

Proposed Policy Committee Recommendations for ACCG 2024 Legislative Agenda

Economic Development and Transportation:

- **Development Authorities / Property Tax Abatement** (North and South Policy Committee Meetings) - ACCG encourages the Georgia General Assembly to address the inequities that can occur when economic development incentives are used, including the use of “payments in lieu of taxes” (PILOT). When economic development incentives result in abatement of property taxes, the use of PILOTs and other legal mechanisms can lead to one local government recouping some or all its lost property taxes while other local governments suffer the full impact of the abated taxes. ACCG requests that the General Assembly change state law to require a written confidential notice regarding proposed economic development projects be provided to the local taxing authorities directly impacted by a tax abatement. ACCG also encourages the General Assembly to authorize a process for the local governing authority to remove development authority appointees. In addition, the rights of those who are allowed to participate in bond validation proceedings for retail and residential projects should be expanded to include local taxing authorities who are directly impacted by said bonds.
- **Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant (LMIG) Program** (North and South Policy Committee Meetings) – ACCG opposes any changes to the LMIG program that reduce current county funds or reduce counties’ proportionate share of such grants. ACCG requests the minimum percentage of funding generated from motor fuel sales appropriated for LMIG be increased from 10% to 15%*. Lastly, ACCG encourages GDOT to allow for the use of LMIG funds for the purchase/lease of transportation equipment.

* Funds allocated each fiscal year for LMIG shall be not less than 10 percent nor more than 20 percent of the money derived from motor fuel taxes received by the state in the immediately preceding fiscal year.

- **Single-County TPLOST** (North Policy Committee Meeting) – Under the current a single-county TPLOST law the tax may be levied up to 5 years at a fractional rate of up to 1% in 0.05% increments if there is an 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 TPLOST 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 sign 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 receive a share of the tax based on no less than their proportionate share of the municipal population in the county.

General County Government:

- **Service Delivery Strategies** (South Policy Committee Meeting)

Implementation of the Service Delivery Strategy Act continues to pose challenges to counties and cities alike. Technical amendments and clarifications are needed to facilitate implementation and minimize disputes. At a minimum, in order to minimize 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, GMA, DCA and CVIOG 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 LOST negotiations. —
- The judicial dispute resolution procedures in current law should be replaced with a process resembling Georgia’s Annexation Arbitration Process, whereby a panel decides whether the city or county’s best 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.
- Current law should be amended to clarify that all revenues generated by taxes and fees levied or imposed primarily in the unincorporated areas of the county — like business and occupation taxes, hotel-motel taxes and alcoholic beverage taxes — may be used by the county to offset the cost of county services provided primarily to unincorporated residents and property owners or for the county’s share of the cost of providing services jointly funded with one or more cities.
- 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.
- The General Assembly should enact legislation that would result in all taxpayers being treated equitably whether they live within a municipality or in unincorporated areas.
- Legislation should be enacted which would prevent 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.

- **Housing Affordability and Accessibility** (South Policy Committee Meeting)

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 DRI, EPD and septic tank permitting in targeted areas.
- Authorizing local governments to implement rental registries to help with inspecting and remediating housing code violations.

- **Tort Reform** (North and South Policy Committee Meetings)
 - **County Liability: Failure to Wear Seat Belts** – O.C.G.A. § 40-8-76.1(d) provides that the failure of an occupant of a motor vehicle to wear a seat safety belt cannot be considered evidence of negligence or causation and cannot otherwise be considered evidence used to diminish any recovery for damages. This adds significant additional costs to claims and insurance for counties. Georgia, like most states, has adopted the comparative negligence doctrine into its tort law. The comparative negligence doctrine is the principle that reduces a plaintiff's recovery proportionately to the plaintiff's degree of fault in causing or contributing to damage or injury. However, as a result of the current law Georgia defendants, including counties, cannot 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. The law should be amended to eliminate this problem.
 - **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. 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. In 2009 the Court of Appeals had ruled that the denial of immunity by a trial court was immediately appealable, noting that immunity was effectively lost if a case erroneously was allowed to proceed to trial. However, in 2016, the Georgia Supreme Court rejected that ruling as being inconsistent with Supreme Court precedent. The denial of sovereign and/or official immunity should be immediately appealable through a direct appeal, so that the governmental entity or employee does not have to face the burden of further litigation or trial. This could result in taxpayers having to fund the entire cost of trial before being able to appeal the erroneous denial of immunity. The Supreme Court noted in its decision that the legislature could easily amend the direct appeal statute and add immunity as a basis for a direct appeal. ACCG urges the General Assembly to specifically allow direct appeal of the denial of immunity to protect employees, constituents, and taxpayers from bearing the burden of unnecessary litigation.
 - **Collateral Source** – Historically, Georgia courts have not allowed defendants to introduce evidence of the amount a plaintiff actually paid for medical expenses in a case; instead, the courts, under the collateral source rule, allow plaintiffs to present evidence of the “amount charged” even if that amount is wildly inflated and was not expected to be paid by anyone. More recently, there is some Georgia case law which indicates that it may not violate the Collateral Source Rule (“CSR”) to put evidence into the record showing what the medical providers “contractually agreed” to accept for payment. Such evidence “might” be used to answer the question of what is a “reasonable” medical cost. Obviously, plaintiff attorneys are fighting very hard against this revision of the CSR as it could serve to undermine their traditional advantages in seeking inflated verdicts. A recent case with \$400,000 in charges showed that the medical provider, through contractual agreement, actually accepted less than \$100,000 in full payment, but the plaintiff was allowed to put the inflated figure in front of the jury. Some states have decided to deal with the issue statutorily, either by establishing “reasonable” charges or allowing defendants to show what was actually paid as opposed to the “charge.” ACCG asks the General Assembly to 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. It is essentially a lottery. The law varies from state to state on whether such is allowed and/or how much of the relationship is discoverable or admissible. Some funding companies even refer plaintiffs to the company's "medical experts" for assistance in proving their claims. If Georgia continues to allow such practices, at a minimum there should be 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.

- **Public Works Bidding** (North Policy Committee Meeting)

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 over two decades, inflation and material costs have increased substantially, 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.

Health and Human Services:

- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (South Policy Committee Meeting)**

The EMS community provides the first hands-on response to Georgians in need, whether provided by a fire or EMS department, a hospital-based service, private providers who are the EMS zone holder. In some locations a hospital-based services or private provider provide EMS service under contract with the EMS zone holder. Counties must invest in this service and its personnel in order to provide the highest quality of care. ACCG urges the General Assembly to:

- Require that DCH adopt all Medicaid codes for emergency medical transport and correct all conflicts and errors in the CMS manual. This is especially important for Medicare Replacement Plans as many of the bills are submitted with errors which result in frequent denials of claims.
- Reimburse licensed ambulance services at the Medicaid rates, including transportation payment for the first 10 miles.
- Increase EMS Medicaid rate to the rural and urban Medicare rate.
- Require reimbursement from Medicaid and all payors for physician directed mobile integrated health, and treatment in place services.
- Appropriate funds to assist jurisdictions in purchasing adequate supplies of Narcon to reverse opioid overdoses.
- Continue state funding for emergency ambulance services and non-emergency transportation for adults.
- Provide resources for enhanced communication technology.
- Waive the fee for the criminal background check by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.
- Require that CMS and all payors honor the assignment of benefits for EMS services. When a patient signs an assignment of benefits, the payment must be remitted to the EMS provider.
- Require private insurance providers to pay to the EMS service directly rather than paying the patient directly.
- Add EMS debt to the list of debt that can be offset against someone's income tax return.

- **Services for Older Georgians (South Policy Committee Meeting)**

As the number of older Georgians increases and their needs change, better planning and targeting of health and human services programs is required. County officials, who are the level of government closest to the people, should be involved in the coordination of local services and programs that create an elder friendly community.

These include infrastructure changes such as innovative traffic signals, larger lettered signs, sidewalks, better lighting, transportation systems that enhance access to services, and communications systems that enhance personal health and safety. ACCG urges:

- Funding to implement state licensure of adult day care centers; and
- The state to enact standard regulations to ensure quality care within assisted living facilities and skilled nursing facilities.

- Exploration of creative options for the provision of transportation services at the local level. Ride share programs for routine appointments would provide a more cost-effective way to transport this population to activities and routine medical appointments.

- **Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) (South Policy Committee Meeting)**
 Counties will continue to join with public and private entities to develop and operate community-based services for persons with mental health, developmental disabilities, and addictive diseases as part of a comprehensive human services system. The association supports improvement and refining of the reformed state and local DBHDD system, to ensure that the needs of citizens are being met in the timeliest and cost-efficient manner. ACCG urges the General Assembly to:
 - Continue to appropriate funds to mental health courts to focus on mentally ill detainees, available to persons charged with misdemeanors and non-violent offenses, recognizing that the best approach for those offenders is diversion out of the system entirely.
 - Work with local communities to ensure adequate services are available to divert mental health patients from the jail into treatment.
 - Provide Crisis Stabilization Units across the state within a reasonable distance from communities to reduce the mileage and man hours required of the sheriff's departments to transport patients.
 - Continue to expand the availability of Behavioral Health Crisis Centers (BHCC) to divert individuals for local jails. It is imperative that local law enforcement have secure facilities to which individuals experiencing a mental health crisis can be taken for appropriate treatment instead of being booked into the local jail.
 - Assess the impact on individual counties of any changes in the funding mechanism for DBHDD services, and provide/enhance a procedure for local government to have input prior to the implementation of such changes. Prioritize its appropriations so that maximum dollars are utilized for direct services for consumers.
 - Appropriate funds to the Georgia Public Safety Training Center to deliver Crisis Intervention Training to law enforcement officers, 911 operators, and all first responders throughout the state.
 - Develop an administrative process for the adjudication of issues arising out of mental health crisis so as to prevent those persons from having to enter the criminal justice system upon the order of a judge. Protocols for first responders, mental health providers, the judiciary, and other professionals in the community could be developed, implemented, and promulgated for this administrative system through local protocol committees.
 - Provide state funding for viable pilot projects that will divert those with mental illness with a pre-arrest diversion program. Ensuring that those suffering with mental illness are given the appropriate treatment immediately as opposed to being booked into jail will improve public safety and provide much more effective treatment for that population, by maintaining any Medicaid and SSI benefits that are in place, thereby saving taxpayer dollars.

- **Co-responder and Behavioral Health Program** (South and North Policy Committee Meeting)

ACCG encourage the General Assembly to appropriate funds to support the establishment of local and multi-jurisdictional co-responder programs across the state. These funds can be allocated as grants or funds provided directly to local law enforcement agencies. These funds would be used to recruit and hire behavioral health specialist, offset the cost of transporting patients, and provide all the necessary resources and training for co-responder teams. ACCG also supports legislation that authorizes that the law enforcement agencies that is responsible for the initial transport of the mental health crisis patient also be responsible for all subsequent transports if the transport is in the peace officer's jurisdiction.

- **Health Care for Inmates of County Jails and Correctional Institutions** (North Policy Committee Meeting)

ACCG urges that options be explored to help counties provide and finance health care for jail and correctional institution (CI) inmates. The inmate health care costs for these individuals are excessive and have become a financial burden on county budgets since federal and state funding streams shut down when an individual enters the jail.

ACCG urges the General Assembly to authorize counties to utilize available public health, mental health, medical schools, and allied professional resources; and

- Support counties in establishing agreements, policies, procedures with applicable state agencies such as the Department of Community Health and Department of Corrections to utilize or develop databases to determine Medicaid and private insurance eligibility and coverage for inmates.
- Assist in helping obtain public benefits, such as Medicaid, for participants in Specialty Courts which will ensure that participants are receiving treatment which will in turn keep them out of the local jails.
- Assist in obtaining Medicaid coverage for inmates awaiting trial and who are otherwise eligible upon a hospital stay in excess of 24 hours.
- Work with superior and state courts to identify barriers to the timely disposition of cases. Defendants who are housed in local jails awaiting trial represent approximately 70% of the overall local jail population, these jail beds along with all medical costs are the sole responsibility of the county, and represent the largest outlay of most of the county's budgets.

- **EMS Zoning** (North Policy Committee Meeting)

Emergency medical services (EMS) are a vital part of the healthcare system. ACCG is in agreement that there is necessity for a study of EMS workforce challenges, EMS wait times, zoning and licensing procedures, and EMS funding. However, ACCG is opposed to any legislation that seeks to circumvent the current EMS zoning process by assigning EMS zones and licenses to municipalities.

Natural Resources and the Environment:

- **State Water and Drought Management Planning** (North and South Policy Committee Meetings) - With water quality and quantity issues affecting all 159 Georgia counties, ACCG supports the continued development and implementation of Georgia's comprehensive statewide water management plan (Water Plan). Notwithstanding this, ACCG recognizes that each county has unique economic and environmental circumstances and there can be no "one size fits all" solution to these complex water quality and quantity issues.

To equitably ensure the long-term success of the Water Plan, ACCG:

- Urges the Governor and General Assembly to establish a constitutionally-dedicated source of funding to successfully implement statewide water planning; assess planning performance; and conduct ongoing water quantity and quality assessments, data compilation, and regional planning development and administration for future rounds of statewide water planning. Until such time, ACCG urges the Governor to recommend and General Assembly to appropriate adequate funding to implement the plan, utilizing the existing Regional Water Planning Council structure.
 - Additionally, ACCG recommends that the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House periodically review, maintain and update their appointments to the Regional Water Planning Districts to ensure that current county elected officials serve on their respective council.
 - *Under the State Water Plan, the Governor will appoint 13 members and an alternate, the Lieutenant Governor will appoint six members and an alternate, and the Speaker of the House will appoint six members and an alternate. Each council must have four city elected officials and four county officials among its 25 members.
- **Stormwater Management** – Adequate funding is necessary in order for local governments to meet federal and state mandates in operating, maintaining and improving stormwater infrastructure and management practices.

To provide watershed protection ACCG:

- Opposes any restrictions on a local government's ability to implement stormwater utilities; assess stormwater utility fees; create stormwater authorities; and state, state-imposed, federal or federally-imposed exemptions on a stormwater utility fee's applicability. This is not a tax, but a fee for mandatory stormwater management services provided. Every entity contributing to stormwater runoff must pay their fair share; otherwise, the costs of these services would shift to other businesses and property owners in the form of property taxes if local governments were forced to fund this service through their general fund.
- **Soil Amendments Derived from Industrial By-Products** (North and South Policy Committee Meetings) - 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 powers.

Public Safety and the Courts:

- **Criminal Justice Reform** (South Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

HB 1176 was passed during the 2012 legislative session which mandates an overhaul of the criminal justice system in Georgia. While ACCG is supportive of efforts by the State to only house serious violent offenders in state prisons, counties must be given the resources to provide services for and supervision of non-violent offenders at the local level. ACCG urges the Governor and the Legislature to take financial responsibility for state prisoners who are housed in local jails on probation revocation proceedings or who have been arrested for another charge while under active probation. Many of these felony state probationers who are on holds from other jurisdictions or the Department of Community Supervision are experiencing mental illness and substance abuse issues and the local taxpayers are paying for housing and medical services for these state inmates. The state must continue to reinvest state dollars saved through criminal justice reform to address the needs of these state probationers at the local level, at the very least a per day per diem should be paid to the local jails for housing these inmates in community services. We also strongly encourage an on-going evaluation of the impact of the criminal justice reform on public safety and the costs to county government.
- **Assume Full Financial Responsibility for State Prisoners** (South Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

To ensure that counties have the financial ability to keep their jails and correctional institutions (CIs) open ACCG requests that the state take steps to eliminate any local tax burden for housing state prisoners. ACCG believes the following actions by the Governor and General Assembly are needed to reach this goal:

 - Increase the daily per diem reimbursement rate for housing state inmates in County CIs.
 - Change the law to include technical probation violators in the class of prisoner for which the state pays a per diem to counties.
 - Develop a plan for incorporating the CI's into the Criminal Justice Reform Re-entry Program to make the operation of the CI's financially viable for counties.
 - Appropriate additional funds to the DOC to compensate counties fully for all medical costs incurred from housing state-sentenced inmates.
 - Increase the county jail per diem reimbursement rate for housing state sentenced inmates to an amount at least equal to the state Department of Correction's published daily cost for housing an inmate and appropriate the necessary funds to the DOC specifically for this purpose.
 - Take responsibility for state prisoners who are housed in local jails on probation revocation proceedings or who have been arrested for another charge while under active probation. Many of these felony state probationers who are on holds from other jurisdictions or the Department of Community Supervision are experiencing mental illness and substance abuse issues and the local taxpayers are paying for housing and medical services for these state inmates.
 - Change the law and filing forms so as to require the Attorney General's Office to provide legal representation for sheriffs and wardens named in habeas corpus petitions filed by state inmates housed in county facilities.
 - Clarify the rules at the Department of Community Health to assist counties in obtaining Medicaid coverage for those inmates that qualify.
- **Expand Effective Court Programs** (South Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

Recognizing the vital role of our judiciary as an independent branch of government, counties support any enhancement of the courts' abilities to administer justice to our citizens. In that regard, counties ask the General Assembly to:

- Continue to make appropriations for the expansion of grant funded programs for the operation of special courts, such as drug courts, DUI Courts and mental health courts which divert persons suffering from health impairment out of county jails and the state prison system.
 - Continue to increase state funding for counties to provide representation to children and parents in juvenile delinquency, CHINS and dependency cases. Funding was allocated in the FY 17 budget for prosecutors in juvenile court, and public defenders, we strongly urge the Governor and the legislature to continue to fund prosecutor and public defender positions specifically for juvenile court. The standardization of practices within juvenile court will assist in ensuring juvenile justice reform is a continuing success.
 - Provide additional funding to District Attorneys to provide prosecutorial staff for Accountability Courts.
 - Provide funding to local Juvenile Courts for community-based programs.
 - Support state appropriations for grants to assist local sheriffs in the implementation of courthouse security measures mandated by state law.
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- **Marijuana Ordinance Reform (North Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)**
The General Assembly should provide Counties with the same authority to adopt ordinances to regulate the possession of less than one ounce of marijuana as cities currently do. Cities through the powers granted by municipal courts, are allowed to set the penalty for possession of less than one ounce marijuana through the adoption of their own local ordinances. Over the past several years a number of cities throughout Georgia have used this authority to adopt such ordinances. The reason that cities adopt these ordinances is not to eliminate penalties, but rather to tailor the penalties to enhance their specific public safety needs and eliminate costs by reducing the amount of time police officers spend in connection with arrest, processing and transportation of those accused of simple marijuana possession. Further, the intent is also to provide for penalties that provide for the flexibility to prevent at-risk youth from being subject to a criminal record for a first-time minor possession charge, that could negatively impact their future ability for gainful employment or educational loan eligibility.

Revenue and Finance:

- **Include Digital Services in the Sales Tax Base** (North & South Georgia Policy Committee Meetings)

Although 2020's marketplace facilitator legislation helped to bridge the gap between sales tax on the goods of brick-and-mortar stores and sales tax on the goods of online retailers, and 2023's digital goods legislation improved parity between digital services and their physical counterparts, the sales tax code has not caught up with the times to capture rentals and subscriptions. Examples of each would be video rentals downloaded through an online platform not being taxed, and subscriptions to popular monthly streaming services not being taxed. ACCG asks the General Assembly to clarify that all digital services, including rental and subscription services and prewritten software delivered electronically and used by a commercial enterprise via electronic transmission to a purchaser, 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.
- **Tax Estimate on Assessment Notice** (South Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

The estimated taxes required to be published on the property tax assessment notice is confusing and misleading because it does not take into consideration the millage rates that have not been set and any new exemptions on the property. This estimate should not be mandated.
- **LOST Renegotiations** (South Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

LOST is a one cent sales tax split between the counties and cities according to a distribution certificate filed with the Department of Revenue.

 - (a) **LOST Negotiation Criteria** – 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.
 - (b) **LOST Dispute Resolution** - Given past difficulties in resolving contentious LOST disputes, which can drag out all year until the December 30th deadline, 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. An improved dispute resolution process should occur automatically when both sides cannot agree and should guide them to a resolution.
- **Property Tax Appeals: Three-Year Lock** (North Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)

The three-year lock in assessed values after a property tax appeal is very easy to get and results in many frivolous appeals, tying up scarce local resources. Much of these appeals are from commercial properties, which are shifting millions of dollars in property taxes to residential properties. This places an additional tax burden on all other properties in the county and has the largest impact on our homeowners, which is punishing the people who live in our communities. This tax shift is favoring out-of-state and sometimes out-of-country businesses over our citizens. ACCG asks the General Assembly to place restrictions on the three-year lock to protect homeowners and local governments.

- **Settlement Conference Loophole (North Georgia Policy Committee Meeting)**

Settlement conferences occur when an appeal is made to Superior Court by the taxpayer or tax assessor. When a property is under this type of appeal, the tax commissioner may bill and collect at 85% of value until the appeal is resolved. Under current law, there is no mechanism to require the taxpayer to attend the settlement conference, thereby allowing the taxpayer an indefinite 15% discount on their property taxes for refusing to attend the settlement conference in good faith. 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 does not pay the required appeal filing fees.

Federal:

- **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.
- **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.

- **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.