REVENUE AND FINANCE

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Adequate and equitable revenue sources for Georgia's counties are essential to ensuring counties' ability to raise operating and capital revenues in a balanced and fair manner. Counties urge the state to work with ACCG to provide more diverse revenue options. A more diverse revenue stream would remove pressure from property taxes. Additionally, ACCG requests that state officials pay special attention to burdensome mandates and requirements, which increase taxes and impede the county service delivery mission. We ask that decision-makers pay close attention to the property tax, sales tax and other local tax issues.

AD VALOREM REFORM

Comprehensive Tax Reform – ACCG supports the modernization of Georgia's tax system. The current property and sales tax laws have not been updated to function appropriately within today's economy. Local governments and schools have also relied too heavily on property tax without sufficient revenue alternatives available to them.

In order to update the system, all property and sales tax exemptions should be reviewed and every exemption that fails to provide a legitimate benefit to the entire state's economy should be eliminated. All services should also be evaluated to determine which ones can be incorporated into the sales tax base. Once additional revenue sources are identified, property tax relief can be granted in a variety of ways. New state sales taxes generated from the expanded sales tax base should be partially used to shift the burden away from property owners by implementing a refundable income tax credit for taxpayers that have a homestead property tax liability that exceeds a reasonable percentage of their income. These changes will ensure that no one is forced to sell their property because of the tax burden.

To prevent future exemptions and mandates that unfairly shift more tax burden down to the local property taxpayer, the state should require legislation financially impacting local governments to layover one year and be extensively evaluated for its impact. Funding for state mandates should be paid from state revenues and not local revenues. Any exemptions requiring approval by referendum should notify the voter of the likely shift in tax burden that will result from passage. The property tax is an important component of the overall local revenue structure and should be reformed but not eliminated.

Exemptions/Tax Shifting – ACCG opposes state legislation to give local property tax exemptions to special interests, particularly when the proposals threaten home rule authority and shift the tax burden to hardworking homeowners and businesses. However, where an ad valorem tax exemption for a special interest is statewide, made by the state legislature, the state should finance the tax break.

- ACCG opposes any efforts by the General Assembly to broaden the scope of Georgia Law that provides for property tax exemptions for charities. Current law and several landmark judicial decisions have provided sufficient direction for counties to administer this exemption. Isolated issues should not lead to weakening the requirements for qualification that would affect all of Georgia's counties.
- ACCG asks the legislature to give the county commissioners more authority over local property tax exemptions. Currently the only local exemption that commissioners can implement through a call and passage of a local referendum is the Freeport Exemption. All other local exemptions must first be approved by the General Assembly. ACCG asks the General Assembly to require the consent of the county commission before the local legislative delegation calls for a local referendum to exempt all or a portion of the county property taxes.
- ACCG asks the General Assembly to authorize local implementation of statewide property tax exemptions and special assessments. Once an exemption or special assessment is authorized in a statewide referendum, the local elected officials should determine when it is enacted in their jurisdiction and should have the flexibility to tailor the exemption or special assessment to fit the needs and desires of their county residents.

State Assistance With Ad Valorem Tax Collections– To have an efficient and fair ad valorem tax system, the state and its local governments must work together to provide uniformity in the administration of this tax. The state plays a central role in providing uniform training to county tax assessors and tax commissioners, ensuring counties have an equalized tax digest, updating the appraisers' procedure manual and centrally assessing the property of utilities and railroads. In 2016 the state will complete the phase out of state property taxes and some legislators may be reluctant to continue state financial support for these critical services to local property tax administration. ~~In the past few years, there have been significant cutbacks in state funds allocated to support the property tax administration process. These state cutbacks have forced counties to pay for many things previously funded by the state, e.g., state mandated forms, state mandated training, and state mandated minimum appraisal staff and constitutionally mandated property revaluations.~~ To help counties continue to receive an adequate level of support from the Local Government Services Division of the Department of Revenue, ~~efficiently administer property tax collections and comply with new laws and regulations passed by the state that add complexity to the property tax system,~~ ACCG proposes that the General Assembly provide a dedicated revenue source to fund these services. ~~appropriate additional funds to the Local Government Services Division of the Department of Revenue.~~

Digest Preparation Efficiency and Simplification –Over the years, new laws and policies have made it very difficult and in some cases impossible for counties to submit their digests on-time. When digests are not approved on-time, counties, schools and cities are not able to collect their taxes in a timely manner, forcing many local governments to use their revenue reserves or borrow money. The taxpayer ultimately suffers because they have to pay the interest costs on the borrowed money or lost interest on county reserve funds. Taxpayers may also not be able to get their local property taxes deducted from their income taxes in the current year.
To help counties submit their digest on time, ACCG recommends the following actions be taken by the General Assembly:

- Move the deadline for submitting the tax digest from August 1 to September 1
- Authorize counties through an intergovernmental agreement to share staff resources in their assessor's office or create a regional appraisal office.
- Require the 5 year history to be published one week prior to the setting of the county millage rate instead of two weeks

DOR Penalties for Tax Digest Non-Compliance – Georgia Law provides for stiff penalties against county governments for deficiencies found in the annual tax digest. One is commonly known as the ¼ mil recovery and the other is a $5 per parcel penalty. Given the ongoing issues in the real estate market, new laws that have changed the definition of fair market value, and the law mandating value limits for prior year sales, the process used by the Georgia Department of Audits (DOA) to measure digest compliance is flawed and unpredictable. ACCG requests the Legislature eliminate the ¼ mill recovery since the state will no longer collect an ad valorem tax and enact a five year moratorium on the $5 per parcel penalty ~~both of these penalties on local governments allowing time for the real estate market to begin to stabilize and the DOA~~to allow the Department of Audits time to develop a more predictable methodology for measuring digest compliance.

Public Notification of Tax Increase– The tax increase notice required under the Taxpayer Bill of Rights and the required five-year history has created greater confusion about tax increases for the public. To promote public notification of tax increases, ACCG requests that the notification required by the Taxpayer Bill of Rights and the five-year history be replaced with one annual notification that is simple for the taxpayer to understand. Annually, before the millage rate is adopted each local government should conduct one public hearing. These hearings are an opportunity for the public to receive information and justification of setting the millage rate at the proposed level. The school boards should reimburse the county for the loss of any receiver commissions if the school fails to submit its millage rate to the county on time.

Limitation on Property Reassessments – Georgia's current property assessment practices and standards strive to ensure that property taxes are assessed on a fair and equitable basis according to value. However, this method of property assessment is sometimes perceived as unpredictable and unfair when counties do not continually reassess all property annually or when there are dramatic differences in increased property value from one area of the county to the next. To address local perceptions of fairness in the assessment process, county commissioners should be authorized to establish limitations on property reassessments and given maximum flexibility to structure the assessment limitation to address their community's needs. This flexibility should include the ability to establish the classes of property that are eligible for the assessment limitation, the annual inflationary adjustment for each class of eligible property, and any income or age restrictions. ACCG asks the General Assembly to call for a constitutional amendment that would grant the authority for each county to choose their form of assessment limitation if local elected officials decide one is needed. ACCG does not favor a uniform statewide assessment limitation because each county is unique in its growth patterns and property composition and therefore needs the flexibility to create a local policy on limiting property assessment growth.

~~**Limitations on One-Year Transaction Value Cap for Assessments** – Recently passed legislation requiring the assessment on a recently sold piece of property to be capped at no higher than the transaction amount for the year following the transaction, has caused some problems with uniformity of assessments and the shifting of the tax burden from many recently purchased properties to the rest of the property owners of the county. ACCG is particularly concerned with transactions classified as "Loss-Share", where the banks or government sponsored agencies sell properties to individuals at severely discounted rates, and then collect the difference from the federal government (FDIC) between the sale value and the true fair market value of the property after the transaction takes place. ACCG believes including these types of transactions was not the intent of the legislature and asks that the legislature act to exclude these types of transactions from the one-year transaction value cap.~~

Three Year Assessment Lock – ACCG believes there is confusion as to the interpretation of how the limitations to assessment increases outlined in 48-5-299(c) are applied by counties and by the taxpayers. ACCG calls on the General Assembly to adopt further defining language to clarify that the three year lock only applies when the value is lowered through an appeal to the board of equalization, arbitrator, hearing officer, court or when the board of assessors stipulates it in a negotiated settlement with the taxpayer.

Manufactured Housing/ Mobile Homes – The ad valorem tax deadline for non-homesteaded, non-real property mobile homes should be moved from May 1st back to April 1st of each year. The deadline of May 1st reflects the old motor vehicle deadline required years ago. The mobile home bills are required to be mailed by February 1st and are due within 60 days like all other personal property ad valorem taxes. ACCG also requests fines for failure to display a current decal should be increased to a minimum of $100 with a $300 maximum per violation.

Forestland Protection Act Grants – In the State's 2014 supplemental budget additional revenue was appropriated to compensate the counties for the backlog of ~~During the first year of implementation the state failed to pay counties the~~ constitutionally guaranteed grants under the Forestland Protection Act. Counties appreciate the state's recent actions to become current on the grants they owe counites. However the grant appropriation made in the 2015 budget is significantly less than what will be owed. To sustain this constitutionally mandated grant program and prevent future backlogs, ACCG asks the Governor and the General Assembly to fully fund this program on an annual basis.~~In subsequent years the grants have been appropriated to the counties for the tax benefits incurred two years prior. Now that the state's budget situation is improving, ACCG asks the Governor and the General Assembly to eliminate this payment delinquency.~~

CUVA - In recent years, the Conservation Use Valuation Assessment (CUVA) has been subjected to exemptions from certain commercial uses and as the economy rebounds more attempted exemptions are likely to occur. In an effort to preserve the intent of CUVA while maximizing on economic development opportunities, ACCG supports giving counties the option of whether to allow a property owner to remove a portion of the property in the covenant to be used for industrial or commercial development in which its proposed use is certified by the county as being in the public interest. The county would have the option to recover costs associated with the removal from the covenant property up to an amount equal to twice the benefit received while the property was under the covenant.

Year's Support - Georgia is the only remaining state to allow spouses and minor children of a deceased, with or without a will, to petition for real property to be set aside from the estate which allows for all property taxes in arrears as well as those due during the year of the petition to be exempted. While this Civil War era law was originally intended to protect the widow of a fallen soldier from losing their home, current practices have broadly applied the provision to all real property including vacation homes and investment or commercial real estate. This broad application impacts county tax digests by allowing people to be exempted from property taxes for not only their homestead, but also their business or investment properties. Therefore, ACCG urges the General Assembly to update the law by limiting the real property eligible to be set aside for the tax exemption to homestead property.

Property Tax Administration – The administration of the property tax is performed by the county for local governments and some authorities and special districts. To ensure administrative costs remain low and the process is efficient for the taxpayer, ACCG asks the General Assembly to:

- Authorize the tax commissioner with consent of the taxpayer to send tax bills electronically;
- Authorize the use of the most applicable proposed millage rate on the annual assessment notice;
- Require a settlement conference between the taxpayer and the board of assessors prior to an appeal to superior court; and
- Require the fair market value of real and personal property to be shown on the PT 61 real estate transfer form to help counties comply with the one year value cap required by law.

IRP - Under the previous International Registration Plan (IRP) system, counties received revenue based on the trucks registered in their county, whereas the new formula distributes the statewide revenue based on the size of a county's total digest. This change to the IRP distribution formula will likely reduce this source of revenue to some counties while increasing it for others, despite a predicted increase in the total revenue received statewide. In an effort to establish a more equitable distribution formula, ACCG urges the General Assembly to consider a distribution formula that provides a hold harmless provision for counties based on the last distribution under the old formula, and then distributing additional revenues based on a county's total digest.

Boards of Equalization – The BOE provides a property taxpayer with an independent review of the value set by the Board of Assessors. Sometimes that taxpayer does not receive an appropriate review by the BOE because of the BOE's lack of knowledge or inappropriate behavior. To ensure that property owners are treated fairly by the BOE, ACCG ask the General Assembly to:

- Authorize the Clerk of Superior Court to investigate complaints against the BOE;
- Authorize the Grand Jury to remove members of the BOE at the request of the Clerk of Superior Court when evidence exists that the BOE member has not received the required training or fails to properly preform his or her duties;
- Require BOE members to complete an additional 20 hours of training after every three year term;
- Require the Department of Revenue to publish a manual for the BOE and update it annually.

SALES AND USE TAX REFORM

Sales Tax Administration – Local governments in Georgia are required to pay the state 1 percent of all local sales taxes to defray the cost of administration. In addition, the state earns millions of dollars in interest on local sales tax proceeds. This revenue goes into the State's General Fund and becomes part of the state's budget revenues. The state has only allocated approximately $19 million annually back to the Department of Revenue for collection, processing, and audits and compliance of local sales taxes. ACCG believes that local sales tax revenue could be increased if the state utilized more of the local administrative fee to perform compliance audits. By generating more revenue from our existing sales taxes, counties would not be under as much pressure to raise property taxes. The state would also benefit from the increased audits, since the state's sales tax would be included. On average, each new auditor returns revenues that exceed eight times their cost. ACCG asks the General Assembly to dedicate the entire administrative fee and interest earned on local sales taxes to support the state's efforts in collecting local sales tax. This appropriation should be an enhancement to the sales tax division budget and should not replace existing funds. Local revenues not used to assist the state in collecting local sales taxes should be disbursed back to the local governments.

Sales Tax Exemptions– ACCG opposes sales tax exemptions for special interests. These exemptions erode the sales tax base and create more tax volatility. Most counties rely on sales tax as a primary revenue source for capital projects and property tax relief. Without a stable sales tax system counties will experience difficulty in budgeting for capital projects and have to rely more heavily on property tax to fund county services. ACCG further opposes sales tax caps and thresholds because they add to the complexity of the sales tax system and will make it more difficult for Georgia to require companies located outside of Georgia to collect sales tax on purchases made by Georgia residents over the internet or through catalogues.

Homestead Option Sales Tax (HOST): Allow for All Counties – The HOST tax is a 1 percent county sales tax, the proceeds of which are used to fund a homestead exemption to reduce or eliminate the county property tax levy on homeowners. However, due to limitations in state law, HOST is only available to the handful of counties that do not have a Local Option Sales Tax (LOST). ACCG recommends removal of this impediment so that any county can choose any two of the three sales tax options available: HOST, LOST or SPLOST. Furthermore, ACCG requests that the existing HOST law be amended to allow counties, at their discretion, to use any revenue remaining, after the county has funded a 100 percent homestead exemption with less than 80 percent of the revenue reserved for the exemption, to fund additional capital projects and the maintenance and operations of any HOST projects. ACCG also asks the General Assembly to authorize counties to call for a single referendum to replace their LOST with a HOST and begin providing the HOST tax relief to homeowners in the same year that the voters approve the referendum.

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) – In 2004 the SPLOST law was amended to require counties to include cities in their SPLOST referenda. Although the new law ensures more city projects will receive funding, it also recognizes that counties have service delivery responsibilities to the entire county and the capital projects supporting these services should be given first priority in the SPLOST referendum. Under the new law counties have experienced ambiguity in the interpretation of some provisions. To give counties and cities clear guidance and minimize conflict between counties and cities over future SPLOST referendums and to provide more flexibility in the use of SPLOST funds, ACCG asks the General Assembly to make the following changes to the SPLOST law:

- Require cities to submit their project list to the county or lose their opportunity to participate in the referendum;
- Clarify that repayment of debt on a courthouse, administrative building, or jail qualifies for the level one category;
- Clarify that schools shall use ESPLOST to pay for road improvements and utilities necessary for the construction of new schools and access to such schools;
- Allow up to 15% of the SPLOST revenues to be used for maintenance activities on facilities formerly or currently built with SPLOST if approved by the voters; ~~and~~
- Allow local governments to include in the SPLOST referendum a request for a percentage of revenues to be held in reserve for unexpected emergency capital repairs;
- Include public hospitals in the level one category; and
- Authorize counties to borrow funds from their SPLOST account on a short-term basis. Such loans shall be repaid by the end of the calendar year and shall be backed by the full faith and credit of the counties.

Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) – LOST renegotiations continue to be highly contentious and in many cases damage county / city relations and place a drain on taxpayer resources. To ease the burden of future LOST renegotiations on counties and cities and to ensure that the LOST revenues are providing an equitable distribution of property tax relief to all property taxpayers, ACCG asks the General Assembly to reenact the original LOST formula through a constitutional amendment as an alternative for counties and cities if they cannot reach a consensus on LOST through an intergovernmental agreement. This formula would divide the LOST between cities and counties based upon population and require each local government to use its share of the LOST proceeds to provide property tax relief to the population they received credit for under the formula. ACCG also asks the General Assembly to require all LOST proceeds to be used for property tax reduction and clearly shown on the property tax bill as a credit against the amount of property taxes owed.

Sales Tax to Offset Property Tax – Counties support more options and additional flexibility to utilize local sales tax to further reduce their reliance on property tax. On average, about 22% percent of a county's revenues come from sales tax. Property taxes make up 40 percent or more of the counties revenues. Additional sales tax revenues could be generated by expanding the sales tax base. Georgia currently has 110 exemptions in the sales tax code reducing the potential local sales tax revenue by $2,046.9 million. Georgia also only taxes approximately 36 services out of a potential 168 services. The service sector is the fastest growing segment of the economy yet is largely exempt from sales tax. Counties can only levy up to two percent county sales tax and may participate in an additional one percent regional sales tax for transportation. ACCG asks the General Assembly to help counties reduce their reliance on property tax by expanding the existing sales tax base through reductions in exemptions and including services. Commissioners should also be granted greater flexibility to determine the appropriate local sales tax rate for their county.

Georgia Agriculture Tax Exemption (GATE) – At the beginning of 2013 the GATE program was implemented to allow agriculture producers and the businesses that support them to buy products used in their business sales tax exempt. Although this program consolidates many exemptions that were already in law, it also greatly expanded the types of products that are exempt and who is eligible for the exemption. So far, over 27,000 GATE cards have been issued and many of these were issued to out-of-state businesses. This program is having a significant impact on local sales tax revenues and the broad language in the law invites abuse of the exemption. To help eliminate abuse of the GATE program, ACCG asks the General Assembly to take the following actions:

- Provide a clear definition of agriculture producer and eliminate the exemption for businesses that provide services to agriculture producers.
- Move the application for the program from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Revenue.
- Require the applicant for the program to file the approved IRS schedule or form or other documentation to prove farm activity. The applicant should also provide a social security or tax id number that can be used to cross reference their income tax return.
- Require the applicant to submit a primary NAICS code that is identical to the one used on their income tax return.

Situs of Taxable Transactions – For businesses to accurately determine the proper sales tax allocation to each county, state law should clearly prescribe a uniform method for businesses to identify the county where the transaction occurs. To provide clear guidance in the law ACCG asks the General Assembly to make the following amendments:

- Require the Department of Revenue rate and boundary database to include information at the street address level in addition to the 9 digit zip code when this information is provided to DOR by a county or city in an approved format.
- Require the vendor to use the customer's physical address instead of a P.O. Box.

Disclosure of Local Sales Tax Information – Confidentiality laws greatly limit the information that the Department of Revenue can share with local governments about their sales tax collections. Without this sharing of information between the state and local levels of government it is difficult to determine when errors, under reporting, misuse of exemptions and tax avoidance have occurred. Local officials and staff are the most knowledgeable about their local businesses and the local economy and should be able to work in partnership with DOR to make sure local sales taxes are collected and remitted accurately. To create this partnership, ACCG asks the General Assembly to authorize DOR to share taxpayer information with designated local officials that have entered into a confidentiality contract with the department. These records would continue to be exempt from public disclosure and could only be discussed with local elected officials in executive session.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Revenue Collection Enforcement– With the exception of fees collected by counties operating solid waste handling facilities, there is no general law expressly authorizing the means by which counties may enforce collection and payment of fees lawfully owed to a county in exchange for services provided. ACCG recommends that counties be authorized to enforce collection of taxes, fees and assessments in the same manner the state enforce its tax collections. Such authorization should include garnishment and debt setoff, which would allow county governments to offset overdue individual debts against state income tax returns. In particular, the legislature should authorize counties to collect fees, such as stormwater utility fees, as a separate line item on property tax bills and further authorize enforcement by placing a lien against the property subject to the fees. Furthermore, the General Assembly should authorize counties to delegate the collection and enforcement duties to any appropriate county official. These enforcement tools would protect faithful taxpayers who, under current practice, are forced to shoulder the burden created by delinquent taxpayers.

County Officials' Funds - Full Accounting – County commissioners, as trustees of the people, have a fiduciary duty to properly oversee and account for revenues received by all officials of the county, including constitutional officers. As such, the law should be amended to make it clear that all funds received by any county official from whatever source—including confiscated funds and property—must be deposited in the general fund or other appropriate fund of the county on a monthly basis with all such funds being appropriated and audited in accordance with state and federal law.

Titling Recreational Vehicles and Aircraft to Ensure Tax Compliance–It is difficult for counties to ensure the proper sales taxes and ad valorem taxes are remitted on recreational vehicles (e.g. ATVs and boats) and aircraft because these vehicles are not tracked. The lack of uniformity in sales tax collections places Georgia dealers at a competitive disadvantage with out of state dealers and private sellers. ACCG ask the General Assembly to help counties track these vehicles by requiring them to be titled and remove the sales tax and annual ad valorem tax in lieu of placing these vehicles under the new title tax system. This change would benefit the owners, sellers and insurers of these types of vehicles and simplify the tax administration.

OTHER LOCAL REVENUE ISSUES

Tax and Expenditure Limitations – Georgia, like many other states, is considering a constitutional amendment to cap the increase in state and local revenues from one year to the next. ACCG is opposed to formula driven, artificially set caps because they undermine the long standing fiscal responsibility expected of elected officials. These caps would likely force the state to pass down more unfunded mandates on local governments, cut state revenues shared with local governments and keep local officials from providing services demanded by their constituents. The impact of a tax cap set at the state level would be dramatically different for each county. Tax policies should be made at the local level, and counties should be given greater flexibility to tailor a tax system that best meets their unique circumstances.

Financial Institutions Business License Taxes– ACCG recognizes the importance of financial institutions in Georgia's communities and encourages their growth. In addition to providing capital for community development, financial institutions help fund government operations through the payment of business license taxes. Currently, this tax is levied at .25 percent of gross receipts. However, to ensure that these taxes are properly credited to the appropriate counties, taxes on gross receipts should be distributed to each local government based on their relative share of assets and liabilities produced by the financial institution within their county.

Insurance Premium Tax – To further reduce reliance on ad valorem taxes**,** ACCG recommends that: (1) the state distribute revenues within 30 days after collection and pay counties interest on overdue tax distributions, in addition to providing records disclosing any interest paid to the state as a result of investing county insurance tax proceeds; and (2) counties should have the same flexibility as cities with regard to the use of insurance tax proceeds.

Right-of-Way Occupancy Fee – Unlike cities, counties do not charge utilities a franchise fee for locating in their right-of-way. Instead, utilities have access to the county right-of-way completely free of charge. When counties have to move utilities before widening or rerouting roads, provide public safety response to protect the public from damaged utilities, repair damaged roads and right-of-way caused by utility excavation and comply with state mandated utility locates, the county property taxpayers have to pick up the financial burden for these costs. To take this burden off property taxpayers and require utilities to pay for their "costs of doing business," ACCG asks the General Assembly to allow counties to levy a right-of-way occupancy fee on utility services to compensate them for costs associated with providing utilities access to public right-of-way. Proceeds of the fee should be used to pay for county right-of-way costs that would otherwise be paid for out of property taxes.

Title Agent Fees – ACCG recommends that the title fee be raised from $18.00 to $20.00 and the fee for a replacement title be raised from $8.00 to $20.00. All of the additional funds should be paid over to the county to help pay for the operations and salaries of the tax commissioner's office. The county is now providing all of the input into the tag and title system, but yet received no increase in compensation. Currently the county receives only $.50 for each title processed and $1.00 for each tag processed.

Alcoholic Beverage Tax – The alcoholic beverage taxes counties charge for distilled spirits, beer and wine have not been adjusted since the early 80's. ACCG asks the General Assembly to adjust these taxes for inflation using the Consumer Price Index.

Telecommunications Excise Tax - Telecommunication services are a rapidly growing and evolving sector of the economy. The current tax structure does not provide equity among service providers because they are taxed differently based upon the type of technology they use to deliver their service. Local government revenues on telecommunication companies have been flat or in decline because they have not adequately captured many of the newly emerging technologies. To reduce distortions in the marketplace and to provide for a tax base that grows with the economy. ACCG asks the General Assembly to eliminate the current franchise fees and taxes on telecommunication service providers and replace these revenues with a 3.5% local telecommunications excise tax. The local revenues should be split between the counties and the cities based upon a population formula.

Redirection of Local Fees - ACCG supports the legislative intent for various fees collected at the state level to go toward their statutorily-designated purposes. Fees purportedly established to fund the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund, Solid Waste Trust Fund, Indigent Defense, and Peace Officers and Prosecutors Training Fund, among others, are charged to and paid by businesses, local governments and the citizens of Georgia. However, to the detriment of local governments and the communities they serve, revenues from these funds have been substantially redirected over the past decade to help balance the state's budget. To end the practice of these fees becoming taxes, ACCG urges the General Assembly to either:

- Adopt a constitutional amendment creating a constitutional trust fund to truly dedicate these fees;
- Adopt a constitutional amendment authorizing the General Assembly to establish dedicated trust funds, then having to vote on redirecting any monies to the state's General Fund;
- Establish a mechanism whereby these fees are collected and dispersed at the local level, not subject to the State's appropriations process; or
- ~~Eliminate the fees or reduce them proportionally to the amount that actually goes toward their statutorily-designate purpose.~~

ACCG opposes the adoption of any additional "fees" which impact local governments until the issue of redirecting these monies to the State's General Fund has been effectively resolved through any of the above measures.