



## June 12, 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.

### Governor Kemp Signs Executive Order Thursday

Governor Kemp has signed an executive order this week that takes additional steps towards the reopening of Georgia's economy. While the EO calls for continued social distancing, it provides avenues for restaurants, bars, sports teams, concert venues, and convention centers to reopen with restrictions. **There are no capacity limits for event facilities.** Live entertainment venues will be allowed to reopen on July 1, 2020, as well as conventions should they obtain a license. Capacity limits at bars have also been relaxed.

The order lifts the shelter-in-place requirement for Georgians over the age of 65 unless they are considered medically fragile. Beginning this Tuesday, the EO allows gatherings of up to 50 people without social distancing requirements. Larger groups must still adhere to at least six feet apart.

Restaurants are now allowed to have salad bars and buffets open with precautions, and there is no limit on the number of patrons that can dine in together.

Effective June 16, 2020, at midnight through June 30, 2020, the Executive Order changes are as follows:

Hotels should follow the guidelines for under the Restaurant section starting on page 8 of the order. Hotel banquet and Event Space will have 35 measures to follow, including but not limited to:

- 6 feet spacing from table to table;
- Workers wear face masks that must be cleaned or replaced daily;
- No self-serve buffets (workers must serve guests);
- No preset silverware (must use rolled); and,
- The square footage restrictions have been lifted.

Conventions will have 21 requirements to adhere to, including but not limited to:

- No conventions will be allowed prior to July 1, 2020;
- Signage requirements for entrance screening, sanitation, and social distancing;
- Workers must wear face masks;
- Guests must be screened at the entrance;
- Workers must be trained;
- When possible, businesses must reduce touchpoints;
- Providing hand sanitizer;
- Requiring preregistration for seated events; and,
- One-way aisles to guide traffic through large booth areas.

To review the full list of requirements, please see the [executive order here](#).

### Legislative Session Resumes Monday

The Georgia General Assembly reconvenes on Monday, June 15, to finish out the legislative session that was suspended this March due to COVID-19. Hundreds of bills have crossed over that would typically await further consideration, but instead, legislators are focused on passing a balanced state budget that contemplates over 2 billion dollars in cuts. Sources indicate that few non-budgetary items will be considered during the last 11 days of the 2020 session, which puts legislators in a precarious position during an election year.

#### *What issues remain?*

The state looks dramatically different than it did in March, and as a result, priorities have shifted in turn. In addition to drastic budget cuts, Georgia has been working feverishly to control the spread of COVID-

19. Protests have been raging across the country, dominating the national news. During this time, businesses in Georgia are working to save jobs and stay afloat while adjusting to the new normal.

### *Hate Crimes Legislation*

The pressure on the General Assembly to pass a hate-crimes bill has been growing over the last month. GHLA has been supportive of HB426 by Rep. Chuck Efstrotation (R-Dacula), where additional penalties will be applied to crimes where a victim is targeted because of their race, color, religion, or national origin. The Senate is reportedly amending the bill that has already crossed over, and stakeholders across Georgia are waiting to see a final proposal. The Speaker supported the initiative since the introduction of the measure, and the Lieutenant Governor has voiced his public support over the last few weeks.

### *Safe Harbor Protections*

Additionally, Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan published an [op-ed](#) in the Atlanta Business Chronicle this week, throwing his support behind a critically important effort: business liability during COVID-19. Georgia is looking to reopen the economy, but liability protection has only been afforded to healthcare providers.

Businesses are adhering to guidelines that are constantly shifting, but no one can fully commit to reopening with the constant threat of lawsuits. State lawmakers are working to create a bill that protects Georgia businesses as long as they are following guidelines from the State and Federal government as well as the Centers for Disease Control. GHLA has been involved in the coalition effort behind the legislation and will be working on this initiative through Sine Die.

### *Short-Term Rentals*

GHLA has several outstanding priorities in front of the General Assembly this session. This week, the team spent a considerable amount of time working on HB448 by Rep. Matt Dollar (R-Marietta), which will address the remaining tax collection responsibilities from short-term rentals. The measure will streamline the collection of the hotel-motel tax for these platforms and extends the \$5 hotel-motel fee to short-term rentals. As of today, every member of the Senate and House has received a personalized note with the updated facts and revenue estimates from GHLA. The team has also worked to ensure that members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees have this information readily available as they continue their budget discussions over the next few days.

### **Primary Elections in Georgia**

Georgia's election on Tuesday made national news when some voters in Metro Atlanta waited for more than four hours to vote using the state's new 104 million dollar system.

Voting during COVID-19 posed significant issues, as there were fewer machines spaced farther apart in each precinct. Only so many people can vote at once using social distancing and lines stretched around blocks in some areas. Training poll workers during a pandemic presented challenges, and many voters complained they never received absentee ballots.

Despite the focus on Metro Atlanta, House Speaker David Ralston indicated that he heard reports from northeast and southeast Georgia with similar issues. While the Secretary of State's office pointed to a lack of preparation by the counties, Ralston has indicated that the state has a role to play in training.

Ralston has asked the House Governmental Affairs Committee to investigate further into Tuesday's election.

The team has been following several key primary races after participating in several candidate roundtables leading up to June. One candidate is a CPA by background but is intimately involved with the hotel industry. GHLA met with 16 candidates, 11 of which have either won their primary outright or are engaged in a run-off. GHLA has made it a priority to begin the work of building new champions during the recess and is looking forward to continuing this work over the summer months. The results of these races are [linked here](#) as well as a document covering close-call races for some incumbents.

### **Legislative Tracking Update**

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

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