Track That Bill: How to Research Pending Legislation before the General Assembly

This article is part one of a two part series on how to perform legislative research. The second part of the series will appear in the March edition of the Countyline E-Newsletter.

The Georgia General Assembly convened this year’s legislative session on January 11, 2016, and will be moving full steam ahead through March 24, 2016. During this time, they will consider hundreds of general and local bills that may impact your county. As such, you may be asked to perform legislative research to learn more about a particular bill or resolution which can be daunting if you do not understand how to navigate the resources needed. The purpose of this article is to provide you with the necessary tools so that you can perform legislative research efficiently and effectively.

ACCG Resources

ACCG provides a weekly review of pending legislation for county commissioners and staff in the Legislative Update. This publication includes up-to-date bill descriptions and summaries, highlights areas of concern, and often requests feedback from counties on certain issues. All major bills that the association is following will be included. ACCG also provides a Legislative Tracking Database on our website that includes all local legislation introduced and general legislation that impacts counties. This system allows the user to track legislation by bill or resolution number, topic/issue area, tracking level, ACCG policy committee, last action date, or by the policy staff member who is tracking the legislation.
All general legislation includes an ACCG staff analysis which should be updated as the legislation moves through the process. Once a particular bill or resolution is accessed through the legislative tracking system, the user will be able to view the staff analysis and can choose to view the full text of the current legislation, who authored the legislation, the status history, and can view previous versions of the legislation.

While ACCG does not track local legislation, it is included in the legislative tracking database for the use of our members. A top priority of the policy interns is to track local legislation and send notifications via email to the clerk, attorney, and legislative coordinator of each impacted county to ensure that your county is aware of the introduction of that legislation. For general information about local legislation, ACCG provides an overview of the local legislation process and notice requirements on the Legal Resources webpage.
General Assembly Resources

The General Assembly website also provides an online tracking system for legislation. Unlike the ACCG system, the state website includes all legislation introduced and allows the user to watch the House and Senate chamber, or both, when they are in session and certain House committee meetings, including House Rules and House Appropriations. The state system also provides contact information for all legislators, lists of all House and Senate committees, a compilation of all bill activity that is updated daily (Composite), a record of legislation introduced each day (First Readers), meeting notices and calendars which note when legislation will be heard on the floor of the House or Senate chamber or in committee. These notices and calendars are subject to change frequently and should be monitored closely if you are tracking a particular bill or resolution.

Each bill and resolution that is introduced has been assigned a number by the clerk’s office of each respective chamber. House bills and resolutions will have an HB or HR designation whereas senate bills and resolutions will have an SB or SR designation. If you know the bill or resolution number, you can select the appropriate designation through a drop down tab located at the top left hand corner of the main General Assembly webpage and type in the bill or resolution number to access the legislation in question. Once you have submitted that information, you will be taken to the home page for that legislation. It will contain all available public versions of the bill, bill sponsors, the committee
assignment, progress that the bill has made, and the voting history once it has been voted on the floor of either body. It should be noted that legislation that has been amended in a subcommittee will not be shown online unless it is also adopted by the full committee. ACCG will note these changes through our legislative tools if we are tracking the bill. For all other bills, you will need to contact the committee directly for a copy.

What if you don’t know the bill number? No problem. In addition to the bill prompt on the website, you can also perform keyword searches. In order to perform keyword searches, click on “Advanced Search” located at the top left hand corner of the main General Assembly website. Once you click on “Advanced Search” the next screen will allow you to search by member, committee, keyword, code title, or bill type. For example, if you ran a search for all legislation relating to annexation, you will find information for 24 bills.

What if you aren’t looking for a particular bill, but wanted to see the list of bills that were assigned to the Ways and Means Committee because you were interested in tax matters? Simply select “Ways and Means” and you can review all the legislation that has been assigned to that committee. However, do not always assume that a bill has been assigned to a certain committee just because it contains subject matter relative to that committee. The Speaker and Lieutenant Governor have complete discretion when making bill assignments for house and senate legislation. Although most legislation will be assigned to committees that relate to the subject matter of the bill that is not always the case. Therefore, you should not rely solely on tracking committee legislation if you want to ensure that you
have captured all the legislation relative to the subject matter of your interest. Also, remember to check the legislation assigned to the committee of interest in both chambers in that most legislation can be introduced in either body.

What if you don’t know the bill number or the committee, and cannot find the bill through a keyword search? If you know the name of the legislator that introduced the legislation, you can still track the legislation by clicking on “Member” on the Advanced Search webpage and then selecting the member’s name. All legislation where the member is a primary or co-sponsor should be listed.
What if you have tried all the suggested methods for tracking legislation but still cannot find the bill? In this case, call an ACCG staff member to help you find the desired legislation. We are here to help and will be more than happy to assist you track the requested legislation.