



## *LEGISLATIVE Update*

*April 5, 2019*

### **General Assembly Overview**

The 2019 General Assembly, which concluded on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, proved to be an unexpectedly productive year. Significant legislative action was taken regarding healthcare, technological innovation, election security, and economic development.

In line with Governor Kemp's agenda, strides were made by both chambers to strengthen rural Georgia by creating opportunities for multi-faceted growth. The "Patient's First Act" (SB 106) brought forth by Blake Tillery provides Governor Kemp with the legislative authority to submit a Section 1332 waiver and a 1115 waiver. This allows the state to begin the process of limited Medicaid expansion through the 115 waiver and to provide more affordable private coverage and protect Georgians with preexisting conditions. The expansion will increase healthcare access in rural Georgia and provide a continuum of care with limited healthcare options.

The legislature also addressed rural broadband deployment with the passage of SB 66, "The Streamlining Wireless Facilities and Antennas Act" that allows for the deployment of wireless broadband and opens the door for 5G access statewide. The legislature also passed SB 2, which authorizes Electrical Membership Cooperatives to provide broadband services, and SB 17 that allows rural telephone cooperatives to broadband. These bills expand broadband access statewide for educational and economic development purposes. SB 66 and SB 2 passed both chambers unanimously and are awaiting to be signed by Governor Kemp.

### **Transportation Bills:**

Concerning transportation, two major bills became the focal point in the closing days of the session. On Crossover Day, SB 131 took the spotlight as Senators on both sides of the aisle debated the "Georgia Major Airport Authority Act". The proposed bill aimed to increase transparency in commercial airport operations by shifting operations oversight to an appointed commission. After passing the Senate 34-22 on Crossover Day, SB 131 passed the House 104-70. However, the Senate did not agree to changes made by the House and the bill subsequently died. In addition to SB 131, another piece of legislation that was hotly contested until the end was SB 200. Sponsored by Steve Gooch, the bill proposed a plan to require the Department of Transportation to develop bid appeal procedures. The bill passed the Senate unanimously and

was well received in the House upon arriving on the floor. In the closing days of session, House members added language from the infamous Jet Fuel Tax Exemption bill which the Senate refused to agree with. After multiple conference committee meetings resulting in no agreements, the bill died in the closing moments of Sine Die.

Other matters of interest this session included the passage of the annual budget (HB 31), establishment of the Georgia Business Court (HB 239) and approval for the purchase of new voting machines (HB 316).