Proposed 2027 Legislative Policies

PRESENTED BY THE GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

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Community Development

1. Mental Health

GMA supports increased investment in a statewide comprehensive mental health system, including services for behavioral health, addiction, developmental disabilities, and crisis intervention teams. Municipalities, as key responders to mental health crises, should be engaged by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) and the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) to address the growing volume of cases and reduce the number of individuals with mental health issues in jails. GMA supports state and local efforts to address the youth mental health epidemic, homelessness, and addiction as interconnected challenges requiring coordinated responses across agencies and levels of government.

GMA advocates for the deployment of co-responder models, pairing law enforcement with mental health professionals, to address crises effectively. GMA asks the state to address the shortage of crisis prevention staff and ensure adequate bed capacity in hospitals and treatment centers.

The closure of any state health facility should involve a transparent, collaborative process with local governments and hospital staff. GMA encourages the state to work with municipalities on adaptive reuse of these facilities for community-focused purposes.

Explanation: Mental health crises increasingly fall to local governments to manage through public safety personnel, jail populations, and emergency services, though the underlying system of care is a state responsibility. Youth mental health, homelessness, and addiction rarely present in isolation, and effective responses require DBHDD, DHS, and local governments to work from a shared framework rather than parallel silos. Co-responder models offer a practical tool for managing crises in the field while reducing inappropriate reliance on incarceration. Without adequate crisis staff and treatment capacity, jails become default mental health facilities. When the state considers closing a health facility, the affected communities bear consequences for residents, employees, and local infrastructure which makes early, transparent engagement with municipalities a planning necessity, not a courtesy.

2. Regulatory Authority over Residential Housing and Commercial Property

GMA supports municipal powers that ensure adequate living conditions for all residents through consistent and responsible enforcement of local health, and safety codes. GMA

supports local initiatives and programs that assist local governments in determining ownership of vacant and rental property. GMA supports legislation allowing cities to inspect and register rental properties, regardless of the issuance of an occupation tax certificate or business license. Additionally, GMA supports the expansion of municipal powers relating to property nuisance abatement and other measures to bolster code enforcement, specifically including enforcement of the International Property Maintenance Code.

Explanation: Health and safety codes exist to give residents basic protections. Vacant and abandoned properties create public safety problems that affect quality of life and property values for entire neighborhoods. Rental properties present similar concerns, and cities should have the tools to inspect them and ensure they meet minimum health and safety standards, regardless of whether a business license has been issued. The International Property Maintenance Code provides a clear, consistent standard for property conditions that cities can apply and enforce. Giving municipalities the authority to register rental properties, abate nuisances, and enforce these standards protects residents and strengthens neighborhoods.

3. ~~Medicaid Expansion~~ Healthcare Access

GMA supports a robust healthcare system that promotes public health, community wellbeing, and economic development throughout the state. Recent hospital closures have diminished or eliminated access to healthcare for many Georgians. GMA supports expanding access to healthcare coverage for uninsured and underinsured Georgians through all available mechanisms, including Medicaid expansion and other state and federal tools, to close gaps in care and bolster economic development. ~~Expanding Medicaid would work to close gaps in care for the uninsured and act as a strong resource to bolster economic development.~~

Explanation: Georgia's uninsured rate for working-age adults is approximately 13 percent, well above the national average of 8 percent. An estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Georgians fall into a coverage gap, earning too little to qualify for marketplace subsidies but not meeting traditional Medicaid eligibility. That gap has direct consequences for local governments, which absorb the costs of uncompensated emergency care when preventive care goes unmet. Georgia has lost nine rural hospitals since 2010, and 22 more are currently at risk of closure. Expanding access to coverage through Medicaid, state programs, and other available tools would reduce those burdens and give more Georgians access to care before conditions become emergencies.

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4. Downtown Development and Redevelopment Funding

GMA encourages funding for technical support for downtown development and community redevelopment. GMA supports expanding funds allocated to, and assistance offered for Downtown Development Revolving Loan Funds, OneGeorgia Authority funds, and Enterprise Zone programs. GMA also recognizes the importance of tax credit programs including the Rural Zone Tax Credit and the Historic Preservation Tax Credits.

Explanation: Downtown development and redevelopment programs are critical to the long-term health of Georgia's cities. The Georgia Downtown Renaissance Fund provides low-interest loans through the Department of Community Affairs for private redevelopment projects across the state, and continued appropriations would allow more of those loans to reach communities that need them. Enterprise Zone programs give cities another tool to attract investment in distressed areas. Tax credit programs, including the Rural Zone Tax Credit and Historic Preservation Tax Credits, help cities leverage private investment in ways that state appropriations alone cannot. Together, these programs support economically healthier downtowns and stronger local tax bases.

5. Hotel/Motel Tax

GMA recognizes that most municipal services are impacted by visitors and overnight guests. Therefore hotel/motel taxes should allow for maximum flexibility to fund municipal services while also supporting economic development and tourism promotion.

Explanation: Hotel/motel tax revenues are an important funding source for cities. Georgia law should preserve maximum flexibility for cities to direct those funds toward tourism promotion, economic development, and municipal services as local needs require. The tax should also apply to all forms of short-term lodging, including short-term rentals, so that all overnight accommodations contribute equally to the communities that serve their guests.

6. Impact Fees

GMA supports efforts to allow municipalities the discretion to waive impact fees in whole, or in part to spur development. GMA opposes any efforts to amend the Georgia Development Impact Fee Act to give counties the authority to impose impact fees within municipal limits for countywide services. GMA also opposes any effort to artificially limit the amount of the impact fee that may be levied and any effort to further limit the geographic area in which impact fees may be expended.

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Explanation: Georgia's Development Impact Fee Act is a balanced tool to help pay for the costs of new growth and development. Municipal leaders should have the discretion to waive impact fees, in whole or in part, to encourage development when local conditions warrant. While questions arise about appropriate service areas for impact fee revenues, existing law already distinguishes between project improvements and system improvements and provides a mechanism for municipalities and counties to coordinate through intergovernmental contracts. Counties should retain authority to impose impact fees only in unincorporated areas. Allowing counties to unilaterally impose impact fees within municipal limits would override existing Service Delivery Strategy Act and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax agreements.

7. Short-Term Rentals

GMA supports local control of the regulation of short-term rentals as necessary for quality of life, public safety, and a competitive lodging marketplace. GMA supports the recurring legal use of properties as short- term rentals by individuals in accordance with all applicable local ordinances and state laws.

Explanation: Short-term rentals are popular in certain areas of the state and often create commercial activity inside residential neighborhoods. Lodging facilitator legislation passed in 2021 helps level the playing field between short-term rental providers, traditional hoteliers, and bed and breakfast owners. Current state law requires short-term rental operators to remit appropriate state and local taxes. Beyond taxation, cities have a legitimate interest in managing the impact of short-term rentals, including parking, noise, and disruptive uses that affect neighboring properties. At the same time, short-term rentals are a legal activity that contributes to local economies. Local governments are best positioned to balance those competing interests through clear, community-specific rules.

8. Municipal Broadband

GMA supports continued funding for broadband development efforts across the state of Georgia, aiming to ensure underserved and rural communities have access to reliable and quality broadband service. GMA opposes any legislation that would limit the ability of municipalities to invest in broadband or other communications infrastructures, which are important to meet the economic development and quality-of-life needs of their citizens and businesses.

Explanation: Broadband is as essential as water, gas, and electricity for economic development and quality of life. Many Georgia cities have slow or limited internet access because private providers have bypassed their communities as unprofitable. In those cases,

municipal investment in broadband infrastructure may be the only realistic path to reliable connectivity. Limiting that option would leave residents and businesses in underserved communities without a practical solution. Local officials are best positioned to determine when and whether public investment in broadband is necessary to meet the needs of their communities.

9. Local Control in Alcohol Sales

GMA supports local control in granting permission for tasting, pouring, and package sales of wine, beer, and liquor. State law should be amended to allow cities to adjust Sunday brunch hours through ordinances without costly referenda.

Explanation: Communities across Georgia have different perspectives on alcohol sales, and those decisions belong at the local level. Cities should set alcohol policies through local ordinance, including the ability to adjust Sunday brunch hours without a costly referendum. Craft breweries and distilleries bring jobs and activity to downtowns and should be encouraged to locate and operate in Georgia cities.

~~Community Development Federal Issues~~

~~1.~~ 10. Municipal Bond Tax Exemption

GMA opposes any limits on the federal income tax exemption for municipal bonds.

Explanation: Tax-exempt municipal bonds are the cornerstone of public infrastructure financing, allowing cities to fund water systems, roads, schools, and affordable housing at lower cost to taxpayers. Since 2015, Georgia has leveraged more than $80.9 billion in municipal bond financing, generating an estimated $1.7 billion in taxpayer savings. Congress has given increasing consideration to proposals that would eliminate or cap the tax exemption as a revenue offset measure. Eliminating the exemption would increase local borrowing costs by an estimated $824 billion nationally over the next decade. With Georgia cities facing $33 billion in infrastructure needs through 2030, and 70 percent of Georgia's jobs located in cities, preserving the tax exemption is essential to the state's continued growth and quality of life.

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~~2.~~ 11. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

GMA supports full funding of the CDBG program for municipal community and economic development programs and projects and supports continued administration of the CDBG program at the state level. GMA additionally supports efforts at the federal level to simplify and streamline the federal grant application process in order to increase access and promote equity. Further, as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers the State CDBG program, GMA encourages HUD to meet the letter and spirit of that rule's "maximum feasible deference" clause.

Explanation: CDBG funding helps smaller Georgia cities create jobs, develop affordable housing, stabilize neighborhoods, and deliver essential public services. The program's strength lies in local flexibility and local decision-making. GMA supports simplifying the application process to broaden access and encourages HUD to give state and local officials maximum deference in how funds are used.

~~3.~~ 12. Expanding the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)

GMA supports increasing federal expenditures to the LIHTC and lowering the bond test for housing credit development.

Explanation: The LIHTC is the primary tool for encouraging private investment in affordable rental housing. The "4 percent" Housing Credit is available to developments that receive at least 50 percent of their financing from Private Activity Bonds. Rising construction costs, inflation, and higher insurance premiums have made it harder for developments to reach that 50 percent threshold, putting their access to Housing Credit financing at risk. Lowering the threshold would allow more developments to move forward despite these pressures and is projected to produce and preserve more than 1.39 million additional affordable homes nationally between 2023 and 2032.

13. Federal Grant Streamlining

GMA supports efforts at the federal level to simplify and streamline the federal grant application process in order to increase access and promote equity across Georgia's municipalities.

Explanation: Federal grant programs are a critical source of funding for Georgia's municipalities, supporting infrastructure, community development, housing, and public services. But duplicative reporting requirements, inconsistent eligibility criteria, and lengthy review timelines create significant barriers, particularly for smaller cities with limited staff capacity. Streamlining the application and administration process would allow more

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municipalities to access available federal resources and ensure that funding reaches the communities that need it most.

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Environment and Natural Resources

1. Water, Wastewater, and Sewer

GMA supports cities' authority to own, operate, and set rates for public water, wastewater, and sewer systems to meet the demands of citizens. GMA supports the right of cities to impose rate differentials to account for the disproportionate cost of providing service to extraterritorial customers. GMA opposes the permitting of private water systems without the explicit consent of relevant local governments.

Explanation: Cities must be able to recover the cost of providing water, wastewater, and sewer services to all customers without shifting an unfair burden to city residents. Customers outside city limits often use these systems without contributing to the bonds and taxes that built them, which justifies rate differentials for extraterritorial service. Private water systems that bypass local government authority disrupt coordinated utility planning, complicate wastewater management, and can compromise water quality. Allowing private systems to operate without local consent undermines cities' ability to manage growth and protect public health.

2. Expedited Permitting and Increased Technical Assistance from the Environmental Protection Division (EPD)

GMA recommends a streamlined permitting process and expedited project review that will result in efficiencies at EPD, including support for expedited brownfield cleanup. GMA supports additional state funding to adequately staff positions within EPD and the creation of an office dedicated to providing technical and practical assistance by state environmental staff to Georgia's municipal governments.

Explanation: As Georgia grows, cities must make responsible investments in water, sewer, and other infrastructure to meet increasing demand. But municipal governments often wait more than a year for EPD to respond to permit applications, and project costs rise significantly in the meantime. Faster permitting would reduce those costs and allow cities to deliver infrastructure improvements on schedule. Beyond its regulatory role, EPD should also provide technical assistance to cities, including basic guidelines and templates that would result in more complete applications and quicker reviews.

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3. Stormwater Utilities

GMA supports cities' current authority to enact and manage stormwater utilities as a means of funding to control stormwater and non-point source water pollution. ~~GMA also supports additional funding for Natural Disaster Resiliency Planning for purposes of mitigation efforts for natural disasters.~~

Explanation: Federal and state mandates require local governments to manage stormwater and non-point source pollution, and many cities have created stormwater utilities to meet those responsibilities. The State Water Plan explicitly endorses local stormwater utilities as a viable funding mechanism for controlling runoff and protecting water quality. Cities should retain the authority to create and manage these utilities as a practical tool for environmental stewardship and regulatory compliance.

4. Natural Disaster Resiliency Planning

GMA supports funding for resiliency planning and mitigation efforts for natural disasters including, but not limited to, hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, and floods.

Explanation: Natural disasters including hurricanes, wildfires, droughts, and floods pose significant risks to Georgia communities and their infrastructure. Investing in resiliency planning before disasters strike reduces potential damage, saves lives, and leads to faster, more cost-effective recovery. Cities need adequate funding and resources to prepare for and withstand these events.

~~4.~~ 5. Greater Regulation of Solid Waste Transfer Facilities

Solid waste transfer stations should be formally permitted by the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and comply with local zoning and ordinances. Additionally, any solid waste transfer station should be subject to the same local host fee currently applied to solid waste disposal facilities.

Explanation: Private solid waste companies are increasingly relying on transfer stations to handle waste before it reaches a landfill. Unlike landfills, these facilities do not require an EPD permit, consistency with local solid waste management plans, or a demonstration of need before operating. They also avoid the local host fee that landfills pay, despite generating similar local costs related to public education, plan administration, and community impact. Transfer stations should be subject to the same permitting and fee requirements as the landfills they serve.

~~5.~~ 6. Regional and Statewide Comprehensive Water Management Plans

GMA supports equitable access for all Georgians to a reliable supply of quality water while ensuring that the available resources protect public health, protect environmental quality, and support economic development.

Explanation: Most of Georgia's water supply and treatment systems are owned and operated by municipalities, making local government participation in statewide water planning essential rather than optional. Local land use decisions directly affect water quality and will shape how governments are required to manage water resources in the future. Funding for regional water plan implementation should be explored through mechanisms such as per capita assessments or water withdrawal fees, with revenue remaining in the region where it is generated. Municipalities should be active participants in both the planning process and its financial support.

~~6.~~ 7. Recycling Strategy, Support & Funding

GMA supports a strategic approach for regional recycling efforts to bring access to recycling to more cities. ~~State- supported public and private partnerships forged at the regional level will incentivize the necessary infrastructure to encourage wider citizen access, involvement, and support for recycling efforts.~~ State-supported partnerships can help develop the infrastructure needed to make recycling more accessible and encourage greater public participation. ~~Additionally, GMA advocates for statewide research to identify challenges and best practices in recycling programs, the development and dissemination of standardized recycling guidelines and educational resources, and state funding and technical assistance to help cities implement evidence-based strategies. GMA also supports initiatives to strengthen market demand for recycled materials.~~ Additionally, GMA supports statewide research to identify recycling challenges and effective solutions, as well as the development of clear recycling guidelines and educational resources. GMA also advocates for state funding and technical assistance to help cities improve their recycling programs and supports efforts to increase demand for recycled materials. GMA supports the creation of a state recycling coordinator to help identify opportunities, provide guidance to local governments, and measure efforts across the state.

Explanation: Georgia's cities vary widely in size and density, and regional approaches are needed to make recycling programs work efficiently across the state. Many municipal programs face common challenges including citizen confusion about acceptable materials, high contamination rates, and limited transparency about where collected items end up.

Statewide research, standardized guidelines, and state funding would help cities address these issues with proven solutions. A state recycling coordinator would provide consistent guidance to local governments, identify opportunities for regional collaboration, and track progress across the state.

~~7.~~ 8. Financial Support for Environmental Initiatives

GMA advocates for robust financial support to aid municipalities in environmental initiatives that safeguard Georgia's natural resources. GMA supports preserving the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority's (GEFA) assets and ensuring sufficient funding for its grant and loan programs. Clear eligibility criteria should be established to streamline access to grants and loans. GMA opposes any diversion of dedicated funds, including NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) fees, designated for environmental projects as stipulated in the Erosion and Sedimentation Act and other applicable statutes.

Explanation: Georgia municipalities depend on GEFA grants and loans to fund environmental projects and meet state and federal requirements. Clear eligibility criteria and streamlined access are essential, particularly for smaller cities. Fees collected under NPDES and the Erosion and Sedimentation Act are designated for specific environmental purposes and should not be diverted to other uses.

~~Environment and Natural Resources Federal Issues~~

~~1.~~ 9. Federal Conservation and Sustainability Funding

GMA supports flexibility and streamlined implementation in the use of funding for land and water conservation and energy efficiency.

Explanation: The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund has provided more than $312 million in Georgia over the past five decades to fund parks and recreational facilities. Continued appropriations will help cities meet growing demand for outdoor recreation and green space. Beyond land conservation, cities also need flexibility to use federal funding for energy efficiency improvements that reduce operating costs and support long-term sustainability goals

~~2.~~ 10. Sustainability, Resilience, and ~~Climate~~ Environment Adaptation

GMA supports ~~federal~~ efforts to research and develop ~~national~~ policies and strategies that address ~~climate~~ resiliency and sustainability. GMA supports the continuation of investments ~~at the federal level~~ into sustainability and resiliency planning.

Explanation: Collaboration between the federal government and cities is needed in order to better understand the impact of differing climate impacts as well as to assess, adapt to, and mitigate current and future threats.

Extreme weather events including droughts, floods, and heat waves pose long-term risks to local infrastructure, economic development, and quality of life in Georgia cities. Researching and developing policies that address environmental resilience and sustainability will help communities prepare for and respond to these threats. Collaboration between governments at all levels is essential to understanding local impacts and identifying effective adaptation strategies.

~~3.~~ 11. Recognize the Importance of Water Supply at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Reservoirs

GMA encourages Congress and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to recognize that the Corps' critical role includes providing water supply storage for cities across the nation. However, their role should be limited to providing storage and should not interfere with the state's allocation of water rights.

Explanation: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reservoirs provide critical water supply storage for municipalities across Georgia and the nation. Limiting the Corps to other functions would force cities to build new, costly, and duplicative reservoirs, often in areas where suitable sites are unavailable precisely because Corps reservoirs already exist. Congress has long recognized state authority over water rights allocation, and neither Congress nor the Corps should act in ways that disturb that balance. The Corps should continue providing water supply storage while states retain their traditional role in allocating water rights.

~~4.~~ 12. Support Municipal Liability Protections Related to Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

GMA supports the passage of liability protections for cities operating water systems affected by PFAS contamination. Protections should exist to mitigate a municipality's exposure to PFAS related litigation efforts~~. that reduce their exposure to PFAS related litigation efforts.~~ GMA supports the establishment and funding of state and federal programs aimed at developing processes to keep drinking water sources and systems free from ~~PFAS contamination~~ forever chemicals. GMA supports the ability of municipalities to recover costs and penalties related to removal of forever chemicals from municipal

drinking water sources from entities which bear the responsibility of placing such forever chemicals into municipal drinking water sources.

Explanation: As federal and state governments increase their focus on PFAS ("forever chemicals") in drinking water, local governments will face new rules and treatment requirements. PFAS are widely used in consumer and industrial products, and they do not break down in the environment, leading to widespread water contamination. The EPA now requires public water systems to test for PFAS and meet new safety standards by 2031. Meeting those standards will require significant investment in treatment equipment, technology, and staff training. Federal and state funding will be essential to help communities, especially smaller cities, meet these requirements while protecting public health.

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Municipal Government

1. Fighting for Home Rule and Local Control Powers

The protection of home rule powers and local control is of paramount importance to all municipalities. GMA strongly opposes any legislation, executive action, or regulatory action that restricts the authority of municipalities to respond to and meet the needs of their communities.

Explanation: Municipal government is the level of government closest and most responsive to the needs of residents and businesses. Citizens elect local officials specifically to make decisions tailored to their communities, from zoning and public safety to quality of life and public health. Legislation that preempts or restricts local authority undermines that relationship and limits cities' ability to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their residents. GMA urges the General Assembly and federal policymakers to preserve local decision-making authority rather than impose uniform solutions on diverse communities.

2. Service Delivery Strategy Act

GMA supports the Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) Act. City residents should not be taxed by a county for services not received and which are provided primarily for the benefit of the unincorporated area of the county. GMA supports the active involvement of every city in any applicable service delivery agreement to ensure fairness for all local governments.

GMA supports transparency and good faith in negotiations and believes there should be meaningful dispute resolution processes, including a judicial option. GMA supports sanctions upon failure to comply with the law, but sanctions should only apply to those communities that are in dispute and should not affect funding or permits relating to public health or safety.

Explanation: The SDS Act enables local governments to avoid duplication of services, protect taxpayers from double taxation, and ensure that revenue sources align with service delivery costs by jurisdiction. Every city should have active involvement in any applicable service delivery agreement to ensure fairness in negotiations. During the 2024 session, GMA and ACCG reached agreement on House Bill 1407, which took effect in January 2026 and is intended to improve the SDS process. GMA continues to monitor implementation to assess whether the changes have achieved their intended results.

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3. Municipal Incorporations

GMA supports citizen access to the heightened services and more responsive representation offered by municipal government. GMA supports legislation that creates a clear, fair, and transparent process for the creation of new cities, but believes priority should be given to the growth and expansion of existing cities first. GMA opposes any efforts to deannex portions of existing municipalities to create new municipalities.

Explanation: Municipalities offer home rule and more responsive representation, and GMA supports citizens' access to those benefits. New incorporations should be undertaken carefully, with adequate population, density, and revenue to support effective service delivery. Most existing municipalities have potential growth areas outside their current limits, and annexation is generally a more efficient path to expanding municipal services than creating new cities. GMA opposes efforts to deannex portions of existing municipalities to create new ones, as this undermines service delivery efficiency and the fiscal stability of established communities.

4. Management of Public Rights-of-Way

The public should be compensated for the use of municipal rights-of-way. Use of the municipal rights-of-way by any company or individual without appropriate compensation to the public is a gratuity. GMA opposes any legislation that prevents the authority of Georgia's municipalities to regulate the use of their public rights- of-way and which weakens the authority to locally determine appropriate compensation for such use. GMA supports a balanced approach to state and federal telecommunications policy that allows new technologies to flourish while preserving traditional local regulatory authority.

Explanation: Public rights-of-way belong to the public, and companies that use them should pay fair compensation to the communities that maintain them. Any legislation that limits municipalities' authority to regulate that use or determine appropriate compensation undermines both economic growth and public safety.

5. Annexation and Deannexation

GMA supports ~~current annexation and deannexation law including a dispute resolution processes that give property owners the right to petition the municipal governing authority to enter the incorporated area~~ the ability of municipalities to grow through a fair and predictable annexation process that respects local decision making and private property rights. GMA supports maintaining a balanced annexation dispute resolution process that provides municipalities, counties, and property owners with an opportunity to address concerns and resolve disputes in a timely manner. GMA supports the authority of

municipal governing authorities to review and approve (or disapprove) deannexation requests. GMA believes that no city should be required to provide services to deannexed property without the city's agreement. Additionally, GMA believes that municipal school systems should have coterminous boundaries with their respective municipalities.

Explanation: Annexation allows cities to grow in ways that meet demand for housing, jobs, and services, and property owners should retain the right to petition for annexation. Disputes between municipalities and counties are best resolved quickly at the local level without placing undue burdens on property owners. Cities should also retain the authority to annex unincorporated islands to avoid service delivery conflicts and unnecessary costs for existing taxpayers. Municipal governing authorities should have the ability to review and approve or reject deannexation requests, and no city should be required to serve deannexed property without its agreement. Municipal school systems should share the same boundaries as their respective cities.

6. Early Voting Flexibility

GMA supports full access to the polls for municipal elections and opposes any attempt aimed at voter suppression. ~~GMA supports a timeframe of three weeks of early voting for municipal elections with an option to reduce the timeframe to a minimum of one week including weekend days. Further, GMA supports additional flexibility and cost savings in elections by granting municipalities the option of instituting instant runoff voting systems for mayoral and city council races by local ordinance.~~ GMA supports additional flexibility and cost-saving options for municipal elections, including flexibility in early voting requirements and the authority for municipalities to institute instant runoff voting systems for mayoral and city council races by local ordinance.

Explanation: Access to the polls for municipal elections is essential to ensure that mayors and council members are representative of the voters who elect them. Municipal elections are non-partisan, held in odd-numbered years, and typically draw significantly fewer voters than state and county elections. Flexibility in early voting requirements allows cities to manage election costs responsibly while maintaining meaningful access to the polls. Cities should also have the authority to institute instant runoff voting systems by local ordinance, giving communities a cost-saving option that reflects their size and resources.

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7. Frivolous Litigation Against Cities

GMA supports the passage of a municipal liability protection act to limit cities' exposure to costly litigation. GMA supports legislation that inhibits frivolous litigation against cities, allows cities to recover court costs and attorney fees resulting from frivolous litigation, and requires any litigant to provide a city with reasonable notice before any litigation is commenced.

Explanation: Litigation against cities creates real costs for municipal taxpayers, and those costs should have reasonable limits. Cities should have the same ability to recover attorney fees and court costs from frivolous lawsuits that plaintiffs already have. In many cases, costly litigation can be avoided if a litigant is required to notify the city before filing suit, giving both parties an opportunity to resolve the dispute without going to court. Municipalities serve the public good across a broad range of functions and deserve meaningful protection from litigation that diverts taxpayer resources away from public services.

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Public Safety

~~3.~~ 1. Emergency Medical Service Response Times

GMA supports legislation that addresses and alleviates strains placed on municipalities' public safety resources and residents caused by slow EMS response times. GMA also supports investment in and deployment of Next Generation 911 (NG911) technology to improve emergency response, coordination, and public safety communication.

Explanation: Slow EMS response times pose a direct threat to public health and safety in Georgia communities. GMA supports greater flexibility for municipal first responders to engage in emergency medical transport and investment in Next Generation 911 technology to improve coordination across emergency response systems. Legislation should work proactively to address the underlying causes of slow response times rather than react after harm has occurred.

~~4.~~ 2. Mental Health

GMA supports additional tools and resources for local public safety personnel and municipal courts to address mental health issues in the community. GMA also supports collaboration with state and local agencies to coordinate mental health response efforts, expanded workforce development in the mental health field, and ~~dedicated state-level funding to help communities implement and sustain effective solutions~~ dedicated state funding for community-based behavioral health services, crisis response programs, and co-responder models that pair public safety personnel with mental health professionals.

Explanation: Mental health issues place significant demands on local public safety personnel and municipal courts, often contributing to homelessness and repeat emergency calls. Co-responder models, dedicated state funding for behavioral health services, and expanded workforce development would give municipalities more effective tools to address these challenges at the local level.

~~7.~~ 3. Local Law Enforcement Jurisdiction

GMA supports the ability of municipal law enforcement agencies to patrol and enforce traffic laws on all federal, state, and local public roads in their jurisdiction.

Explanation: Local law enforcement plays a critical role in patrolling state and interstate highways, filling gaps that Georgia's relatively small number of state patrol officers cannot cover alone. Traffic enforcement on public roads saves lives and results in arrests of fugitives

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and others who have escaped the criminal justice system. Proposals to limit local jurisdiction over traffic enforcement on state highways are based on the assumption that such enforcement is primarily about revenue, when in fact it is essential to public safety. Existing oversight mechanisms, including state investigations and local electoral accountability, provide adequate checks on any potential abuses.

~~13.~~ 4. Human Trafficking

~~*Human trafficking destroys lives and harms communities; therefore, GMA vehemently abhors this deplorable act. GMA supports federal, state, and local action which gives law enforcement additional tools and resources to combat and prevent all forms of human trafficking, including sex trafficking and labor trafficking that exploits individuals for forced or coercive work.*~~ *GMA supports federal, state, and local efforts to combat and prevent human trafficking. GMA supports providing law enforcement with the tools and resources necessary to identify, investigate, and prosecute trafficking offenses, including enhanced technology, training, interagency partnerships, public awareness efforts, and appropriate criminal penalties.* ~~*Such tools and resources should include, but not be limited to, enhanced technology development and deployment, training, building partnerships with schools, state law enforcement, and community organizations, and increased penalties for traffickers and consumers.*~~

Explanation: Human trafficking is a serious crime that threatens the health, safety, and freedom of victims in communities across Georgia. Effective enforcement requires cooperation across federal, state, and local agencies, supported by enhanced technology, specialized training, and public awareness efforts. Providing law enforcement with the tools and resources to identify, investigate, and prosecute trafficking offenses protects vulnerable individuals and strengthens community safety for all residents.

~~14.~~ 5. Drug Abuse

GMA supports additional tools and resources for local public safety personnel and municipal courts to combat and prevent drug abuse.

Explanation: Drug abuse affects cities of all sizes across Georgia. While the state has made progress through community-based treatment and accountability courts, local public safety personnel and municipal courts need additional resources to address the problem effectively at the community level.

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~~2.~~ 6. Funding for Municipal Public Safety and Courts

~~GMA continues to support utilizing funds collected for public safety equipment and training, municipal court judge training, and municipal court clerk training solely for that purpose. GMA supports adequate funding for local public safety personnel training and counseling, municipal court judge, and municipal court clerk training. GMA supports municipal law enforcement and believes that criminal laws are best enforced by properly trained law enforcement personnel.~~

GMA supports strong municipal public safety and court systems through adequate funding for training, equipment, and employee wellness programs. GMA supports dedicating funds collected for public safety, municipal court judge training, and municipal court clerk training solely to those purposes and believes that criminal laws are best enforced by properly trained law enforcement personnel. GMA support efforts ensuring that the payment of municipal fines takes precedence over the remittance of revenue to fine add-on recipients in partial payment cases, opposes any new or additional state-imposed fine add-ons on offenses adjudicated in municipal court, and supports an administrative and processing fee based on a percentage of fine add-ons collected and remitted to other entities.

Explanation: Municipal police officers make up the majority of law enforcement in Georgia and have the most direct contact with the public, making proper training, adequate equipment, and employee wellness programs essential. Funds collected for public safety and court training should be dedicated solely to those purposes and flow to both the Georgia Public Safety Training Center and regional academies so municipal officers receive their fair share of resources. When fines are only partially paid, municipalities should receive payment before revenue is remitted to fine add-on recipients, and no new state-imposed fine add-ons should be placed on offenses adjudicated in municipal court.

~~11.~~ 7. ~~Traffic Camera and Digital Enforcement Technology~~ Automated Enforcement and Public Safety Technology

~~GMA supports legislation that authorizes municipalities to ethically and responsibly use video and digital technology to improve public safety efforts.~~ GMA supports the responsible use of public safety technology and digital tools to enhance public safety, improve operational effectiveness, and support law enforcement efforts.

Explanation: Automated enforcement and digital public safety tools have been used in Georgia municipalities for years and have contributed to improved safety outcomes. Responsible use of these technologies makes law enforcement more efficient and transparent while ensuring that technology serves as a tool for community safety rather than

a source of revenue or overreach.

8. Local Government Firearms Policy

~~GMA supports the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution.~~ GMA supports policies that balance constitutional rights with the need to protect public safety and ensure safe municipal operations. GMA believes reasonable laws regulating persons with serious mental health issues and their ability to obtain firearms licensing are warranted. GMA supports the ability of local governments to set policies regarding the carrying of weapons and firearms by their employees and volunteers while they are engaged in the course of their employment. ~~Further, GMA supports the ability of local governments to set policies regarding the carrying of weapons and firearms on municipal property where security is provided.~~

GMA supports the authority of local governments to establish and enforce policies regarding the carrying of weapons and firearms on municipal property and at municipal events where security is provided. GMA further supports preserving local authority to regulate weapons in facilities and venues owned, leased, operated, or managed by a municipality, consistent with state and federal law. GMA supports municipal law enforcement and believes that criminal laws are best enforced by properly trained law enforcement personnel.

Explanation: Local elected officials are best positioned to set policies about firearms and weapons on municipal property, at municipal events, and in facilities owned or managed by their cities, including policies covering employees and volunteers. Balancing constitutional rights with the need for safe municipal operations is a local decision that should remain with local governments.

9. Bias-based Profiling

GMA opposes the practice of profiling protected classes and encourages efforts by municipal police departments to train officers not to engage in such profiling. GMA supports legislation that requires training, supervision, and local policies designed to prevent bias-based profiling, such as GMA's Excellence in Policing Program, provided that any data collection mandates apply only to those agencies found to be engaged in such practices.

Explanation: Bias-based profiling undermines public confidence in law enforcement, and many municipal police departments already train officers to avoid it. State proposals requiring officers to collect additional data at every traffic stop are unnecessary given that municipalities already submit traffic citation data, including identifying information, to the state. Any legislation addressing bias-based profiling should avoid creating administrative

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burdens that interfere with local public safety efforts.

10. Volunteer Firefighter Incentives

GMA supports incentivizing the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters with a state income tax credit and/or credits for state-issued driver's licenses and firefighter training.

Explanation: Small and mid-sized Georgia cities depend on volunteers to staff their fire departments, and retaining them has become increasingly difficult. A state income tax credit for volunteers who maintain training and participation, along with credits for driver's licenses and firefighter training costs, would help cities recruit and retain experienced volunteers.

~~6.~~ 11. Funding Crime Labs

GMA believes that adequate and proper funding of state crime labs is the responsibility of state government and opposes efforts to shift costs for their support from the state to local governments. GMA also supports additional state funding for cities where crime labs are located and regularly used by multiple jurisdictions, to help offset the associated operational and public safety impacts.

Explanation: State crime labs are a vital resource for local law enforcement agencies prosecuting crimes on behalf of the state. Requiring local governments to fund their operation fails to recognize that cities already remit fine add-ons to the state for this purpose, and shifting additional costs to local agencies increases the tax burden on local residents. Cities that host crime labs used by multiple jurisdictions also bear operational and public safety impacts that warrant additional state funding to offset those costs.

12. Juvenile Justice Reform

~~*In the interest of public health, safety, and welfare of municipal residents, GMA supports juvenile justice reform which promotes and emphasizes education and responsibility to juvenile offenders and helps provide them paths to a successful adult life.*~~

GMA supports juvenile justice policies that promote accountability, rehabilitation, and positive outcomes for youth while protecting public safety. ~~*In supporting juvenile justice reform, GMA calls for the ability of municipal governments to review and assess the community outcomes related to any such reform.*~~ *GMA supports the ability of municipal governments to evaluate the effectiveness and community impacts of juvenile justice reforms.*

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~~*GMA also supports the following: proper treatment for juveniles exhibiting behavioral patterns that may cause criminal activity, holding parents and guardians responsible when their actions promote and encourage criminal activity of the juvenile, adequate state funding for juvenile detention facilities, staff training for those working in such facilities, and state funding to provide access for early intervention programs to discourage criminal or negative attention-seeking behavior.*~~ *GMA supports adequate state funding for juvenile justice programs, detention facilities, law enforcement efforts, staff training, early intervention initiatives, behavioral health services, and wraparound support services that help youth and families address the underlying causes of delinquent behavior. GMA also supports appropriate accountability for parents and guardians whose actions contribute to or encourage juvenile criminal activity.*

Explanation: Effective juvenile justice policy balances accountability with rehabilitation, addressing the underlying causes of delinquency rather than simply responding after the fact. State funding for detention facilities, staff training, behavioral health services, and early intervention programs gives young people better paths forward. Municipal governments should be able to evaluate the community impact of juvenile justice reforms to ensure they are producing positive outcomes.

~~15.~~ 13. Medical Cannabis

GMA supports local control of building permitting, inspection, and occupational tax certificates for any medical cannabis cultivation operation. The location of cultivation sites, processing and distribution facilities, and dispensaries should be subject to local land use, zoning, building, and occupancy codes.

Explanation: Georgia law authorizes a limited number of medical cannabis cultivation sites, processing facilities, and dispensaries. GMA supports local control of all permitting, inspection, and occupational tax processes for these operations and believes they should be subject to the same local land use, zoning, and occupancy codes as other businesses.

~~16.~~ 14. Municipal Option on O.R. Bonds & Other Diversion Programs

GMA supports a municipality's ability to develop qualifying Own Recognizance (O.R.) bond policies, allowing appropriate individuals to be released from custody without having to post bail and diversion programs to further criminal justice policy initiatives tailored to the needs of each municipality.

Explanation: Own Recognizance bonds allow appropriate individuals to be released without posting bail, reducing jail costs and populations. Diversion programs offer alternatives to

traditional prosecution that can better address underlying issues while reducing the burden on municipal courts. Local officials are best positioned to determine when these tools are appropriate for their communities.

~~1.~~ 15. Collective Bargaining and Mandated Pay and Benefits

GMA strongly supports public safety employees, but GMA strongly opposes legislation establishing collective bargaining for local government employees, placing costly restrictions and requirements on the relationship between municipalities and municipal employees, and mandating pay or benefit levels.

Explanation: Collective bargaining for local government employees would increase costs, reduce flexibility, and undermine home rule by limiting elected officials' ability to manage their own workforce. All local government employees already have adequate constitutional due process protections. Mandating pay and benefit levels at the state or federal level removes decisions that are best made locally based on each community's needs and resources. GMA supports improved public safety pay and benefits determined at the local level and believes that support for public safety officials experiencing PTSD should be addressed as a statewide issue with statewide funding rather than as an unfunded mandate on local governments.

~~5. Municipal Court Fines and Add-Ons~~

~~*GMA will seek to have the payment of municipal fines take precedence over the remittance of revenue to fine add-on recipients in partial payment cases. GMA adamantly opposes any new or additional state-imposed fine add-ons collected on offenses adjudicated in municipal court. GMA supports an administrative and processing fee based on a percentage of the fine add-ons collected and remitted to various entities.*~~

Explanation: Municipal courts and municipal police departments are wholly funded by municipal taxpayers. Cases brought to such municipal courts are typically made by municipal police or code enforcement personnel, are adjudicated by municipal judges, and are administered by municipal personnel. Municipalities pay to house municipal prisoners in county jails and must spend their own resources to provide for indigent defense. The creation of new fine add-ons and regulatory changes place fine add-on recipients above municipalities in the priority for receiving fine payment in cases where the entire fine is not immediately paid in full. The effect of these changes is to force municipal courts to act as tax collection agencies for state government programs that rarely benefit municipalities. Municipal courts carry a large burden in collecting and remitting fine add-ons to various

entities and should be able to retain a percentage of the amounts collected as an administrative fee for the work done by the municipal court.

The creation of new state-imposed fine add-ons, given the current number of existing fine add-ons and the partial payment priority system currently in place, is overburdening defendants that are adjudicated in municipal court. Additional fine add-ons result in sending more defendants to probation and imposing more costs on the administration of municipal courts.

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Revenue and Finance

1. Revenue Options

The state law should provide a wide variety of revenue options available equally to all municipal governments. These options should include flexibility for municipal officials to adopt revenue sources as necessary to respond to local growth, decline, recession, community desires, and emergencies, should encourage community input, and should tax equity and the elimination of double taxation. GMA supports the equitable distribution of sales tax revenue based on defined and measurable data points. Specifically, GMA supports a procedure for local elected officials, subject to voter approval, to institute the levy of municipal option sales tax (MOST) for capital improvements or property tax relief.

Explanation: Local elected officials, subject to voter approval, should have the flexibility to adopt revenue sources appropriate for their communities, including a municipal option sales tax for capital improvements or property tax relief. Sales tax revenue should be distributed equitably based on defined and measurable data, ensuring that cities receive a fair share that reflects the economic activity and services they provide.

2. Tax Transparency and Accuracy

GMA supports increased transparency in revenue collection. GMA supports legislation requiring the Department of Revenue to collect, compile, and provide to municipal governments the data necessary to determine the aggregate amount of sales tax generated by industry or businesses located in each municipality. GMA also supports additional state appropriations for Department of Revenue system upgrades to enhance data transparency and accuracy. GMA encourages the continued review of exemptions and incentives based upon measurable and defined data. GMA also supports requiring state agencies to analyze, consider, and disclose the fiscal effect of new or amended state laws and regulations on local governments.

Explanation: Municipal officials need detailed sales tax data to assess compliance, measure the health of their local retail sector, and evaluate whether economic development efforts are producing results. GMA supports the following steps to improve reporting and accuracy:

(1) Require the Department of Revenue to collect and share aggregate sales tax data for collections within municipal boundaries.
(2) Ensure all data, whether electronically or manually filed, is fully captured.
(3) Protect the confidentiality of information shared with cities.

(4) Increase audits to ensure compliance.

State agencies should also be required to analyze and disclose the fiscal impact of new or amended state laws and regulations on local governments, and exemptions and incentives should be reviewed regularly based on measurable data.

3. Revisions to the Taxpayer Bill of Rights Advertisement Requirements

GMA supports amending the requirements prescribed by the "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" to more accurately describe the changes to the tax digest, to provide flexibility in when the notice is required to better reflect economic conditions and to account for local property tax exemptions.

Explanation: The "Taxpayer Bill of Rights" notifies the public when the overall tax digest increases in value, but the wording fails to distinguish between increased millage rates and increased assessments. It also does not explain that an overall increase in assessed values does not mean every parcel increased in value, creating confusion that has led some cities to publish additional notices to clarify the original.

4. Full Collection of Sales Taxes

GMA recommends that the state take necessary steps to ensure the full collection and timely remittance of all sales and use taxes due to the state and to local governments, including additional funding for the Department of Revenue for audits and compliance purposes.

Explanation: The Georgia Department of Revenue currently audits less than one percent of businesses remitting sales taxes. While most businesses comply, inadequate enforcement leaves potential revenue uncollected. A voluntary compliance system alone is not sufficient to ensure full collection of sales tax revenues owed to state and local governments. Providing the Department of Revenue with additional auditors and enforcement capacity would help close that gap.

5. Expansion of Exclusive County-Wide Sales Tax

GMA opposes the creation or expansion of existing county-wide sales taxes that exclude municipal government participation ~~or~~ and threaten or replace other equitable sales tax options.

Explanation: County-wide sales taxes that exclude municipal participation deprive cities of needed revenue and can undermine equitable tax distribution. The Homestead Option Sales Tax can complicate Local Option Sales Tax negotiations and reduce cities' leverage in those

discussions. Cities should be full participants in any sales tax negotiations that affect their residents.

6. Sales Tax Exemptions

GMA opposes the erosion of the local sales tax base caused by the creation of statewide sales tax exemptions. In the case of sales tax exemptions, GMA supports each exemption having a fiscal note and a time-limited sunset tied to a periodic cost- benefit analysis based on defined goals. GMA also supports the study of sales tax exemption parameters to further define the purpose of each sales tax exemption.

Explanation: The growing number of statewide sales tax exemptions has gradually eroded the local tax base without adequate consideration of the cumulative effect on municipal revenues. Cities are left with fewer resources to fund services while facing increasing service demands and unfunded mandates. In some cases, municipalities are required to provide services to exempt entities without compensation. Each exemption should include a fiscal note and a periodic cost-benefit review to ensure it continues to serve its intended purpose.

7. Property Tax Exemptions

GMA opposes the erosion of the local property tax base caused by the creation of statewide property tax exemptions. In the case of exempt properties, GMA supports mechanisms that allow compensation to be paid to the local government for services rendered in lieu of taxes. GMA also supports the study of property tax exemption parameters to further define the purpose of each property tax exemption.

Explanation: The growing number of property tax exemptions has eroded the local tax base, leaving cities with fewer resources to fund services while facing increasing service demands. In some cases, municipalities are required to provide services to exempt properties without compensation, which shifts costs to other taxpayers. Mechanisms that allow local governments to recover service costs from exempt properties, along with periodic reviews of exemption parameters, would help ensure each exemption continues to serve its intended purpose.

8. Assessment Limitations and Appeals

GMA supports reasonable reform of the approach to homestead property assessments which minimizes undue hardship and confusion to property owners, ensures equity among comparable properties and taxpayers, provides for adjustment of values that mimics market

conditions, and strikes a balance between the goals of providing more certainty to taxpayers and retaining uniformity, flexibility, and revenues necessary to provide services at the local level. GMA supports the retention of full flexibility over property tax collection with transparent methods and community input.

Explanation: Local governments need a broad tax base to fund services during market fluctuations, and changes to the property assessment process should avoid creating tax inequities. Assessment restrictions force cities to rely on new growth or raise millage rates to maintain revenue. Uniformity is also a concern: property owners with identical properties receive the same services but may pay significantly different taxes based solely on when they purchased their property. Timely reassessment practices, transparent collection methods, and meaningful community input help ensure fairness and current market value across the tax base.

9. Local Expenditure Flexibility

GMA opposes local government expenditure caps and required-minimum expenditures.

Explanation: Georgia's cities vary widely in size, resources, and needs, making spending caps a poor fit for such a diverse state. While local officials work to keep costs low, citizen demand, emergencies, court decisions, and state and federal mandates can force expenditure increases beyond their control. Many costs, including insurance, fuel, and construction materials, fluctuate with market conditions. Local elected officials are accountable to their voters and must have the flexibility to make the budget decisions necessary to provide the services their communities expect.

10. Unfunded Mandates

GMA opposes any legislation that creates unfunded mandates that impact cities.

Explanation: Unfunded mandates are laws or regulations imposed on local governments by the state or federal government without providing the funding to cover the associated costs. When forced to absorb these costs, local governments must raise taxes or reduce services in other areas. Any requirement imposed on local governments should be accompanied by sufficient funding to pay for compliance.

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11. Franchise Fees or Comparable Compensation

GMA supports the use of negotiated municipal fees that takes into account provider equity while ensuring commensurate compensation to the municipality and citizens for the use of the municipal right-of-way. GMA opposes changes in federal or state law which divert or reduce municipal compensation for use of municipal right-of-way.

Explanation: Franchise fees compensate municipalities for the use of public rights-of-way by utility companies, wireless providers, and cable companies. These fees are an important source of local revenue, and changes in federal or state law that divert or reduce them deprive communities of compensation for public infrastructure built and maintained at local taxpayer expense.

12. Debt Set-off

GMA supports legislation authorizing local governments to establish a debt set-off program in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Revenue to collect debt owed to local governments.

Explanation: A debt set-off program would allow past-due utility accounts and other debts owed to local governments to be collected against a debtor's state income tax refund. Local governments would submit debts to a central clearinghouse, which would transmit them to the Department of Revenue for set-off against state income tax returns. Debtors would receive notice of the debt and have the opportunity to appeal or pay before any set-off occurs. Similar programs have been successfully implemented in North Carolina and South Carolina.

13. E-Fairness Legislation for Taxes

GMA supports legislation that continues to modernize the law regarding taxes and fees to ensure equitable taxation on digital products equivalent to traditionally taxable goods and services.

Explanation: Digital products and services are often taxed differently than equivalent physical goods, giving online providers a competitive advantage over traditional businesses and eroding the local tax base. Modernizing tax law to ensure equitable taxation of digital products would level the playing field and protect local revenue.

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Transportation

1. Transportation Finance

GMA supports coordination between the federal, state, and municipal governments in providing for transportation infrastructure funding and in identifying needs. Municipalities are often the first to recognize the growing gap between necessary infrastructure improvements and current revenues; an approach in the awarding of funding that prioritizes local engagement accounts for the most appropriate expenditure of revenue. GMA supports the establishment of a committed appropriation from the State Government to municipalities for the development of transportation infrastructures.

Explanation: Flexible and sustainable revenue options are essential for states and cities to address long-term transportation infrastructure needs. Georgia cities report nearly $9.7 billion in transportation infrastructure needs over the next five years, and local funds alone are not sufficient to meet that demand. Transportation funding must address needs beyond roads and bridges, including sidewalks, bicycle paths, transit, and passenger rail. A long-term federal and state commitment to transportation funding, with local control over how funds are spent, is essential to leveraging local investments and keeping pace with Georgia's growing population.

2. Increased Truck Weights

GMA opposes legislation to allow increased truck weight limits.

Explanation: Heavier trucks cause significantly more damage to roads and bridges than lighter vehicles, and Georgia's local infrastructure is already under strain. Increasing truck weight limits would accelerate deterioration of municipal roads and bridges without a guaranteed funding source to cover repair costs. State authorities also lack sufficient personnel to enforce existing weight limits in Georgia's municipalities, making enforcement of higher limits even less reliable.

3. Review and Update LMIG Distribution Formula

GMA urges the Georgia Department of Transportation to work with local officials, GMA, and ACCG to review and update the Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant (LMIG) distribution formula no less than every four years using available data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources to reflect the intensity of use and the economic impact of transportation projects.

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Explanation: LMIG funds are currently distributed using a formula based one-third on population and two-thirds on local road mileage. State law allows GDOT to incorporate additional factors such as vehicle miles traveled, employment, and local funding matches, but the formula has not been updated to reflect the more detailed data now available. Routine periodic review would allow GDOT to incorporate current data and distribute funds more accurately to where they are needed most.

4. Intermodal transit

GMA supports the planning, funding, and operation of transit services in partnership with the state and federal government and encourages the accelerated development and implementation of the entire Georgia Rail Passenger Program. Additionally, GMA believes that it is critical that funding for Georgia transit services come from a combination of local, statewide, private, and federal sources. To facilitate the implementation of the state's rail program and interstate passenger rail connectivity, GMA calls upon Georgia's governor to announce appointments to the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority.

Explanation: As Georgia's population grows, moving people efficiently between metropolitan areas becomes increasingly critical to the state's economic well-being. Viable commuter and passenger rail services would give Georgians real choices in how they travel and reduce pressure on an already strained highway system. Funding for rail transit should draw from a combination of local, state, private, and federal sources. Appointments to the Georgia Rail Passenger Authority are essential to moving the state's rail program forward and establishing interstate passenger rail connectivity.

5. Airports

GMA supports policies oriented to the viable, safe operation of airports, which recognize and support airports as a major tool for economic development across Georgia. Further, GMA opposes any attempt to usurp control of or take over any airport owned by a local government or local government authority.

Explanation: Georgia's 104 general aviation and air carrier airports generate significant economic activity, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions in state and local tax revenue. A 2020 Georgia DOT study found airports contributed $73.7 billion in economic impact statewide, though updated figures reflecting post-pandemic conditions would provide a more current picture. Local governments are best equipped to oversee municipal airports because local elected officials are directly accountable to the voters and taxpayers who use and fund them. State oversight of locally owned airports is neither warranted nor

necessary.

6. Strengthen the Relationships between GDOT and Georgia's Municipalities

GMA supports maintaining stronger relationships between GDOT and municipalities that foster good communication, local input, greater flexibility, and an understanding of and sensitivity to the individual character of Georgia's communities in the design and implementation of transportation projects in municipalities. GMA also supports GDOT efforts to streamline and expedite the completion of local transportation projects. GMA believes the following four steps should be taken to build this relationship:

I. *GMA urges the state legislature to provide sufficient funding to GDOT to ensure that the Department has adequate staff to provide project review and implementation for local road projects in a timely manner so that scarce state, local, and regional transportation resources can be used as efficiently and effectively as possible.*
II. *GMA supports an enhanced, substantive role for cities in the evolving statewide planning and project prioritization process at the Georgia Department of Transportation.*
III. *GMA supports continued, sustained funding for local projects and priorities within this evolving process.*
IV. *GMA urges GDOT to authorize a process to certify local governments to carry out an approved list of projects on local roads without GDOT review and approval.*

Explanation: Transportation projects serve as economic development catalysts in downtowns and throughout Georgia's communities, but project delays in the permitting and review process increase costs and discourage investment. Adequate GDOT staffing is essential to timely project review and implementation. Cities should have a substantive role in statewide transportation planning and project prioritization, with sustained funding for local priorities within that process. Certifying local governments to carry out approved projects on local roads without GDOT review would streamline delivery and free up GDOT resources for more complex projects.

7. Authority Over Emerging ~~Transportation Technology and Uses~~ and Multi-Modal Transportation Technology

GMA supports the local authority to regulate right-of-way access and management, safety considerations, and user requirements of newly emerging personal transportation modes. GMA supports updating state law to reflect modern transportation realities, including establishing current and accurate definitions for e-bikes and other electric and alternative

mobility devices that reflect their actual use and distinguish them appropriately from motor vehicles and traditional bicycles. ~~*Clear definitions for electric scooters and other new types of vehicles, rules of the road that complement safety in use, and limitations on the liability of local governments where such vehicles are utilized are needed in the code to augment cities' ability to viably harness these new technologies as real transportation options.*~~ *Clear, updated definitions for e-bikes, electric scooters, and other emerging vehicle types, along with rules of the road that complement safety in use and limitations on the liability of local governments, are needed in the code to augment cities' ability to viably harness these new technologies as real transportation options. Current state law governing these vehicles is outdated and must be revised to reflect how these modes are being used today.*

Explanation: State law governing e-bikes, electric scooters, and other emerging mobility devices is outdated and does not reflect how these vehicles are used today. Clear definitions that distinguish these devices from motor vehicles and traditional bicycles, updated rules of the road, and liability limitations for local governments are needed to allow cities to safely accommodate these transportation options.

8. Remove Cap on Local Taxing Authority to Support Road Infrastructure

GMA urges the General Assembly to take swift action to increase the cap on local taxing authority that exists in the Transportation Funding Act of 2015 and to better reflect periodic adjustments to the average retail price on which the local sales taxes are based allow local taxing mechanisms to apply uniformly to petroleum products, without arbitrary caps or limitations, and ensure taxation equity on equivalent electric charging.

Explanation: Current law places a $3 cap on local sales taxes on motor fuels, while state excise taxes on motor fuels are periodically adjusted for inflation and fuel efficiency with no cap. This artificial limit prevents local governments from generating sufficient revenue to keep pace with rising transportation infrastructure costs. Removing the cap and incorporating automatic adjustments based on average statewide retail prices would provide a more sustainable local revenue stream. Ensuring that equivalent taxes apply to electric vehicle charging would also maintain tax equity as more Georgians transition away from traditional motor fuels.

9. Drone Technology and Local Authority

GMA supports the authority of local governments to establish policies and regulations governing the operation of drones within their jurisdictions, including right-of-way access, safety requirements, and operational standards. GMA supports state and federal efforts to develop clear regulatory frameworks for drone use that preserve meaningful local control. GMA encourages Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to engage

municipalities as partners in developing drone regulations that address public safety, privacy, and community impact.

Explanation: The rapid proliferation of drone technology among private users, commercial operators, and public agencies has prompted regulatory action at the state and federal level. Local governments are increasingly utilizing drones to enhance public safety responses, support infrastructure inspection, and improve long-range planning efforts. However, the expansion of drone use also raises legitimate concerns around public safety, privacy, and community impact that are best addressed at the local level. Municipalities are uniquely positioned to understand the operational realities and community sensitivities within their jurisdictions, and meaningful local authority must be preserved as state and federal regulatory frameworks continue to evolve. GMA encourages the FAA and state policymakers to treat municipalities as partners in this process, ensuring that drone regulations reflect both the promise of the technology and the responsibility local governments bear for the safety and welfare of their residents.

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