



## **March 14, 2025**

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 29 through 31. Wednesday was designated as a committee workday, providing lawmakers with the necessary time to concentrate on the numerous bills under consideration. Following Crossover Day last week, the House and Senate have been actively reviewing and evaluating each other's bills. Tort reform remains on everyone's minds this week, highlighted by two hearings and several hours of testimony.

The legislature will reconvene on Tuesday, March 18th for legislative day 32. Please click [here](#) to see the entire legislative calendar.

### **Tort Reform Update**

The House Rules Subcommittee on Lawsuit Reform held two hearings on [SB 68](#), which proposes a substantial overhaul of civil practice, evidentiary rules, damages, and liability in tort actions. The hearing revealed a sharp divide between those who support and oppose the bill.

Supporters of SB 68, including business owners, hospital administrators, and physicians, believe the bill is crucial for addressing rising insurance costs, clarifying liability standards, and reforming what they see as an unfair litigation process. They argue that "phantom damages" and excessive damage demands drive insurance premiums, threaten business viability, and contribute to a healthcare crisis by making it challenging to retain physicians. They emphasize that SB 68 would fairly compensate patients while ensuring businesses and healthcare providers can continue operating, and they believe it will address the disparity between billed and actual paid medical costs, creating a more balanced and sustainable legal environment in Georgia.

Opponents, including numerous attorneys and survivors of crimes like sexual assault and human trafficking, expressed grave concerns that SB 68 would severely hinder victims' ability to seek justice. They argued that the bill would make it nearly impossible to hold property owners accountable for negligent security, eliminating such claims and creating a "race to the bottom" where businesses are disincentivized from implementing safety measures. Survivors of human trafficking particularly emphasized that the bill would shield hotels and motels from being held accountable for their role in

enabling or ignoring trafficking. They urged for broader exemptions to protect vulnerable individuals.

Critics of Section 7 of SB 68 expressed worries that it could hinder plaintiffs from obtaining fair compensation. Specifically, they argued that it would change how damages are calculated, potentially reducing the amount awarded to plaintiffs and leaving them with insufficient funds after paying legal fees. There was also concern that it would treat insured individuals differently than those without insurance. Some opponents suggested changing the bill's wording by removing certain clauses to fix these problems. They also mentioned that the bill mainly benefits insurance companies and those responsible for injuries.

GHLA has made it our mission to do our part in eradicating the evil that is human trafficking in Georgia and will continue to make every effort to ensure our industry has the tools needed to prevent criminal activities from entering our establishments. The reality of human trafficking is heartbreaking and has no place in our society—or in our hotels. The hospitality industry does not condone, tolerate, or want this crime occurring on their properties. Hoteliers are deeply committed to stopping trafficking wherever it happens. Click [here](#) to read the full statement from GHLA.

SB 68 did not receive any action this week and remains in the subcommittee. Chairman Leverett mentioned in the last meeting that there will likely be another meeting next week and a possible vote. We will continue to provide updates.

**Tort Reform Press Gaggle**





# GOV. KEMP'S TORT REFORM KEEPS GEORGIA

## THE NO.1 STATE FOR BUSINESS

Georgia hoteliers are facing skyrocketing insurance costs— even without being sued. Stopping unfair litigation and nuclear verdicts will help ALL businesses thrive. We strongly support Governor Kemp's plan to tackle tort reform.



*Frank Phair, VP of Operations of Legacy Ventures and GHLA past Chair provides comments at Tort Reform Gaggle.*

On Thursday of this week, GHLA joined businesses from across the state to take part in a press conference sharing impact stories from hotels and echoing our strong support for Governor Kemp's Tort Reform package.

**Support Tort Reform to Protect Georgia's Hospitality Industry – Act Today!**

Georgia's hospitality industry is the backbone of our state's economy, welcoming millions of visitors every year and creating countless jobs. But rising costs, fueled by a broken civil litigation system, are making it harder for hotels to thrive. Governor Kemp has made tort reform a top legislative priority, and now is the time to act to ensure our

industry's future success. Here are some more ways you can help secure a better legal system for Georgia's hotels:

1. **Take the Impact Survey** - Let us know how tort laws are impacting your business by taking the "**GHLA Tort Reform Impact Survey**"
2. **Email Your Legislators** – Visit [www.JusticeNotJackpots.com](http://www.JusticeNotJackpots.com) to urge your State Senator and Representative to support comprehensive tort reform.
3. **Contact Your Lawmakers Directly** – If you have relationships with your local legislators, call or text them and explain how vital tort reform is for Georgia's hospitality sector.
4. **Share This Message** – Forward this email to fellow hoteliers, industry partners, and colleagues. Encourage them to join the fight for meaningful reform that will protect our businesses.

### **House Passed FY26 Budget**

The House passed the Fiscal Year 26 budget this week, HB 68. The budget now sits in the Senate, where the upper chamber will have its opportunity to improve the bill.

Below are some of the highlights:

- Department of Corrections: The House has increased funding by \$250 million. This funding will focus on decreasing ratios, improving staff retention and recruitment, and increasing funding for daily operations. \$38 million has been allocated for private prisons.
- Education: The House supports the Governor's educational recommendation with an additional \$98 million. This includes:
  - \$60 million for student support services programs, with specific allocations for mental health grant funding, grants for school social workers, BOOST 2.0, and implementing a new financing source for the poverty weight.
  - \$28 million for school safety.
  - \$10 million based on the Council of Literacy recommendations.
- Additional Funding:
  - \$8 million for CJCC to offset the loss of VOCA funding.
  - \$6.4 million for provider rate increases for child carrying institutions.
  - \$3.4 million for 150 new NOW/COMP waivers.
  - \$32 million for reimbursement rate increases for Medicaid providers.
  - \$8.3 million for graduate medical education, including \$2.8 million for 150 new residency slots and \$5 million for a grant program to support new and expanding residency programs.
  - \$23.5 million for an enhanced supplement to state retirees.

### **Senate Study Committee on Tourism**

[SR 323](#) sponsored by Senator Echols, which aims to create a study committee on making Georgia the number 1 state for tourism, passed unanimously out of the Senate Economic Development and Tourism Committee this week.

- Georgia's Tourism Appeal: The state has a rich history, numerous festivals, sports teams, and diverse natural attractions.
- Economic Impact: In 2023, tourism generated \$79.7 billion in economic impact and over \$5 billion in state and local tax revenue.

- FIFA World Cup 2026: Atlanta is set to host eight matches, expected to bring significant global media exposure.
- Committee Formation: Five Senate members will be appointed, with representatives from committees on agriculture, economic development, tourism, and natural resources.
- Purpose: The committee will study ways to boost tourism statewide, from small towns to major cities.
- Reporting & Duration: Findings will be reported before the committee's dissolution on December 1, 2025.

## **Legislative Tracking Update**

### **House Bills:**

- [HB 741](#) - Petrea-Stephens-Franklin-Watson Tax Relief Act; enact
- [HB 753](#) - Better Georgia Without Blight Act; enact
- [HB 755](#) - Cherokee County; levy an excise tax
- [HB 762](#) - Savannah Music Commission Act; enact

### **House Resolutions:**

- [HR 557](#) - House Study Committee on Georgia's Investment Funds; create

### **Senate Bills:**

### **Senate Resolutions:**

- [SR 386](#) - Senate State FairTax Study Committee; create
- [SR 391](#) - Senate Study Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Digital Currency; create
- [SR 393](#) - Senate Study Committee on Improving Family Caregiver Services; 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.