As the 2020 legislative cycle approaches, legislators across the South are preparing and pre-filing legislation to address emerging and relevant policy issues in their states. With its regional focus, the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) is uniquely positioned to identify and research current and emerging policy issues and trends. This report was prepared by Anne Roberts Brody, policy and program manager, and Roger Moore and Cody Allen, policy analysts, and provides a sampling of issues and trends that are anticipated to emerge during the 2020 legislative term. State actions referenced in this report may represent appropriate policy options for Southern lawmakers to consider and, as such, may include bills or policies originating outside the SLC region.

Current and emerging trends under the purview of the SLC’s six standing committees, which are relevant to policymakers across the South, have been identified. The Agriculture and Rural Development preview discusses meat labeling, funding for rural broadband expansion and efforts to address mental health in rural communities, while the Economic Development, Transportation and Cultural Affairs preview considers distracted driving laws and the regulation of autonomous transportation, as well as a brief discussion of an innovation in commercial trucking corridors. In Education policy, lead testing of school drinking water, regulating student use of medical marijuana and efforts to reverse teacher shortages are trends to watch for the 2020 legislative term, while infrastructure development for electric vehicles, renewable natural gas and flood mitigation efforts are important emerging issues in the Energy and Environment area. The Fiscal Affairs and Government Operations section discusses emerging technologies, public pension stress testing and state efforts to assist with the 2020 decennial census, and the Human Services and Public Safety preview examines vaping and electronic cigarette restrictions, as well as certificate of need reform and prescription drug importation plans.

Additional information about these or other issues that may be addressed in 2020 are available by contacting the SLC. Staff are available throughout the year to provide expert assistance on various policy issues important to state legislatures and, when needed, can leverage the organization’s resources to provide additional support for both legislators and staff.