Car Fee Reform & Tourism Funding Stability

Senate Bill 522 would have added a \$5 fee to rental car transactions, with 20 percent of the revenue dedicated to tourism marketing efforts across the state. The goal was to create a stable and predictable funding stream for destination marketing organizations.

The bill did not advance out of the Senate Finance Committee before adjournment, as tax and budget negotiations dominated the final weeks of session.

Securing long-term, reliable tourism marketing funding remains a top GHLA priority, and work on a revised funding proposal is already underway for next year.

Looking Ahead

The 2026 session demonstrated GHLA's ability to lead in a complex policy environment and deliver tangible results.

At the same time, unfinished business remains.

Work on No Pay, No Stay reform, online booking protections, and long-term tourism funding solutions begins today. Over the offseason, GHLA will build legislative champions, refine bill language, and strengthen coalition support to ensure these priorities are positioned for success in 2027.