Earlier today, the ACCG Executive Committee was invited to participate in a conference call with Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to provide an elections update. Following the discussion, the Executive Committee voted unanimously to support Secretary Raffensperger’s approach to the election calendar for the remainder of the 2020 cycle and facilitating an improved, uniform absentee ballot application and mail process to minimize risks posed to voters, county election officials, and poll workers by COVID-19.

Below is a summary of some of the key points from this discussion:

- **Election Date:** During a declared State of Emergency issued by the Governor or President, an election may be postponed by the Secretary of State for not more than 45 days. Governor Brian Kemp declared the State of Emergency in Georgia on March 14, 2020. The following week, Secretary Raffensperger announced that Georgia’s Presidential Preference Primary Election, scheduled for March 24, would be combined with the Primary Election set for May 19, 2020. The Primary Election date is set by state statute and cannot be moved. Furthermore, this date occurs after April 13, the date upon which Georgia’s current State of Emergency is set to expire. Therefore, the Secretary of State does not have authority to postpone the General Primary at this time, and even if a state of emergency does exist at that time, the PPP has already been extended the maximum amount it can be and would have to go forward on May 19. Any change to the May 19 General Primary date would have negative repercussions on county elections officials’ ability to administer the remaining elections in 2020, particularly the November 2020 general election.

- **Absentee Ballot Requests:** Due to public health concerns and the increased interest in voting absentee to minimize risks posed by COVID-19, the Secretary of State’s office has taken steps to send out a uniform absentee ballot application to all active Georgia voters. This application will include the individual’s name, address and voter registration identification number, as well as a bar code. Completed applications will be returned to county elections offices where the bar code will be scanned and the data populated to the state’s voter registration system to facilitate the verification of the absentee ballot request. Upon verification, they will be uploaded in batches to a mail vendor, secured by the Secretary of State’s office, which will mail the absentee ballot. This uniform process established by the Secretary of State’s office will maintain consistency throughout the state and eliminate postage costs for counties to mail absentee ballot applications and ballots.

- **In Person Voting:** State law requires people to have the ability to vote in person. Therefore, counties must set up and run early and election day polling locations. If social distancing recommendations are maintained, this will be challenging. The Secretary of State’s office is ordering disinfecting wipes and sprays to provide to counties to use in polling locations. Securing enough poll workers is another concern since the average age of volunteers is estimated to be 70, which falls into the high-risk category for COVID-19. The goal is to provide counties additional resources to handle the increased interest in absentee voting while simultaneously helping counties cope with the increased difficulties of in-person voting due to social distancing, thus minimizing risks to poll workers and in-person voters.

- **Fraud Concerns:** The Georgia General Assembly took steps following the 2018 elections to reduce the potential for fraud, especially through ballot harvesting. Absentee ballots may only be sent to
the individual who requested it, and the only person who can complete, handle or return that ballot is the individual to whom it was sent or a family member who lives in the same household. The Secretary of State’s office will widely publicize this information and investigate any anomalies identified.