

ACCG's 2019 Legislative Service Awards

Representative Patty Bentley – Over the past two years, as a member of the Georgia House Rural Development Council, Representative Patty Bentley helped spearhead efforts to help revitalize Georgia's rural counties in the areas of healthcare, broadband and economic development, among others. Bentley, a former Taylor County Commissioner, maintains a close relationship with ACCG and her counties, frequently seeking feedback on issues prior to voting on them. She remains well respected for working across the aisle to formulate sound public policy for the benefit of the entire state; has demonstrated impeccable strength and courage in the face of overwhelming challenges; and serves as a role model to all by serving the public's interest.

Representative Barry Fleming – Representative Barry Fleming, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and former Columbia County commissioner, worked tirelessly over the past two years to solicit county input on revising Georgia's election laws and voting system. He ensured counties, those who run the state's elections, were at the table; spearheaded legislation to replace Georgia's outdated voting equipment; and worked with the Governor's Office to secure \$150 million in state funding to achieve this purpose. Fleming also worked with ACCG to enhance SB 171, the legislation providing for constitutional officer pay raises; create the statewide business court system; and ensure that counties were given the same exemption from the mandatory e-filing fee that was afforded to the Attorney General and state agencies.

Representative Tom McCall – Representative Tom McCall, a legislative veteran and Chairman of the House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee, has always maintained a constructive working relationship with ACCG policy staff and his counties. In 2019, Chairman McCall sponsored HB 322, an ACCG initiative that increased the threshold by which local governments must advertise bids or proposals on the Georgia Procurement Registry from \$10,000 to \$100,000. McCall also sponsored HB 208, authorizing local governments to extend their contracts for utility services from 10 to 20 years.

Representative Jay Powell – House Rules Chairman Jay Powell was primarily responsible for the House holding legislation in 2018 that would have significantly preempted local government right-of-way for the then near-unregulated placement of small cell poles and equipment. This directly led to the negotiations among ACCG, GMA, AT&T and Verizon over the 2018-2019 interim that resulted in compromise language, SB 66, being passed in 2019 with the support of all groups. Powell also authored HR 164, his annual effort to help restore monies to Georgia's "trust funds". As Rules Committee Chairman, Powell assisted in amending several bills that would have negatively impacted counties and remains open to ACCG's feedback on an array of issues.

Representative Darlene Taylor - Representative Darlene Taylor, Chair of the House Information and Audits Committee, has long been a stalwart of home rule and local control, looking out for the interests of the cities and counties she represents. This is particularly important as she serves on the House Governmental Affairs and Agriculture Committees, which hear many significant bills impacting local government. Taylor is to be commended for her opposition to HB 302, which would have preempted cities and counties from adopting design standards on single family homes and duplexes. ACCG greatly appreciates her attention to detail, facts and reasonable solutions as she deliberates the impact of bills before her.

Senator Matt Brass – As Chairman of the Senate Reapportionment and Redistricting Committee, Senator Matt Brass met with ACCG prior to the 2019 legislative session soliciting input on SB 177, which imposes safeguards on local governments creating and submitting local reapportionment plans. When the House stripped and replaced Brass's SB 162 with language preempting local government regulation of short-term rentals, he refused to call the bill back up in the Senate, effectively letting it rest for the session. These were among the several bills and issues on which the Senator and ACCG worked together in 2019.

Senator Frank Ginn – Senator Frank Ginn chairs the Senate Economic Development Committee. A former county manager and longtime partner with Georgia's local governments, Ginn was instrumental in helping address several of ACCG's concerns with SB 177, mandating an additional 5-percent pay raise for local constitutional officers. While the bill ultimately passed, Chairman Ginn helped install safeguards such as delaying the effective date until January 1, 2021, ensuring that past cost of living adjustments were rolled up into their new base salary, and other measures making the bill more palatable for county budgets. Ginn also sought ACCG input on a host of issues including gambling proposals, local control on alcohol sales, various home rule usurpations and regulations governing the placement of small cells in local government right-of-way. Ginn continues to provide the voice for home rule in the Georgia Senate.

Senator Steve Gooch – Senator Gooch, the Senate's Majority Whip and former Lumpkin County commissioner, spent a considerable amount of time the past two legislative sessions sponsoring and advocating for rural broadband initiatives. Gooch authored SB 402 (the Achieving Connectivity Everywhere Act) in 2018 that set the framework for Georgia's Broadband Deployment Initiative. In 2019, Gooch sponsored SB 2, authorizing the state EMCs to provide broadband service. Lastly, while the Senator's bill to provide the legal framework for e-scooters to operate in Georgia did not pass, he facilitated discussions between the e-scooter industry and local governments that ultimately led to a study committee being created on the topic.