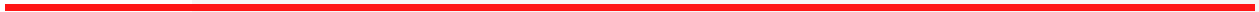


2024

LEGISLATIVE SESSION DEBRIEF





Common Cause Georgia is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization that works to strengthen public participation in our democracy and ensure that public officials and public institutions are accountable and responsive to citizens. Through a powerful combination of coalition building, lobbying, technical assistance, litigation, grassroots organizing, policy development, research, and public education, we spotlight local, state, and national issues that affect every Georgian.

Legislative Advocacy

Common Cause Georgia ("CCGA") monitored the activity of the Georgia General Assembly during the legislative session that ran from January 8, 2024 - March 28, 2024. We submitted written testimony and gave public comment at committee hearings on proposed bills dealing with voting and elections, redistricting, ethics, and government transparency. We also provided questions, talking points, and amendment language to legislators and helped to keep the public and media informed of relevant legislation.

Notable Bills

Common Cause Georgia monitored a number of bills during the most recent legislative session, lending its voice in support or opposition where needed.

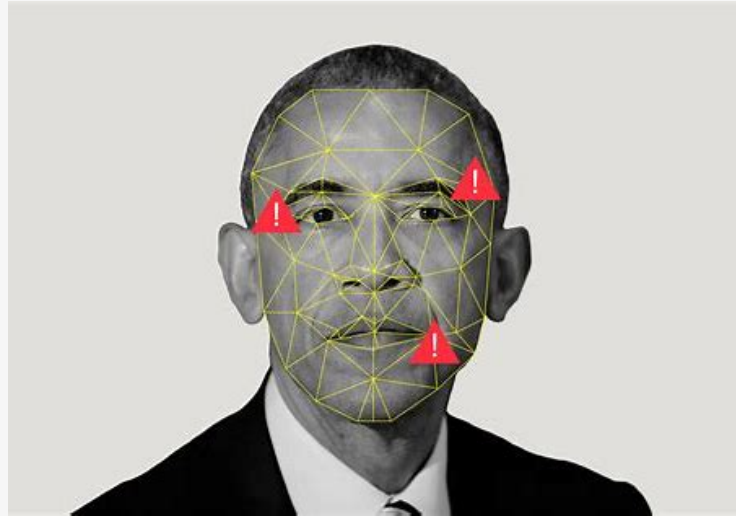
BILL	CCGA POSITION	SESSION OUTCOME	BILL STATUS
S.B. 414 DONOR PRIVACY BILL, BUT APPLIES TO 501(C)(4) POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NOT ONLY TRADITIONAL 501(C)(3) CHARITABLE ORGNAIZATIONS	EXPRESSED CONCERN	PASSED	WILL BE SIGNED INTO LAW
H.B. 986 BILL TO ADD SOME REGULATIONS AROUND THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIEGENCE IN CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS	SUPPORT	TABLED	MAY BE CALLED BACK TO COMMITTEE NEXT SESSION
S.B. 301 THIS BILL WOULD REMOVE FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN JURISDICTIONS WITH A "SANCTUARY POLICY"	OPPOSE	NOT PASSED	MAY BE CALLED BACK TO COMMITTEE NEXT SESSION
S.B. 358 STARTED AS A BILL TO GIVE SEB AUTHORITY TO INVESTIGATE SOS; SUBSTITUTE MADE CHANGES TO CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS	EXPRESSED CONCERN	NOT PASSED	MAY BE CALLED BACK TO COMMITTEE NEXT SESSION
S.B. 332 ·UPDATES REQUIEREMENTS FOR THE PROSECUTOR OVERSIGHT COMMISSION, A NEW BODY WITH POWER TO DISCIPLINE OR REMOVE APPOINTED OR ELECTED DISTRICT ATTORNEYS OR SOLICITORS-GENERAL, TO REMOVE THE SUPREME COURT'S OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVELY REACTIVATE THE COMMISSION	EXPRESSED CONCERN	PASSED	WILL BE SIGNED INTO LAW

Elections Bills

We are still seeing efforts by the state legislature to restrict access to the ballot and the use of underhanded tactics employed to pass such legislation in the face of widespread opposition.

BILL	CCGA POSITION	SESSION OUTCOME	BILL STATUS
S.B. 355 BAN ON RANKED CHOICE VOTING	OPPOSE	NOT PASSED	MAY BE CALLED BACK TO COMMITTEE NEXT SESSION
H.B. 974 COMBINATION OF ELECTION BILLS; ADDS A WATERMARK TO BALLOTS, CODIFIES THE SEC. OF STATE'S BALLOT IMAGE LIBRARY, AND ADDS CONTESTS TO BE SUBJECT TO RISK LIMITING AUDITS	OPPOSE	PASSED	WILL BE SIGNED INTO LAW
S.B. 189 OMNIBUS ELECTIONS BILL, INCLUDING PROVISIONS CONTAINING: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CHANGES TO RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS• IMPOSING ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS ON COUNTY ELECTION WORKERS WITHOUT ACCOUNTING FOR THEIR LIMITED RESOURCES AND THE COSTS TO IMPLEMENT• CHANGES TO PROBABLE CAUSE TO SUSTAIN VOTER CHALLENGES, OPENING THE DOOR FOR MORE MASS CHALLENGES	OPPOSE	PASSED	WILL BECOME LAW UNLESS GOVERNOR VETOES
H.B. 1207 ORIGINAL BILL WAS TO ADD A MECHANISM FOR CANDIDATE TO PROOFREAD BALLOTS, BUT PROVISIONS ADDED TO REQUIRE ELECTION WORKERS TO BE CITIZENS, EXPRESSLY EXPAND ACCESS OF POLL WATCHERS, AND ADDS POLL WATCHERS TO CODE SECTION ABOUT ELECTION INTERFERENCE	OPPOSE	PASSED	WILL BE SIGNED INTO LAW
S.B. 1312 PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION SCHEDULE FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS AND TERMS	OPPOSE	PASSED	WILL BE SIGNED INTO LAW

H.B. 986 and the Rise Artificial Intelligence in Campaign Ads



ADVOCACY

During the recent session, a bill was introduced to address the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence in campaign advertisements and the rise of “deep fakes” that risk confusing voters and increasing the spread of disinformation. The bill ultimately did not pass, but through our lobbying efforts we urged the addition of an injunctive relief provision to stop the proliferation of such ads and, most importantly, a disclosure requirement to make it known on an ad when A.I. was used to manipulate the sound, video, or image depicted. We will keep working to see this passed in a future session.

EDUCATION

Common Cause Georgia strives to educate voters about disinformation and the need to be critical of media content. This is especially true with the use of A.I. on the rise. There remains a great deal of mis-and disinformation about the security of our elections and the reliability of election results. We will work to combat these narratives in the lead up and aftermath of the 2024 election.



S.B. 189

ANOTHER ELECTIONS OMNIBUS BILL

The process by which this bill passed was another example of the legislature pushing things through at the last minute and ignoring public concerns. The bill adds new, unnecessary burdens for election offices without accounting for additional funding to comply with the new requirements. The new residency requirements for voter registration do not account for many valid reasons voters have to be transient and adds steps for eligible voters to make sure they are still registered. This bill could also open the door for even more mass challenges, make them easier to sustain, and disenfranchise voters.

What can WE do about S.B. 189?

MITIGATE

Common Cause Georgia continues to advocate to the State Elections Board about the need for more guidance on how counties should deal with voter challenges. We hope that if the board promulgates rules, the damage of mass challenges will be reduced for voters and that counties will have to spend less time and fewer resources in dealing with challenges.

EDUCATE

We will work to help keep voters updated and informed about the ways this law will impact them, from changes to the requirements for the voter registration to be up-to-date to changes to how their ballot might look in coming election years.

LEGISLATE

We will gather information and be ready if necessary to go back to the state legislature in future sessions to ask them to provide clear provisions on this law or better account for the needs it creates in the state budget.

Prosecuting Attorneys Qualifications Commission

Last year the legislature passed a bill establishing a Prosecuting Attorneys Qualifications Commission. This newly created body is an oversight commission with the authority to investigate and remove local prosecutors. The original legislation gave the Supreme Court of Georgia the authority to approve the rules of the commission, but the Court ruled they did not have the Constitutional authority to do so. S.B. 332 passed this session removes this step from the process, so the commission and its accompanying rules and authority will proceed.

Lawsuit

Since the passage of S.B. 332 and its signing into law by Governor Kemp, Georgia district attorneys have filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the commission. District Attorney Jared Williams from the Augusta Judicial Circuit said, "This law is not about oversight; it's about overturning the will of voters. It creates a dangerous barrier between public officials and the communities we serve, discouraging transparency and undermining our freedom of speech." Common Cause Georgia will be monitoring the progress of the lawsuit and communicating to our members about the outcomes.



H.B. 1312

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION RACES

The Georgia Public Service Commission has exclusive power to determine the rates for services like electric, gas, and telecommunications services. It is meant “to balance Georgia citizens' need for reliable services and reasonable rates with the need for utilities to earn a reasonable return on investment.” There are five districts for members of the PSC, but they are elected at-large. Recently, a lawsuit challenged this statewide manner of electing the PSC members, alleging it dilutes the votes of black voters in Georgia in violation of the National Voting Rights Act. The District Court agreed, but the decision was overturned by the appellate court. This session, the General Assembly passed a bill that outlined upcoming statewide elections and terms for the PSC.

DISTRICT	ELECTION	TERM
1	Nov. 2028	until 2034
2	Nov. 2025	until 2030
3	Nov. 2025	until 2026
4	Nov. 2028	until 2034
5	Nov. 2026	until 2032

Transparency in the General Assembly



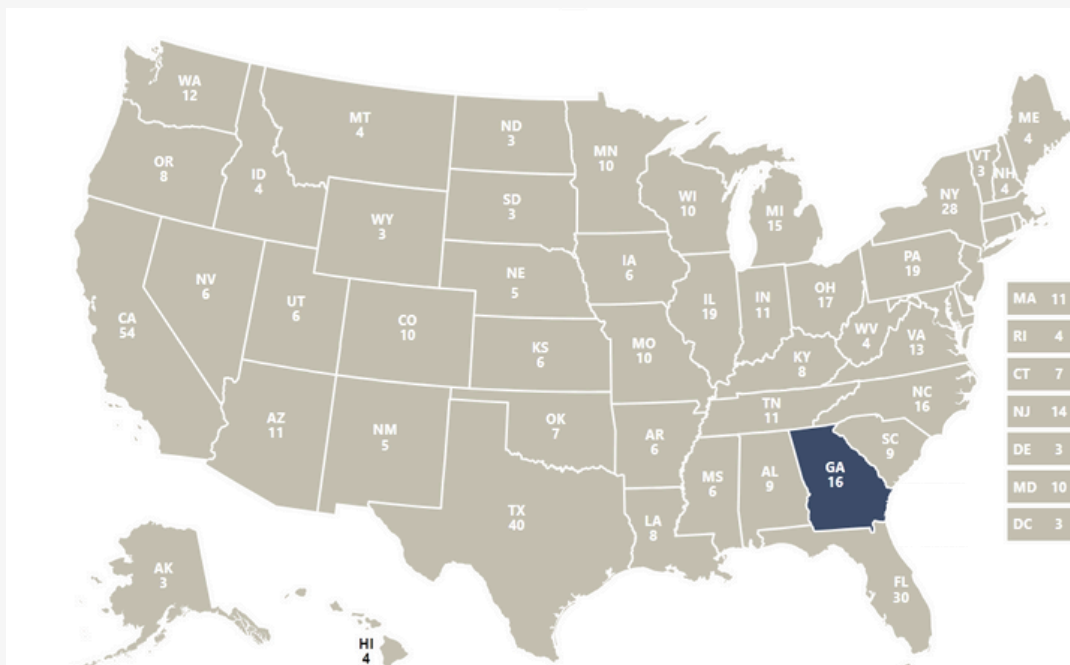
The 2024 session was no exception to the political maneuvering that has become common in the Georgia legislature.

The Georgia General Assembly is a public body and conducts the business of the Georgia public. Elected officials should allow the people of Georgia to exercise their right to participate in government proceedings, like committee hearings, where laws impacting Georgians are heard. Common Cause Georgia advocates for changes to increase transparency and public participation, such as the creation of an online portal for the public to use to upload testimony, comments, and other written documents for committees and extending the time frame for public comment to allow for more public input; requiring at least 24 hours' public notice of committee meetings and their content. Another important requirement to enforce is the accompaniment of fiscal notes with bills that would impose significant cost to enact. Per Title 28 of the Georgia Code, fiscal notes are to be provided with any bill that significantly impacts state revenues or expenditures. The legislature too often ignores this legal requirement that at minimum requires a formal waiver. Too many elections bills have been passed in recent years without fiscal notes, meaning the cost to enforce is not sufficiently considered in the state budget and passed onto counties.

Common Cause Georgia hopes to have candidates running for the Georgia legislature in 2024 sign a good governance pledge to indicate they will uphold more transparent practices next session.

Looking Ahead

2024 ELECTION



2024 is a presidential election year, meaning higher turnout across the country. Georgia will also elect members of Congress and the Georgia General Assembly, and a number of local offices. We can also expect a lot of national attention on Georgia given the role our state played in the 2020 election and its aftermath.

Common Cause Georgia is part of the national Election Protection coalition. In Georgia, we train volunteers at the polls throughout early voting and on election day. We work to monitor potential threats of election sabotage and to dispel disinformation. We also work in the post-election period to observe the processes that take place in each county to tabulate votes and certify election results.

We will continue to have conversations with election officials about how the laws that have passed since 2020, and especially this year, will affect them in 2024. There remains a lack of clarity about aspects of S.B. 202 passed in 2021 and S.B. 222 passed in 2023 and it is unclear the impact this year's S.B. 189 will have. An area of particular concern is voter challenges. S.B. 202 opened the door for mass challenges, which we have seen across many Georgia counties. S.B. 189 made some changes to the section of the statute about challenges and what constitutes probable cause, but it is unclear how this will be interpreted across Georgia's counties, and we will still urge the State Election Board to promulgate rules regarding voter challenges and procedures to handle them.

Staff & Team Members



Aunna Dennis
Executive Director

Mariana Carillo
Engagement
Organizer

Jovan Davis
Engagement
Organizer

Anne Gray Herring
Research & Policy
Analyst

We are a growing team, working to expand our efforts in Georgia. In addition to our in-state staff members, dedicated interns and fellows, contractors, and volunteers on the ground, we also have the resources of Common Cause's national organization, including a communications team, voting and elections staff, and a network of offices across the country so we can compare the laws and trends of Georgia to that of other states.