Lobby Week in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Continued Advocacy for the 50+

While the AARP Georgia Advocacy Team was not able to travel to Washington, D.C. for our annual Lobby Week, we were able to successfully move advocacy issues important to Georgia and nationally in a positive direction. Over the course of four days in May, we met virtually with 10 Congressional offices.

We asked congressional members to help with supporting our Georgia nursing home residents by advocating for virtual visitation, increasing testing, and making available more PPE within nursing homes. We also asked the members to push for Georgia to receive its fair share of supplementary funding from the federal government, regardless of the amount of Georgia’s own rainy day fund. Our Lobby Week conversations and those conducted after Lobby Week directly led to Georgia being one of the states enrolled in a pilot program that will allow EBT benefits to be used for online grocery delivery. Special thanks to AARP Georgia State President Lee Baker and Executive Councilmember Kay Argroves who joined us virtually for these conversations.

AARP Georgia Advocates for Issues Affecting the 50+

The Georgia Legislature officially ended the 2020 session on Friday, June 26, 2020. This session was punctuated by budget debates, historic legislation, and delays due to COVID-19. Through all of the challenges of the 2020 session, AARP Georgia made successful strides on many bills that are important to the 50+. Thank you to AARP Associate State Director Jil Hinds and Legislative Consultant Callie Mitchell for their work during the session.

Georgia House Bills

HB 987 | Elder Abuse Bill
HB 987, the Elder Abuse Bill, passed the House with a 160-1 vote. Signed into law by Governor Kemp, the bill increases fines for abuse and increases training and safety provisions. AARP Georgia was a vocal advocate for HB 987 and supported its sponsor Rep. Sharon Cooper in moving the bill through the legislature. The new law makes it mandatory for facilities to be certified in order to have memory care units and for them to hire staff who are trained to work with dementia patients. The law ensures that fines would increase when poor care is the cause of severe injury or death.
HB 448 | Family Care Act
In 2016 AARP Georgia and a group of supporting organizations fought to pass the Family Care Act that allows family caregivers to use their earned sick leave to care for loved ones. The bill passed and was signed in 2016. However, there was a sunset provision written into the bill, meaning it would have expired this year. We were successfully able to get the sunset provision removed from the bill and it has been signed by the Governor.

HB 426 | Hate Crimes Bill
HB 426 passed quickly through both chambers of the legislature. This bill received bipartisan support, and was asked for by the Speaker of the House David Ralston. Rep. Chuck Efstration sponsored the bill, and Governor Kemp signed it on June 26, 2020. Violating HB 426 will lead to enhanced penalties for anyone who is proven to have intentionally targeted a victim or group of victims based on race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender, mental disability, or physical disability. HB 426 went into effect on July 1, 2020.

Georgia Senate Bill

SB 359 | COVID-19 Liability Protections
Georgia State Senate Bill SB 359 provides for immunity to businesses and health care providers for certain COVID-19 claims. The definition of health care providers includes nursing homes and long-term care facilities. This bill will restrict a patient or patient's family's rights to hold facilities liable for their negative actions. The Governor has signed this bill. AARP is not in support of the bill.

Supreme Court Ruling

LGBTQ Workers Are Protected From Discrimination, Supreme Court Rules

On June 15, 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled that those who identified as LGBTQ were protected from job discrimination under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In 2019, AARP was one of many organizations to send a brief to the Supreme Court in support of LGBTQ and older adult workers. While Georgia remains a right to work state, the new ruling means that if a person who is part of the protected class can prove discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, it would be possible to file a civil rights claim. This was a landmark ruling that provides job protection for people who could until now be fired for their sexual orientation or job discrimination under the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In 2019, AARP was one of many organizations to send a brief to the Supreme Court in support of LGBTQ and older adult workers. While Georgia remains a right to work state, the new ruling means that if a person who is part of the protected class can prove discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, it would be possible to file a civil rights claim. This was a landmark ruling that provides job protection for people who could until now be fired for their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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