

Gold Dome



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Gold Dome Report – Special House Rural Development Council Edition

Earlier today, on a brisk morning in the North Georgia mountains, the Georgia House of Representatives' Rural Development Council unveiled its recommendations for the 2019 legislative session. Focused on economic development, broadband, and healthcare in Rural Georgia, the Council's recommendations propose sweeping changes to established taxation and regulatory structures that would impact communities rural and urban across the state. Details on the Council's recommendations in today's Special Edition [#GoldDomeReport](#).

Rural Development Council Adopts Recommendations for 2019 Legislative Session

Concluding a three-day meeting in Dahlonega and a second year of meetings held across the state, the House Rural Development Council adopted its recommendations for the 2019 legislative session today. Led by co-chairs Reps. Terry England (R-Auburn) and Jay Powell (R-Camilla), the Council voted to recommend substantial changes to the ways a number of businesses and services are taxed, regulated, and attracted to the state. Specifically, the Council recommended the following:

- Economic Development
 - Encouraging **Regional Development Authorities** ("RDA") consisting of 3-5 counties by allowing such RDAs to have the collective benefit of the lowest tier status of any one of its members for projects that locate in a jointly-owned industrial park.

- Adjusting the job thresholds for Tier One and Tier Two counties for purposes of the **Quality Jobs Tax Credit** to five and ten jobs, respectively, and provide a \$500 per job bonus for locations and expansions in Tier One and Tier Two counties.
- Establishing a **blight removal and code enforcement grant program** to be modeled after the City of Hoschton's "Spring Cleaning Challenge" to be administered by the Department of Community Affairs and offering grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000 to municipalities to initiate free, neighborhood-level cleanup for their most-blighted areas.
- Allowing **farm wineries** to sell up to 24,000 gallons of their own wine without having to be first refused by an established distributor, and instructing the Department of Revenue to streamline the paperwork and reporting for farm wineries.
- Broadband
 - **Eliminating franchise fees** on cable television and landline telephones.
 - **Eliminating sales tax** on landline and cellular telephones, as well as broadband equipment.
 - **Implementing of 4% sales tax** on telecommunications, cable, and satellite services, as well as digital goods and services.
 - **Allowing electric and rural telephone cooperatives** to deliver broadband services.
 - **Streamlining the application and permitting process** for small cell technology by capping costs and fees, providing timelines to local governments for review and approval of applications, and defining height and size requirements.
- Healthcare
 - *Certificate of Need ("CON")*
 - **Eliminating the CON program for healthcare providers in Region 3** (Metro Atlanta) of the Department of Community Health's State Service Delivery Regions.
 - **Replacing CON with a "rigorous application and licensing requirement"** for new providers outside of Region 3 seeking to locate within 20 miles of an existing provider and for new providers in Region 3 within 20 miles of an existing provider outside of the region.
 - **Establishing an indigent and charity care requirement for non-profit providers** based on a rolling two to three year average of the state's individual hospital average, which is currently 7.35%.
 - **Establishing an indigent and charity care requirement for for-profit providers** at 3% less than the rolling two to three year average of the state's individual hospital average.
 - **Establishing an indigent and charity care requirement for a single-specialty destination hospital** at 10% or the rolling two to three year average of the state's individual hospital average, whichever is higher.
 - **Imposing penalties for failure to meet charity care requirements** consisting of a 1% fine of net revenue for every .5% of the indigent care requirement not provided.
 - **Increasing reporting requirements for non-profit hospitals** by requiring use and public posting of such hospitals' federal Form 990s, reporting of property owned by such hospitals and any ownership or interests such hospitals have in other business ventures, online posting of any bonded debt or outstanding loans and executive leadership salaries and compensation.
 - **Restricting non-profit hospitals from purchasing, maintaining, or holding Medical Use Rights.**
 - **Clarifying that all operating subsidiaries of a hospital authority are subject to open records requirements.**
 - **Increasing the Rural Hospital Tax Credit to \$100M per year.**
 - **Supporting the efforts of Governor-Elect Kemp in addressing the safety net cliffs that are harmful to the working poor.**

The full Council report with additional detail and background is available [online](#). Notably absent from the report were recommendations relating to agriculture and education, although Chairman England noted that the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation will be conducting a career survey in the agriculture field to create recommendations for streamlining education efforts from Pre-K to graduation. Chairman Powell also stated that the legislative package containing the Council's recommendations is likely to consist of 9 to 12 bills, and he invited Council members to let he and Chairman England know if any member wants to carry a particular bill.

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