



2017 Legislative Session

Legislative Days 17 – 20

February 17, 2017

Session Reaches Midway Point

This week the legislature met Tuesday through Friday. Friday was legislative day twenty, midway point in the forty-day session. With session waning, the pressure is on to move bills before the Crossover Day deadline on Friday, March 3.

Next week the legislature will be off Monday in observance of President's Day. They will meet Tuesday through Friday.

Vet Loan Funding

On Friday, the House adopted the Fiscal Year 2018 budget, which sets state spending beginning July 1, 2017. While the Governor recommended preserving \$100,000 to provide service cancelable loans for large animal veterinarians, the House added an additional \$100,000 to that program. The Georgia Student Finance Commission oversees this scholarship, along with over a dozen other similar programs. It is unclear how much, if any, of that additional money will be earmarked specifically for veterinarians; however, at a minimum the program will be able to continue providing loan forgiveness for at least five veterinarians for another year.

Licensing Issues

SB 2: The FAST Act by Sen. Mike Dugan, R-Carrollton Adopted by the Senate on 2/17

SB 2 attempts to support Georgia's businesses by creating efficiency and transparency in the permitting and licensing process at the state and local level. The bill has been amended to require that an applicant initially only pay 50% of permitting or licensing fees, with the balance to be paid before the license, certificate or permit is issued. The legislation requires state and local government agencies to establish a fee schedule that will include turnaround times. If the agency fails to meet that schedule, the fee will be reduced by 10% for every ten days past the deadline. In addition, agencies will be required to offer expedited processing, which can be no more than twice the original fee.

Section 3 of the bill also requires each professional licensing board to establish rules to issue provisional licenses for individuals who have been previously licensed by the board or who have been licensed for that profession in another state. The boards are permitted to refuse to issue provisional licenses, but only if they can determine that doing so would pose a significant danger to the life, health or safety of the public.

Professional Issues

HB 40: Veterinary Records by Rep. Scot Turner, R-Holly Springs

Pending in the House Rules Committee

Representative Scot Turner has reintroduced legislation that requires a veterinarian to disclose the rabies vaccination history of any animal in the veterinarian's care to the physician caring for a person bitten by that animal. The veterinarian has 24 hours from receipt of the written request from the physician to supply the vaccination history. This version is identical to the compromise the GVMA reached with the author last year, which limited the scope of the request to rabies. The bill is eligible for placement on the House debate calendar.

HB 231: Annual Drug Update by Rep. Bruce Broadrick, R-Dalton

Pending in the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee

HB 231 is the annual drug update bill, which changes and reclassifies provisions related to controlled substances. Of particular interest to veterinarians, the bill classifies Carfentanil and Thiafentanil as Schedule II controlled substances.

HB 213: Trafficked Drugs by Rep. Rich Golick, R-Smyrna

Hearing only in the House Judiciary Non-Civil Committee on 2/13

This measure helps combat the trafficking of drugs cut with fentanyl. The GVMA provided the author and Judiciary Non-Civil Chairman written comments to help the Committee understand the legitimate uses of fentanyl and its derivatives within veterinary medicine.

Animal Welfare and Regulatory Issues

HB 49: Livestock Dealers and Market Operators by Rep. Clay Pirkle, R-Ashburn

Favorably reported from the Senate Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee on 2/15

This legislation updates license and surety requirements of livestock dealers and livestock market operators. It also requires the Commissioner of Agriculture to publish the names and locations of duly-licensed dealers and market operators. While the bill is eligible for placement on the Senate debate calendar, the Senate is not likely to consider the measure until after Crossover Day.

HB 288: Service Animals by Rep. Tom Kirby, R-Loganville

Scheduled for a hearing in a House Judiciary Non-Civil Subcommittee on 2/17

Similar to legislation the author introduced last year, HB 288 provides for additional rights and responsibilities for persons with service animals. Part of the author's intent is to limit abuse of service animal and companion animal protections.

HB 144: Regulate Retail Pet Stores by Rep. Earl Ehrhart, R-Powder Springs

Pending in the House Rules Committee

Offered by the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, HB 144 creates a new class of pet dealers licensed by the Department. These licensed retail pet store owners must administer certain inoculations before selling an animal and must guarantee the animals for 14 days after sale to ensure only healthy animals are sold. It prohibits local governments from adopting ordinances that ban the otherwise legal sale of animals from retailers licensed by the bill. Having been favorably reported from the House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee, the bill is now eligible for full debate.

HB 253: Dog and Cat Sterilization by Rep. Wendell Willard, R-Sandy Springs

Heard in a the House Motor Vehicles Subcommittee on 2/15

HB 253 increases the proportion of money derived from the sale of specialty license plates promoting the dog and cat reproductive sterilization support program from \$10 to \$19 per tag. The non-profit Humane Association of Georgia collected signatures from over 60 House members in support of the legislation.

HB 50: Livestock Liability Protection by Rep. Clay Pirkle, R-Ashburn

Pending in the House Judiciary Committee

HB 50 provides liability protection for certain activities related to livestock and requires every livestock activity sponsor, livestock professional and owner of a livestock facility to post signage warning patrons that they are not liable for the injury or death of a participant in livestock activities. The definition of "livestock activity" is limited to nonprofit events like school fieldtrips where the participants engage with livestock.

Public Health and Safety Issues

HB 176: Food Standards by Rep. Tom McCall, R-Elberton

Favorably reported from the Senate Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee on 2/15

HB 176 authorizes Georgia's Department of Agriculture to enter into agreement with the federal government to enforce provisions of certain federal laws relating to standards, labeling, and adulteration of food.

SB 78: Adulteration and Misbranding of Food by Sen. Lee Anderson, R-Grovetown

Favorably reported from the House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee on 2/15

This bill authorizes the Commissioner of Agriculture to issue a variance or waiver to certain rules and regulations promulgated by the Department relating to the adulteration and misbranding of food.

Congressional Election

On February 10, Georgia Congressman Tom Price was confirmed by the US Senate to serve as the Secretary of Health and Human Services in President Donald Trump's new administration.

Price promptly resigned Georgia's 6th congressional district seat and Governor Nathan Deal set a special election for April 18 with a runoff, if needed, on June 20. Candidate qualifying occurred last week. A staggering 18 individuals are in the running, including current state senator Judson Hill and former Secretary of State and gubernatorial candidate Karen Handel. Betty Price – Tom's wife and current state representative – announced on the final day of qualifying that she would not run.

Georgia's "resign to run law" means there will also be a special election to fill Hill's seat. While an election date has not yet been set, a number of individuals in the East Cobb district have expressed interest.