

Alabama Legislative Report
February 28, 2025

Cell Phone Bans Advance in Alabama Legislature

Separate bills aiming to ban cell phone use in Alabama schools are moving forward in the Legislature. House and Senate committees have both approved measures that would require a "bell-to-bell" cell phone ban, set to take effect in the 2025-2026 school year.

House Bill 166, sponsored by Representative Leigh Hulsey, and Senate Bill 92, sponsored by Senator Donnie Chesteen, mandate that students store their cell phones in lockers, vehicles, or designated areas throughout the school day. This initiative comes as growing evidence suggests that unrestricted cell phone access leads to student distraction and disengagement.

While the proposed legislation includes exemptions for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and in life-threatening situations, it does not specify penalties for violations. Instead, it delegates the responsibility of establishing disciplinary policies to individual local school boards.

Both bills are now in position for floor votes in the House and Senate.

Governor's Public Safety Bills Advance in Legislature

Several bills from Governor Ivey's public safety package, aimed at strengthening law enforcement and public safety, progressed through the Alabama Legislature this week.

- **SB116 (Senator Will Barfoot): Banning "Glock Switches"**

This bill prohibits devices that convert firearms to fire at rates similar to machine guns, often referred to as "Glock switches."

While these devices are already federally illegal, state and local law enforcement requested a state-level penalty due to their frequent use in criminal activity.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously (28-0) and now moves to the House for consideration.

- **HB202 (Representative Rex Reynolds): Expanding Law Enforcement Immunity**

This bill aims to broaden legal immunity protections for law enforcement officers.

It would allow officers facing accusations of excessive force to present their immunity defense to a jury, even if a judge previously denied it.

It also restricts civil liability to match the higher standards of criminal proceedings.

The House Judiciary Committee approved the bill, and it is now in position for a floor vote.

Hemp-Derived THC Ban Proposal Shifts to Tax and Stricter Enforcement

A proposed ban on hemp-derived THC products in Alabama has shifted focus, moving away from a complete prohibition to a tax and stricter enforcement model.

Senator Tim Melson's SB132, initially introduced to ban products like Delta-8, Delta-9, and Delta-10 THC and classify them as Schedule I drugs, was discussed by the Senate Healthcare Committee but not advanced.

Senator Melson presented a substitute bill to the committee. This revised version includes provisions to:

- Impose a 6% additional sales tax on hemp-derived THC products.
- Increase penalties for retailers selling these products to individuals under 21, including loss of alcohol and tobacco license on fourth violation.
- Impose labeling and testing requirements to ensure safety of product.
- Create a limit on the amount of THC that can be included in a product.

The modified bill is expected to return to the Senate Healthcare Committee for a vote before it can proceed to the Senate floor.

Veterans Affairs Commissioner Bill Nears House Vote

Senator Andrew Jones's SB67, which proposes significant changes to the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, has cleared the House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and is now set for a vote by the full House.

The bill would:

- Elevate the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs to a cabinet-level position, appointed by the Governor.
- Transition the current board's role to an advisory capacity.

While the amended bill has garnered support from numerous veterans' groups, some remain vocal in their opposition.

Occupational License Reform Bill Heads to Senate Floor

Senator Chris Elliott's SB193, aimed at reforming occupational licensing in Alabama, has successfully passed through a Senate committee and is now poised for a floor vote.

The bill proposes to establish the Office of Occupational and Professional Licensing within the Department of Workforce (formerly the Department of Labor). This new office is intended to streamline administrative processes, particularly for smaller licensing boards that would be consolidated under the legislation.

GED Alternative Passes House, Community College Bill Advances

House Passes Bill Expanding Alternative High School Diplomas

Representative Matt Woods' HB266, known as the "Restoring Educational Advancement of Completing Highschool (REACH) Act," was unanimously approved by the House on Tuesday. This bill codifies and expands the Alabama Community College System's current practice of offering non-traditional high school diplomas to individuals aged 18 and older who have dropped out of high school. The legislation aims to enhance workforce education. The bill now moves to the Senate Education Policy Committee for consideration.

Senate Committee Advances Bill Covering Community College Costs for High School Students

The Senate Finance and Taxation Education Committee advanced Senator Arthur Orr's SB196 on Wednesday. This bill, modeled after Georgia legislation, proposes to cover community college tuition for eligible high school juniors and seniors who choose to enroll full-time in community college. Students would have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma by acquiring equivalent credits at the community college. Proponents of the bill highlighted its alignment with the state's successful dual enrollment program for high school students.

Archives Bill Sparks Senate Filibuster and Gridlock

The Alabama Senate faced significant delays on Thursday due to a Democratic filibuster centered on Senator Chris Elliott's SB5, a bill that would alter the appointment process for the Alabama Department of Archives and History's board.

Currently, the board selects its own members. SB5 would shift this authority to government officials.

The Senate managed to pass the first two bills on the day's calendar but adjourned before reaching SB5 after an hours-long slow down. A floor vote on the bill will likely require a cloture motion by Senate Republicans to end the filibuster.

Lawmakers will return to Montgomery on Tuesday, March 4th, having completed one-third of the 2025 legislative session, with 20 legislative days remaining.

EDAA

Bill	Sponsors	Title	Last Action	Latest Version
AL 2025rs SB 175	Kitchens	Taxation; certain aircraft and aircraft parts are exempt from sales, use, and lease taxes Companion Bills: HB 253	Senate, Feb 27, 2025: Read for the Second Time and placed on the Calendar (Finance and Taxation Education)	Introduced
AL 2025rs HB 253	Colvin	Taxation; certain aircraft and aircraft parts are exempt from sales, use, and lease taxes (Ways and Means Education (House)) Companion Bills: SB 175	House, Feb 11, 2025: Pending Committee Action in House of Origin (Ways and Means Education)	Introduced
AL 2025rs HB 373	Kiel	Alabama Film Office renamed, Entertainment Industry Incentive Act of 2009 amended, maximum expenditure threshold eligible for rebates increased, annual cap increased, unspent incentives carried forward (Economic Development and Tourism (House)) Companion Bills: SB 177	House, Feb 27, 2025: Pending Committee Action in House of Origin (Economic Development and Tourism)	Introduced
AL 2025rs SB 177	Bell	Alabama Film Office renamed, Entertainment Industry Incentive Act of 2009 amended, maximum expenditure threshold eligible for rebates increased, annual cap increased, unspent incentives carried forward Senate Calendar: Regular Calendar (February 27, 2025) Position: 42 Companion Bills: HB 373	Senate, Feb 20, 2025: Read for the Second Time and placed on the Calendar (Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Development)	Introduced
AL 2025rs HB 243	Whitt	To unabate a portion certain state ad valorem and construction related transaction taxes to deposit into the Alabama Development Fund. Senate Calendar: Regular Calendar (February 27, 2025) Position: 41	Senate, Feb 20, 2025: Read for the Second Time and placed on the Calendar (Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Development)	Introduced
AL 2025rs HB 292	Rafferty	Economic development tax incentives; value of the repayment of awarded tax incentives required to be published. (Economic Development and Tourism (House))	House, Feb 18, 2025: Pending Committee Action in House of Origin (Economic Development and Tourism)	Introduced

Bill	Sponsors	Title	Last Action	Latest Version
AL 2025rs SB 22	Coleman (M)	Alabama Jobs Act, further provides for recapture of incentives (Ways and Means Education (House))	House, Feb 13, 2025: Pending Committee Action in Second House (Ways and Means Education)	Engrossed
AL 2025rs HB 259	Robbins	Establish income tax credit for recruited or remote workers (Ways and Means Education (House))	House, Feb 11, 2025: Pending Committee Action in House of Origin (Ways and Means Education)	Introduced