



ADVOCACY ALERT

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DEAR FAITHFUL FRIENDS,

The 2018 Session: A Review of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The 2018 Georgia General Assembly session concluded its busy 40 day session on March 29, 2018. The Governor has 40 days to sign or veto legislation – until May 6, 2018. If he takes no action, the bill becomes law without his signature. You can track the bills the Governor signs and vetoes [here](#).

Big picture outcomes from the session include several important successes in the areas of education, transportation, immigration and freedom from discrimination. The General Assembly adopted major changes to the state tax laws (HB 918) in the wake of federal tax reform, reflected in the [FY 2019 Budget](#) (HB 684). The Budget received a late boost from Governor Deal in raising the revenue estimate and allocating an additional \$167 Million for K-12 education for the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula to close the shortfall in the state formula for education funding that has persisted for more than 16 years. An important measure will require provision of multi-tiered supports to students in PreK-3rd grade prior to imposition of long term suspension or expulsion ([HB 740](#)). \$1,500 college grants will become available for hard working low income students who are not HOPE eligible ([SB 405](#)). The Legislature also passed an important expansion for transit funding for the metro Atlanta region ([HB 930](#)), and a measure to increase access to high speed rural broadband ([SB 402](#)). A bill that would allow for the collection of sales tax for online sales ([HB 61](#)) was adopted in anticipation of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that may allow for this. Distracted driving legislation ([HB 673](#)) passed so that drivers will be barred from holding their cell phones while driving. Efforts to narrow Sunday voting ([SB 363](#)) were defeated. A bill to update and replace outdated electronic voting equipment (SB 402) with a paper-based system did not pass but may be revisited next year. Anti-immigrant legislation ([SB 452](#)) was stopped. A bill to give expanded remedies for adult survivors of child sexual abuse ([HB 605](#)) did not pass. A measure to allow religious adoption agencies ([SB 375](#)) that contract with the state to discriminate against gay couples was not adopted, but a clean bill that revised the adoption code passed early in the session ([HB 159](#)).

On PBG Priority Issues, common sense gun legislation passed providing enhanced penalties for “straw man” gun purchases ([HB 657](#)). Threats to expand campus carry authority failed to materialize. However measures to ban assault weapons ([HB 10](#)) or bump stocks ([HB 651](#)) and a measure to allow mental health records to remain available for gun background checks ([HB 999](#), [SB 99](#)) failed to pass but may be revisited next year. Delta lost a \$40 million tax break based on its decision to sever ties with the NRA following the Parkland massacre.

On health care, the budget included increased funding for autism and other behavioral health initiatives for children recommended by the Children’s Mental Health Commission. An effort to expand Medicaid was not successful ([HB 669](#)), nor were efforts to provide consumer protections against “surprise billing” for out of network care in an emergencies ([HB 314](#), [HB 678](#), [HB 799](#), [SB 359](#)). A bill creating a Health Coordination and Innovation Council ([SB 357](#)) passed to bring together major health stakeholders to address Georgia’s healthcare challenges, as did creation of a Rural Center for Health Care Innovation and Sustainability ([HB 769](#)). An effort to establish a Commission on Substance Abuse

and Recovery ([SB 352](#)) did not pass. Expansion of the scope of practice for advanced practice nurses to serve rural underserved communities ([SB 351](#)) also failed.

Hate crimes legislation passed the House Judiciary Committee ([SB 373](#)), but never received a floor vote.

Major initiatives on homelessness and housing did not pass. While efforts to repeal the low income housing tax credits were unsuccessful ([HB 851](#) and [SB 432](#)), the measure to allow for statutory dedication of revenue that could pave the way to a dedicated funding stream for affordable housing ([HR 158](#)) also failed to receive approval in the Senate. The Beltline bill ([HB 642](#)) that originally included funding for affordable housing was amended to delete that purpose and was ultimately held in the Senate. Despite strong leadership and a growing coalition, the healthy housing initiatives ([HB 954](#) and [HR 1431](#)) were stalled by opposition from the Georgia Realtors and Apartment Association but work is continuing on all these issues.

For more information on the major bills, the [AJC Bill Tracker](#) provides a good summary of what passed and what didn't.

Thank you for your advocacy and engagement with us this session! Your voice helped advance the issues you care about and helped stop bad measures from becoming law. We look forward to staying connected with you over the summer and fall as key Study Committees hold meetings, and to keeping you informed as the election season moves ahead.

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For a detailed overview of wins and losses from this year's legislative session, become a member of Presbyterians for a Better Georgia! By joining, you will receive regular emails, legislative updates, and specialized information about upcoming PBG events and actions. Click "join us" to learn more.