

ACCG Federal Policy Committee 2023 – 2024 Policy Platform

Chair: Oz Nesbitt (Chairman, Rockdale County)
Vice Chair: Carlotta Harrell (Chair, Henry County)
Staff Member: Martha Revelo

Economic Development and Transportation

Infrastructure Investment – Counties play a critical role in our state’s transportation system with local governments owning and maintaining 80 percent of all public roads in Georgia. ACCG encourages Congress to allocate funding directly to local governments for locally owned public infrastructure, which includes surface transportation projects, bridges, transit systems and airports and involve local governments in the decision-making process. ACCG requests federal grant applications be kept as simple as possible in order to decrease the need for hiring technical assistance in order to draw down federal funds.

Truck Size and Weight Limits – ACCG urges Congress to refrain from passing legislation that increases allowable size and weight limits on local roads and bridges as current allowable weight limits are at maximum capacity. The increase in truck weight limits contributes to the rapid deterioration of local road and bridge infrastructure and increases the number and severity of accidents which negatively affects the movement of freight and people through Georgia.

General County Government

Broadband/Telecommunications - ACCG recognizes the critical importance of, and fully supports, expanding affordable broadband access throughout Georgia and stands ready to work with our federal, state and industry partners to facilitate this deployment. ACCG supports federal grant and loan programs in order to help eligible local governments and their private sector partners provide broadband services to unserved and underserved areas. While accommodating broadband equipment in the public’s right of way (ROW) may play a critical role in enhancing broadband connectivity, counties must maintain their ability to balance this access with their role of protecting the public health, safety and welfare and managing the taxpayer’s ROW investment. Accordingly, ACCG opposes any federal legislation or rules which preempt or otherwise diminish counties’ ability to regulate their community’s ROW and land use.

County Employee Mandates – ACCG believes that personnel management practices and compensation to local government employees are properly functions for local determination. ACCG strongly opposes any state or federal mandated salaries, benefits or other special treatment for any county employees or class of employees. ACCG further opposes any legislation which would provide for collective bargaining rights for local government employees.

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 issues including updating current regulatory policies that allows the flexibility for the use of funds for a needs assessment plan and alternative homes (tiny homes i.e.). The federal government should follow a national housing policy that provides clear annual housing goals, provides adequate and predictable funding levels, provides an assessment needs platform, offers incentives for energy efficient buildings, and builds 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 as it pertains to workforce housing needs.

Health and Human Services

Medicaid –ACCG believes the up-front investment in health care can be directly related to later health care savings and a reduction in other social costs. The Medicaid program is a vital health safety net that provides crucial support for the uninsured and underinsured. ACCG encourages Congress to consider the impact of any Medicaid reforms that would directly or indirectly shift costs to counties, e.g. any reforms that would impact the numerous community resources expended by county governments to support: hospitals; health departments; behavioral health and developmental disabilities (DBHDD) programs; emergency medical services (EMS); and community programs for older adults, children, youth and families.

Federal Inmate Exclusion Policy – Federal Inmate Exclusion Policy – ACCG requests that the federal government allow federal benefits such as Medicaid, Veterans Affairs, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to remain active for eligible inmates / detainees in local jails pre-adjudication. Federal law prohibits the use of federal funds and services for medical care provided to “inmates of a public institution.” The federal law does not differentiate between a convicted inmate and a person incarcerated prior to conviction. The “Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy” should be rescinded for those awaiting trial that have not been convicted. Those accused should not lose their federal health benefits until the adjudication process is complete for those individuals in a pretrial status. This policy creates a financial burden for counties and adds to the behavioral and mental health crises our communities are experiencing.

Behavioral Health Services – ACCG urges the federal government to advance legislation and administrative changes that will enhance counties' abilities 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 and 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. Furthermore, ACCG supports other measures to meet the growing demands 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.

Funding Local Public Health Prevention Efforts - ACCG supports protecting the Public Health Prevention Fund from elimination or further cuts. ACCG also supports increased federal aid for providing ongoing basic public health services such as immunizations and programming that addresses the social determinants of health, as well as preparedness and response efforts to ongoing outbreaks, as well as other threats to the public’s health and safety.

Opioid Crisis - ACCG understands the need for strong federal-state-local partnerships in combatting the opioid and controlled substance crisis. ACCG encourages Congress to provide funding that local governments can access to address these urgent public health issue.

Natural Resources and Environment

EV Charging Stations- ACCG urges federal policymakers and agency implementers to provide direct funding and maximum flexibility to counties for the deployment and maintenance of EV charging stations and infrastructure. Counties need direct federal funding, flexibility, and additional clarity around long-term operating assistance to support the successful deployment of EV charging stations off federal highways and in rural and remote areas of the country that may differ significantly in population, geography and energy availability.

Interstate and Intrastate Water Conflicts – ACCG supports Georgia’s efforts to resolve interstate and intrastate water conflicts regarding surface water allocations, water quality, ecosystem management, drought management and issues related to groundwater.

Endangered Species Act Listings & Designation of Critical Habitat – ACCG urges the federal government to work closely with public and private entities with regard to all current and future listings, along with the designation of critical habitat, under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) to insure:

- Only those species that are truly threatened or endangered are included on the list;
- Any designation of critical habitat is limited to the minimum land area, supported by good science, necessary for the protection and welfare of the species;
- The impact of listings and designation of critical habitat under the ESA do not act as a barrier to county government in supplying those fundamental services required by our state's constitution and law; and
- Compensation is provided to local governments to offset the economic impact of designating critical habitats that would impair a community's ability to fully implement their land use plan.

Public Safety

Equity in Funding Local Public Safety Grants – ACCG supports the federal government's efforts to assist local first responders in preparation for major incidents, through tailoring of existing grant programs, like the Byrne – Justice Assistance Grant, SAFER and the FIRE Act. Any dedication of funds or grant set-asides under these programs should not be at the expense of the traditionally funded grant programs that have supported other local government efforts that have a more immediate impact on the quality of life of their citizens. ACCG requests the administration to take an approach to grant funding that serves all local public safety interests thus serving the public safety needs of all local citizens, equally.

Definition of “Criminal Justice Purpose” in Regulations for Operation of NCIC – ACCG recognizes the importance of the National Crime Information Center in coordinating information used by state & local public safety officials across the nation. One of the most vital areas where NCIC serves local public safety officials is through its use as a resource for conducting thorough pre-employment background checks. Currently, only law enforcement pre-employment background checks are considered within the definition of “criminal justice purpose,” for which NCIC records are provided free of charge to any requesting agency. This disparity is causing fire service, emergency medical service and communications agencies to incur costs to obtain access to NCIC records for pre-employment background checks. We ask for all public safety workers' pre-employment background checks to be considered a “criminal justice purpose” so as to eliminate the cost burden to local governments for ensuring the reliability of their personnel by using NCIC records.

Federal Funding for Juvenile Justice – ACCG encourages all federal justice grant funds for juvenile justice and delinquency prevention to go directly to counties. These funds will be used to preventing and reducing juvenile crime. These grant funds will be used for early intervention programs, providing resources to youth to offset risk factors, and establish and implement education and treatment strategies for juveniles involved with illegal substances. By reauthorizing and updating the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), the federal government can collaborate with local governments to establish a process for the direct funding of these grant funds to local county governments.

NextGen 911- ACCG urges Congress to pass legislation along with an adequate funding resource to assist with the needed funding for technology and telecommunicator training related to NG911 implementation and interoperability nationwide. As communications technology transitions from analog systems to Internet Protocol (IP) based systems, the means of accessing 911 must also transition. 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, known as Next Generation 911 (NG911). Once fully implemented, NG911 systems will process multi-media data and provide greater security, sustainability, and reliability than the aging analog 911 systems.

Revenue and Finance

Tax Exempt Municipal Bonds - Tax exempt municipal bonds are vital tools to local governments seeking to bring economic development and job growth to their communities. ACCG urges Congress to continue to preserve the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds and to oppose any attempt to cap or eliminate the exemption, for doing so would increase the borrowing costs of public entities which will ultimately be shifted to the taxpayer in the form of rate and tax increases. Additionally, ACCG asks that Congress reestablish the ability to refund (refinance) municipal bonds while preserving the bonds' tax-exempt status. Reinstating this financing tool allows local governments to take advantage of lower interest rates, thereby saving taxpayer dollars.