

2024

# LEGISLATIVE TOOLKIT



**ACCG**

Advancing Georgia's Counties.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACCG Governmental Affairs Team and Policy Council . . . . .	1
A Message from the ACCG President . . . . .	2
Legislative Priority Briefs	
Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Funding . . . . .	3
Mental Health Reform . . . . .	4
Property Tax Assessment and Appeal Reform. . . . .	5
ACCG Policy Objectives . . . . .	6
ACCG Guiding Principles . . . . .	10
ACCG Policy Development Process . . . . .	12
Six Ways to Engage Legislators. . . . .	13
Policy Communication Tools . . . . .	14



# ACCG GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS TEAM

## ACCG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Clint Mueller**  
*Director of Governmental Affairs*  
cmueller@accg.org  
678.772.8911



**Todd Edwards**  
*Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs*  
tedwards@accg.org  
404.805.7883  
*General County Government*



**Martha Revelo**  
*Associate Director of Governmental Affairs*  
mrevelo@accg.org  
470.989.3838  
*Economic Development and Transportation Federal Natural Resources and the Environment*



**Gabriel Carter**  
*Governmental Affairs Associate*  
gcarter@accg.org  
470.591.6622  
*Health and Human Services Public Safety and the Courts*



**Dante Handel**  
*Governmental Affairs Associate*  
dhandel@accg.org  
203.906.8762  
*Revenue and Finance*



**Dave Wills**  
dwills@accg.org  
404.522.5022

## ACCG POLICY COUNCIL

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Henry Craig** - Baldwin County Commissioner  
ACCG President

**David Sikes** - Toombs County Chairman  
First Vice President and Policy Council Chair

**Clinton Johnson** - Dougherty County Commissioner  
Second Vice President

**Marc DeMott** - Colquitt County Commissioner  
Third Vice President

**Cindy Mills** - Forsyth County Commissioner

**Shannon Whitfield** - Walker County Chairman

**Melissa Hughes** - Tift County Commissioner  
Immediate Past President

### POLICY COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS

**Lannie Brant** - Camden County Commissioner  
Chair, Natural Resources and the Environment

**David Carmichael** - Paulding County Chairman  
Chair, Revenue and Finance

**Tarenia Carthan** - Douglas County Commissioner  
Chair, Economic Development and Transportation

**Blake Elsberry** - Chattooga County Sole Commissioner  
Vice Chair, General County Government

**Myra Exum** - Brooks County Commissioner  
Vice Chair, Natural Resources and the Environment

**John Graham** - Warren County Chairman  
Chair, Public Safety and the Courts

**Carlotta Harrell** - Henry County Chairwoman  
Vice Chair, Federal

### PRESIDENT APPOINTMENTS

**Chris Dockery** - Lumpkin County Chairman  
**Steve Taylor** - Bartow County Sole Commissioner  
**DeMont Davis** - Clayton County Commissioner

### SECTION PRESIDENTS

**Chris Hamilton** - Jackson County Attorney  
County Attorney Representative

**David Crawley** - McDuffie County Manager  
County Manager/Administrator Representative

**Amanda Hannah** - Wayne County Clerk  
County Clerk Representative

**Nicole Hendrickson** - Gwinnett County Chairwoman  
Vice Chair, Economic Development and Transportation

**Demond Mason** - Newton County Commissioner  
Vice Chair, Revenue and Finance

**Oz Nesbitt** - Rockdale County Chairman  
Chair, Federal

**Bud Owens** - Gordon County Commissioner  
Vice Chair, Health and Human Services

**Audie Rowe** - Cook County Commissioner  
Vice Chair, Public Safety and the Courts

**Travis Turner** - White County Chairman  
Chair, General County Government

**Doreen Williams** - Rockdale County Commissioner  
Chair, Health and Human Services

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



## Dear Georgia Counties and Partners in County Government,

Effective governance is underscored by the spirit of collaboration. Time and time again, Georgia's county officials have witnessed the positive impacts of collaboration when working with state leaders to enact laws and policies that ultimately benefit all who call our state home. With the support of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), also known as Georgia's county association, county leaders partner with members of the General Assembly and leaders from state agencies on advocacy efforts which advance all 159 counties. Such efforts are guided by the ACCG Policy Agenda presented in the association's Legislative Toolkit.

The 2024 ACCG Legislative Toolkit details the association's Policy Agenda which is inclusive of the ACCG Guiding Principles, Policy Objectives, and Top Three Legislative Priorities. The Policy Agenda will guide ACCG's advocacy efforts during the legislative session and will help inform county government partners on issues significant to all counties.

ACCG's top legislative priorities for 2024 include Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Funding, Mental Health Reform, and Property Tax Assessment & Appeal Reform, all which are outlined in the enclosed policy priority briefs. The list of Policy Objectives features other significant items the association will actively pursue.

ACCG looks forward to continuing its work of advancing Georgia's counties while best serving in the role as a key player in the state's government arena. County officials and partners in county government are encouraged to use this resource when making decisions during the legislative process. Please do not hesitate to contact a member of the association's Governmental Affairs Team if they can be of assistance as we all work to progress Georgia's position as a national model for effective and efficient government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry R. Craig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Henry Craig

ACCG President and Baldwin County Commissioner



# ISSUE: EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) FUNDING

## BACKGROUND

Emergency medical services (EMS) are a vital part of the healthcare system. However, providing emergency medical services is an expensive endeavor for both urban and rural counties.

While EMS mainly operates at the local level, a significant portion of funding decisions related to EMS are made at the state level. Items such as the current Medicaid reimbursement rate are determined by the state government. Furthermore, according to a report by the Georgia Department of Community Health, there has not been a substantial rate increase to the EMS codes since 2002. Due to the financially strenuous nature of EMS, several counties are having to supplement EMS services from their general fund.

## STATUS

As a result of the outlined financial challenges, the burden posed on EMS during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased inflation rates, EMS providers and workers have endured a tremendous amount of strain that has resulted in workforce shortages and challenges in service delivery. EMS providers struggle to provide timely emergency medical care when there is a lack of available emergency medical technicians (EMT) or paramedics. ACCG believes that increasing the current Medicaid rate to the Rural and Urban

Medicare rate and changing the rules and regulations to include Medicaid reimbursement for the first 10 miles of ambulance transport will help address EMS workforce shortages and service delivery challenges.

ACCG encourages the Governor and General Assembly to adjust the current Medicaid funding mechanism for EMS by:

1. Allowing the first 10 miles of ambulance transport to be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement.
2. Increasing the EMS Medicaid rate to the Rural and Urban Medicare rate.

## TALKING POINTS

- The current EMS workforce shortages and service delivery challenges greatly threaten an already strained healthcare system.
- With most emergency medical services being delivered at the local level, it is essential that local governments be a part of the discussion on determining the proper use of current funding mechanisms.
- ACCG encourages the Governor and General Assembly to increase the EMS Medicaid rate to the rural and urban Medicare rate, while additionally including coverage for the first 10 miles.



# ISSUE: MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

## BACKGROUND

Georgia's counties are as dedicated as ever to realizing mental health reform in the state of Georgia. While House Bill 1013, which was passed in 2022, was a great first step, it is imperative to continue to build on that success. House Bill 520, introduced in 2023, is the next step in mental health reform. Some of the relevant items that House Bill 520 will accomplish are that it authorizes the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to perform comprehensive studies of our mental healthcare system; provides resources to local governments for jail diversion initiatives; and commits to taking actionable steps to find more supportive housing options. This bill also focuses on "familiar faces", which are individuals with serious mental and behavioral health challenges who have frequent contact with criminal justice, homeless, and behavioral health systems.

## STATUS

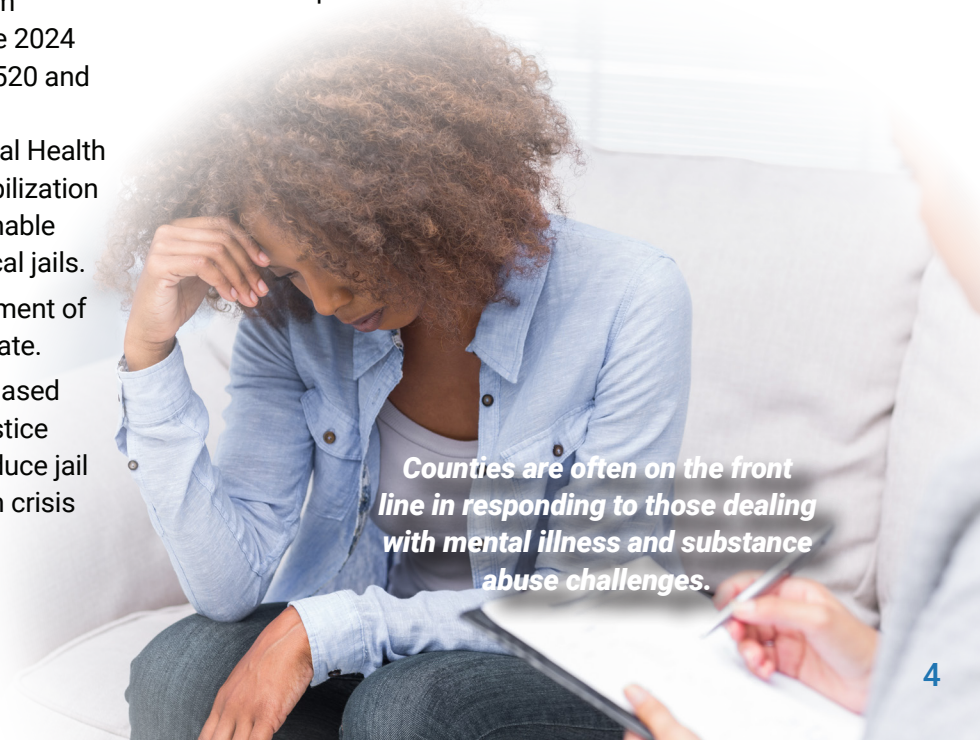
House Bill 520 passed 163 to 3 in the Georgia House of Representatives but failed to move forward in the Georgia Senate. ACCG encourages the Georgia General Assembly to pass HB 520 during the 2024 legislative session. Furthermore, ACCG is encouraging the General Assembly to address mental health reform through the expansion of crisis centers and co-responder programs. The major mental health reform efforts that ACCG is requesting during the 2024 Legislative Session align with House Bill 520 and include:

1. Expanding the availability of Behavioral Health Crisis Centers (BHCC) and Crisis Stabilization Units across the state within a reasonable distance to divert individuals from local jails.
2. Appropriating funds for the establishment of co-responder programs across the state.
3. Authorize DBHDD to provide county-based coordinators to work with criminal justice and behavioral health providers to reduce jail admission of those in a mental health crisis who do not pose a public safety risk.

4. Appropriate funds in order for DBHDD to develop a pilot program to assist jails in implementing behavioral health screening programs and protocols.
5. Authorize DBHDD to establish a grant program to create or expand jail in-reach and reentry programs which will focus on "familiar faces" and connect individuals with community resources.
6. Authorize the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to increase supportive housing for the "familiar faces" population.

## TALKING POINTS

- Counties are often on the front line in responding to those dealing with mental illness and substance abuse challenges. Appropriate state policies and adequate funding are needed for counties to properly address the magnitude of this challenge.
- Addressing the issue of "familiar faces", behavioral health screenings in jails, access to crisis centers, and co-responder programs will help strengthen public safety across Georgia's counties.
- Adequate supportive housing opportunities are an essential component to help ensure the rehabilitation of substance abuse and mental health patients.



*Counties are often on the front line in responding to those dealing with mental illness and substance abuse challenges.*



# ISSUE: PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT AND APPEAL REFORM

## BACKGROUND

Many mechanisms in Georgia's property tax system are confusing to taxpayers. The annual assessment notice is required to include a tax estimate, which is based on the current year's value and the previous year's millage rate. It also does not include exemptions and credits, so it provides an inaccurate figure which is confusing to most taxpayers.

When a taxpayer appeals their property value, if they provide written evidence or attend the hearing, whether they win or lose the value determined at the hearing will lock for the two subsequent years. While this measure was originally placed into law to protect taxpayers, it is having an opposite effect. Most of these appeals are from commercial properties, including out-of-state or foreign investors. They are shifting their tax burden to residential properties, which negatively impacts Georgia residents as they assume the tax burden of those entities.

While a property is under appeal, the taxpayer has the option to pay 85% of their property tax bill until the appeal is resolved. When an appeal is made to Superior Court, there is no mechanism to require the taxpayer to submit the filing fees and attend the settlement conference in good faith. Therefore, the taxpayer could receive an indefinite 15% discount on their property taxes under this loophole.

The 2022 sales ratio study conducted by the Department of Audits and Accounts (DOAA) indicated that 81 counties were 10% or more below market value (a .36 ratio) and that 117 counties were 5% or more below market value (a .38 ratio), even after large increases in assessed values. There are financial impacts to county governments including a reduction in public utility property tax collections and a \$5 per parcel penalty if the county remains below a .36 ratio for too long under the Department of Revenue's review of the sales ratio study.

## STATUS

- ACCG supports removing the tax estimate from the assessment notice to reduce taxpayer confusion.
- ACCG supports placing restrictions on the three-year lock to protect homeowners and local governments.
- ACCG asks the General Assembly to provide a mechanism to compel the taxpayer to attend the settlement conference, and to allow the appeal to be terminated if the taxpayer refuses to pay the filing fees and advance their appeal.
- ACCG asks the General Assembly to provide a law setting out the DOAA sales ratio study methodology and allowing the tax assessors and DOAA to utilize data from the same time period.

## TALKING POINTS

- It is important to eliminate taxpayer confusion by decoupling the tax estimate and the assessment notice, while preserving transparency to protect taxpayers.
- The current language regarding the three-year lock is taking advantage of homeowners as they pick up the tab for out-of-state and foreign investors.
- The settlement conference loophole applies to all types of initial appeals: to the Board of Equalization, an arbitrator, a hearing officer, or directly to Superior Court.
- The DOAA sales ratio study is pressuring tax assessors to be more aggressive in their assessments or risk financial penalties on their local governments.

# 2024 POLICY OBJECTIVES

## Single-County TSPLOST

Under the current single-county TSPLOST (Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) law, the tax may be levied up to five years at a fractional rate of up to 1% in 0.05% increments if there is an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with all qualified cities within the county. If any municipality in the county does not agree to the IGA, the tax can only be levied up to 0.75%. ACCG asks the General Assembly to adjust the current single-county TSPLOST law to incorporate language from the local option sales tax (LOST) law so that once a city or cities making up 50% or more of the municipal population signs the IGA, the tax may be levied up to the full 1% and the remaining cities that do not sign will be considered absent municipalities and will receive a share of the tax based on no less than their proportionate share of the municipal population in the county.

## SDS and LOST Negotiations

**Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) negotiations** continue to pose challenges to counties and cities alike. Technical amendments and clarifications are needed to facilitate implementation and minimize disputes. At a minimum, and in order to reduce conflict in future revisions to local service delivery strategies, the Service Delivery Strategies (SDS) Act should be amended as follows:

- Key definitions and principles detailed in the joint SDS handbook authored by ACCG, the Georgia Municipal Association, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia should be clearly set forth in the statute.
- The frequency and scheduling of future revisions to local service delivery strategies should be clarified.
- Require SDS renegotiations only once every 10 years and for these to be completed in the same years as Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) negotiations.

- Replace the judicial dispute resolution procedures in current law with a process resembling Georgia's Annexation Arbitration Process. Authorize a panel to decide whether the city or county's best and final offer is more equitable when settling failed SDS negotiations.
- Ensure that cities cannot charge higher utility rates or fees to unincorporated residents unless that cost is "reasonably" related to the cost of providing the service.
- Amend current law to clarify that all revenues generated by taxes and fees levied or imposed primarily in the unincorporated areas of the county may be used by the county to offset the cost of county services.
- Any service area granted to a government outside their jurisdiction should be able to be changed without an agreement if the authorized government is asked to provide the service and fails to do so.
- Enact legislation that would result in all taxpayers being treated equitably, whether they live within a municipality or in unincorporated areas.
- Enact legislation to prevent the subsidization of city operations by counties and unincorporated taxpayers through utility franchise fees, through county property tax exemptions on municipal profit-making enterprises, and through "double-dip" distributions of sales tax revenues that provide inequitable benefits to municipal residents.

**Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) negotiations** are a one-cent sales tax split between counties and cities according to a distribution certificate filed with the Department of Revenue. The stated purpose of LOST is to provide a property tax rollback on the tax bill and to fund services that would otherwise have to be paid for through property tax.

- ACCG supports clarification or elimination of the eight LOST criteria to provide negotiators with assistance in allocating the tax based on its stated purpose.



# 2024 POLICY OBJECTIVES

- ACCG supports improvements to the dispute resolution process so that counties and cities may more readily come to an agreement when both sides are at an impasse.
- ACCG opposes the expansion of the Municipal Option Sales Tax (MOST) to additional cities or any tax that applies to an area smaller than a whole county.

## Housing Affordability and Accessibility

ACCG continues to work with various stakeholders to develop meaningful solutions to address Georgia's critical shortage of market-rate workforce housing. While ACCG continues to oppose preempting local government zoning and land use regulations, the association supports state-authorized flexibility and incentives to encourage the development of more housing that someone making 120% or less of the median income of the area can afford. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Allowing counties to create workforce housing zones where they could waive or reduce impact fees and employ fast-track permit approvals and more flexibility in design standards to receive state financial assistance and lower-interest loans for infrastructure.
- Providing expedited review for the Developments of Regional Impact, Environmental Protection Division and septic tank permitting in targeted areas.
- Allowing qualified third parties to approve septic system installations.
- Authorizing local governments to implement rental registries to help with inspecting and remediating housing code violations.

## Public Works Bidding

Currently, Georgia law requires local governments to bid out public works projects that have an estimated value of \$100,000 or more. As this

amount has not been changed in more than two decades, inflation and material costs have increased, and many vendors elect not to go through the time and effort to submit bids for small projects. ACCG asks the General Assembly to raise this bid threshold from \$100,000 to \$250,000. This will save counties time and money by not having to bid-out smaller projects and should increase competition among vendors who otherwise may not be willing to go through the bid process.

## Tort Reform

The cost of doing business in Georgia has grown substantially due to the increased expense of litigation. Tort reform legislation is needed to make Georgia's legal system more fair and equitable for local governments and their constituents, which should help contain the rising cost of insurance premiums driven by increasing claims costs. ACCG recommends the following tort reform measures.

- **County Liability: Failure to Wear Seat Belts** – Change Georgia statute to allow counties to invoke the comparative negligence doctrine in defending claims made by plaintiffs whose injuries are in whole or in part related to their failure or their choice not to wear a seatbelt.
- **Direct Appeals from Denial of Immunity** – Sovereign Immunity and Official Immunity protects state and local government entities and employees from certain lawsuits, and thereby protects taxpayer funds from expenditure on lawsuits and judgments. ACCG believes that the denial of immunity by a trial court order in a given case should be immediately appealable to avoid the expense of further litigation and trial because of an erroneous ruling.

# 2024 POLICY OBJECTIVES

- **Collateral Source** – Allow defendants to introduce evidence of the amount a plaintiff actually paid for medical expenses in a case instead of, under Georgia’s current collateral source rule, allowing plaintiffs to present evidence of the “amount charged” even if that amount is wildly inflated and was not expected to be paid by anyone. This will provide a statutory framework to level the playing field to prevent such inflated figures from being presented to juries.
- **Litigation Funding** – Similar to collateral source, litigation funding (by a third party) increases the overall cost of litigation. It encourages plaintiffs to “roll the dice” on claims that might not otherwise get filed. A third party offers to fund the litigation (often non-recourse so plaintiff owes nothing if there is no recovery) for a percentage of the recovery. ACCG asks for a statutory framework that allows defendants to show the existence of the funding agreement as the company and any experts they refer have a financial incentive to support plaintiff’s claims, and plaintiffs have additional incentive to magnify their claims to cover the amounts they will owe the funding companies.
- **Settlement Offers and Agreements** – Prelitigation demands pursuant to Georgia law have been used to set up excess verdicts and potential bad faith claims based on the timing of the payment, which could affect all organizations, individuals, and their insurers. ACCG urges the General Assembly to add a clarifying statement to O.C.G.A. § 9-11-67.1(g) to provide that the payment made within the specified period will satisfy the payment obligation.

## Healthcare Cost in Jails

ACCG asks that the General Assembly explore options to help counties provide and finance health care for jail and correctional institution (CI) inmates.

## Soil Amendments Derived from Industrial By-Products

Counties seek partnership with the Georgia Department of Agriculture to better ensure that soil amendments are appropriately applied, and the program rules are enforced. Without enhanced oversight and enforcement over the application of soil amendments, rural quality of life is threatened. ACCG requests legislation or department rules that would require information sharing between the Department of Agriculture and county governing authorities. Additionally, counties want to know where soil amendments are being applied in their respective counties, have the ability to inspect locations where soil amendments are being applied, and have clearly defined enforcement.

## Funding for State Prisoners Housed in County Jails and Correctional Institutions

ACCG urges the General Assembly to assume financial responsibility for state prisoners housed at local jails and county correctional institutions. This would also include state prisoners who are housed in local jails on probation revocation proceedings. The association is requesting an increase in the per diem reimbursement rate per state prisoner.

## Include Sales Tax on Digital Rentals and Subscriptions

2020’s marketplace facilitator legislation provided for taxation of goods sold on platforms creating the markets, and 2023’s digital goods legislation improved parity between digital goods and their physical counterparts. However, the sales tax code has not caught up to capture rentals and subscriptions. ACCG asks the General Assembly to clarify that all digital services, including rental and subscription services, should be taxed in the same manner as their physical counterparts to provide parity with brick-and-mortar stores and to expand the sales tax base.



# 2024 POLICY OBJECTIVES

## FEDERAL

### Behavioral Health Services

ACCG urges the federal government to advance legislative and administrative changes that will enhance the counties' ability to provide comprehensive behavioral health services. ACCG also supports federal funding for

- Existing mental and behavioral health services through enhancements to programs like the Community Mental Health Services block grant, the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant, and support for expansion of broadband and telehealth resources for behavioral health providers, particularly in rural communities.
- Additional services through enhancements such as the elimination of the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIED) and the elimination of capping at 16 the number of Medicaid reimbursable beds in treatment facilities at Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD).

Furthermore, ACCG supports other measures to meet the growing needs for behavioral health services, including developing and expanding the workforce, building an infrastructure for behavioral health crisis response, fully implementing, and expanding mental health parity, expanding access to health information technology, and the clarification of data privacy provisions.

### Next Generation 911 (NG911)

ACCG urges Congress to pass legislation along with adequate funding to assist with the transition from obsolete analog 911 systems to an Internet Protocol (IP) based system also known as Next Generation 911 (NG911). Technology exists for emergency communication centers to have access to multi-media data sources of information. However, 911 systems across the country struggle to move from the analog 911 systems built over 50 years ago to digital IP-based 911 systems. Once fully implemented, NG911 systems will process multi-media data and provide greater security, sustainability, and reliability than the aging analog 911 systems.

### Housing Affordability and Accessibility

ACCG urges Congress to provide dedicated direct federal funding resources to increase the ability for counties and local governments to assist with housing shortages. This includes updating current regulatory policies to allow flexibility for the use of funds for a needs assessment plan and alternative homes (e.g., tiny homes). The federal government should implement a national housing policy that provides clear housing goals, adequate and predictable funding levels, and an assessment needs platform. Furthermore, it should offer incentives for energy efficient buildings and build on partnerships with state and local governments and the private and nonprofit sectors in support of new construction and rehabilitation for rental and homeownership properties relating to workforce housing needs.



# ACCG GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## LOCAL ISSUES

ACCG provides a common platform that allows counties to maximize their legislative influence by making requests of the General Assembly and Congress through a unified effort. Through ACCG's policy development process, a policy platform is adopted, containing issues of significant importance to all counties or a reasonable portion of them. ACCG will not become directly involved in lobbying local legislation or general legislation that is drafted to affect only one county. ACCG will, however, notify the affected county of the pending legislation and will, at the request of the county, provide technical assistance. ACCG urges members of the General Assembly to refrain from passing this type of legislation without the support of the county governing authority. Where legislation will benefit some counties at the expense of others, ACCG will notify all counties of the potential benefits and consequences of the legislation but will not take a position.

## HOME RULE

Home rule is the right of the people to determine and implement a public policy at the grassroots level. Home rule power is conferred on Georgia counties by Article IX, Section II, Paragraph I of the Georgia Constitution. Local governing authorities have the power to adopt ordinances, resolutions, or regulations relating to its property, affairs, and local government, as long as they are not inconsistent with state law or the Georgia Constitution. Although state laws may define minimum standards, they should not preempt counties from passing ordinances that establish a more stringent standard for their communities. The preservation of administrative and fiscal home rule authority allows counties to develop and implement community-based solutions to local problems. ACCG believes that counties, as the government closest to the people, are the most appropriate authority to serve the needs and requirements of the community.

## COST SHIFTING

A state directive that compels local governments to provide a service, program, or benefit without providing the appropriate monies or a funding source is regarded as an unfunded mandate. County officials recognize that some state mandates are justified because they achieve agreed upon state-wide policy goals. However, many, if not most, mandates on counties are imposed without the consensus of local governments or the resources necessary for their implementation. Mandates shift costs to local property taxpayers, financially drain county governments, and impede a county's ability to adequately deliver the fundamental services required by law. Mandates also compromise a county's ability to provide discretionary services requested by the local community. ACCG opposes any state or federal actions that limit the ability of local elected officials to make fiscal and public policy decisions for the citizens they represent. Furthermore, counties support the establishment of an agreed upon course of action whereby state and county elected officials deliberatively evaluate the appropriate funding and delivery of intergovernmental service responsibilities between counties and the state.

## LOCAL REVENUES

To provide services requested by the local community or required by the state, counties need an adequate stable revenue source that is diverse and fairly spreads the tax burden across the residents of the county. State-determined restrictions on local revenues hinder a local community's ability to establish a revenue structure that fairly distributes the financial burdens of local government to all citizens of the county based on the unique characteristics of the county.

# ACCG GUIDING PRINCIPLES

When new state laws or annexation erodes a portion of the local revenue base, county commissioners must shift the tax burden to other residents or reduce the level of county services provided. Politically, neither of these choices is popular. The decision to tax should occur at the same level of government where the decision is made to enact a new service or enhance an existing service. Local governments should have an equal share of flexibility and control over both revenues and expenditures as they are directly linked.

## SERVICE DELIVERY

To help create and maintain the quality of life desired by the residents of a community, counties should be given the flexibility to create new services, expand existing services, or discontinue a service. If a service is funded partially or fully using county revenues, then the county governing authority should have a level of control over the service commensurate to its share of the funding. Local government services in the unincorporated areas should be provided solely at the discretion of the county governing authority and such services should not be disrupted by annexation. Service delivery responsibilities within the incorporated areas of the county should be determined jointly with the city. When the state wishes to provide services locally, they should coordinate with the counties to determine the most efficient method of service delivery and funding of the service.

## LAND USE

County officials must have the ability to make reasonable decisions for zoning, comprehensive planning, and infrastructure issues to ensure that the local community grows and develops in a way that adds value to the community and improves the quality of life for all residents. This includes a county's right to adopt local land use and other environmental regulations to protect its unique natural resources and vision for the community. Citizens expect the county commission to exercise its ability to manage and direct growth without being subjected to prohibitive claims for damages for infringement on private property rights. Likewise, county land use decisions should not be thwarted by municipal annexations. Locally elected officials are in the best position to balance the rights of individual property owners with the rights and wishes of all property owners within a county.

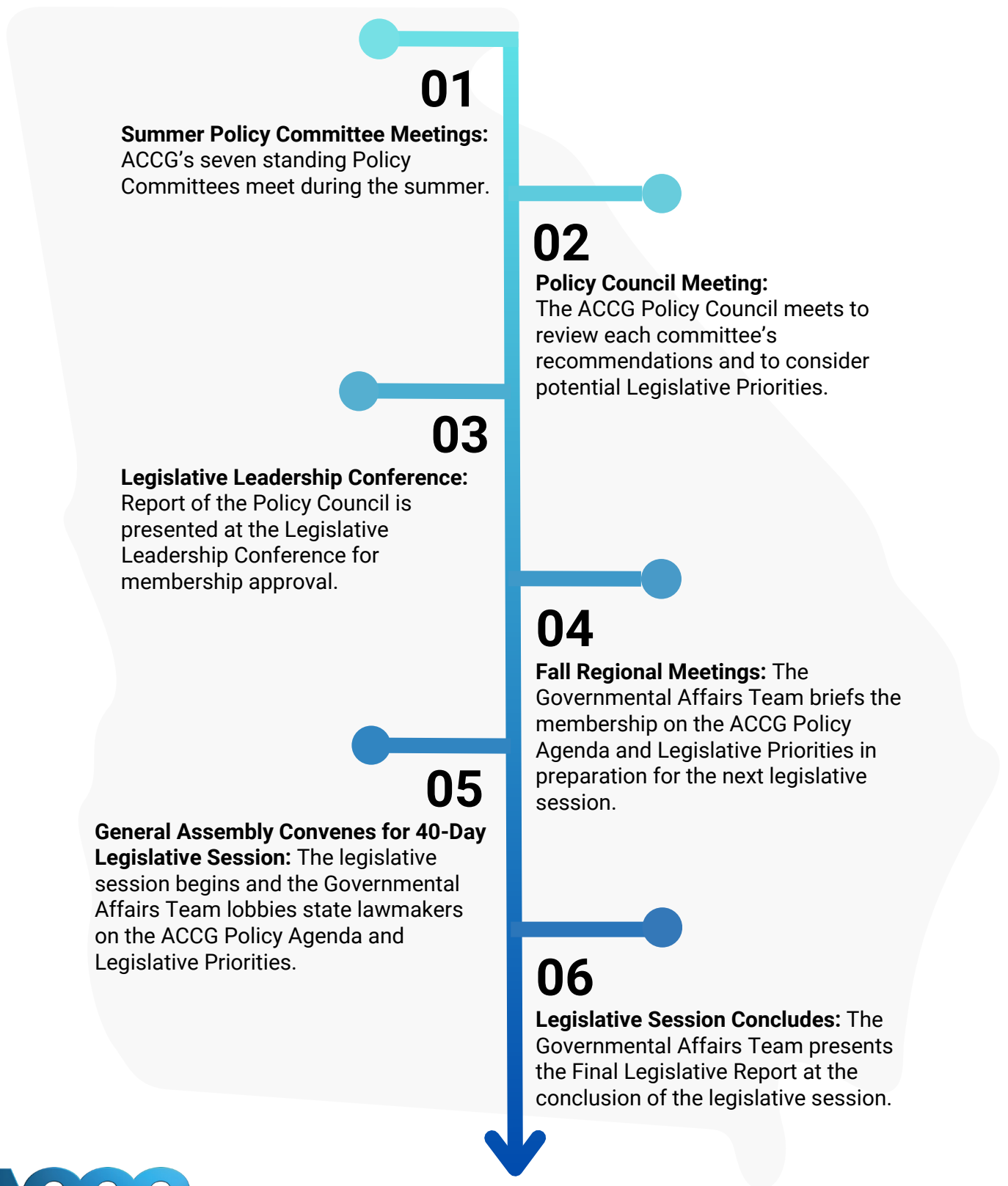
## STATE/COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

Counties were created to function as local subdivisions of the state. To tailor services to the needs of the different geographic and demographic areas of the state, decision making power must be granted to locally elected representatives. The state sets general parameters, including minimum standards and levels of service, then local officials should decide what additional services and enhancements the local community desires. The state and its local county subdivisions must work in tandem to improve the quality of life for all Georgia residents. To facilitate this partnership the state should:

- Fully fund state services and not require or attempt to coerce counties into subsidizing the service.
- Provide support (i.e., funding and technical assistance) to attain a minimum level and standard of services needed statewide (i.e., crime information center, crime lab, utility assessments, training public safety officers, establishing uniform assessment procedures and transportation improvements).



# ACCG Policy Development Process



# 6 WAYS TO **EFFECTIVELY** ENGAGE YOUR LEGISLATORS

1

Make sure you have your legislators' contact information should you need to reach them on short notice.

2

Invite your legislators to attend your county commission meetings and tour your county facilities.

3

Make sure to thank your legislators for their positive efforts on behalf of your county.

4

Remain cordial when discussing your concerns with, or opposition to, pending legislation in order to maintain good working relationships with your legislators.

5

Meet with your legislators, before and during the session, to review the Legislative Toolkit and discuss bills that impact your county.

6

Meet periodically with your legislators for briefings on current issues.



# Policy Communication Tools

STAY UP TO DATE ON THE LATEST ACCG POLICY NEWS

## WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Published and emailed every Friday during the legislative session, the Legislative Update is the weekly report that helps keep county officials informed about the various issues moving through the General Assembly.

Contact Schuyler Harding ([sharding@accg.org](mailto:sharding@accg.org)) if you would like to receive this publication.

---

## ACTION ALERTS

ACCG will periodically release Action Alerts regarding issues that require immediate action from county officials. The Action Alerts will include background information on the issue as well as talking points that county officials can use when speaking to their legislators.

---

## LIVE UPDATES OVER ZOOM

Join the Governmental Affairs Team every Friday at 9:00 a.m. for the Virtual Legislative Update via Zoom. Be sure to tune in for weekly recaps of what took place under the Gold Dome.

---

## X (FORMERLY KNOWN AS TWITTER)

Follow us on X ([@GACounty](https://twitter.com/GACounty)) for real-time information and updates from the Capitol as various events take place.



# ACCG GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS TEAM

Clint Mueller  
Director of Governmental Affairs  
cmueller@accg.org  
678.772.8911

Todd Edwards  
Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs  
tedwards@accg.org  
404.805.7883  
*General County Government*

Martha Revelo  
Associate Director of Governmental Affairs  
mrevelo@accg.org  
470.989.3838  
*Economic Development and Transportation  
Federal  
Natural Resources and the Environment*

Gabriel Carter  
Governmental Affairs Associate  
gcarter@accg.org  
470.591.6622

*Health and Human Services  
Public Safety and the Courts*


Dante Handel  
Governmental Affairs Associate  
dhandel@accg.org  
203.906.8762

*Revenue and Finance*

191 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 700  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
Tel: (404) 522-5022 | Fax: (404) 525-2477

[www.accg.org](http://www.accg.org)

 [facebook.com/gacounty](https://facebook.com/gacounty)

 [twitter.com/GACounty](https://twitter.com/GACounty)