



Date: April 19, 2021

TO: The Honorable Brian P. Kemp, Governor
The Honorable Geoff Duncan, Lieutenant Governor
The Honorable David Ralston, Speaker of the House
Members, Georgia State Senate
Members, Georgia House of Representatives

FROM: The Undersigned Coalition of 16 Organizations

SUBJECT: Amend Georgia's Open Meetings Act

Governor Kemp, Lt. Gov. Duncan, Speaker Ralston, and Members of the Georgia General Assembly:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to amend Georgia's Open Meetings Act.

The passing of SB 202 "The Elections Integrity Act of 2021" out of the Legislature demonstrated the multitude of problems inherent in our General Assembly. The lack of transparency is a major concern for all Georgians. It is known that the "we the people" and transparency are pivotal in establishing a more unified union. The Georgia General Assembly is a public body and conducts the business of the Georgia public. Therefore, [Georgia's Open Meetings Act](#) should be amended to include meetings of the state of Georgia's General Assembly. In addition, we demand that the Georgia legislative body no longer be permitted to meet secretly and make decisions that impact large constituencies of the Georgia public. During this time of Covid, Georgians are sheltering in place and to keep ourselves and neighbors safe. This does not mean they should be shut out of meetings. If increased transparency is the goal, then the Legislature must amend Georgia's Open Meetings Act.

The bottom-line is this: General Assembly meetings are conducted to aid in the conduct of the people's business. Georgians have the right to witness the open conduct of their business by the General Assembly. Although some would argue that transparency is at the forefront, this couldn't be further from the truth. For illustrative purposes, last month the "Election Integrity Act of 2021" passed in the Georgia General Assembly. This bill was passed without the presence of the general public in the meeting room. Committee meetings on the bill were held with little or no notice to the public; the meetings were held at inconvenient times and were not streamed or recorded; the texts of amendments and substitutions were not made publicly available on the General Assembly website in a timely fashion. The "Election Integrity Act of 2021" imposes new ID requirements for vote-by-mail, restricts drop boxes for mail ballots, and

bans mobile voting places among many other things. These changes have been called “voter suppression on steroids.” Candidly, it should not have been passed in a room without an open meeting. We must maximize transparency and public participation in oversight of government.

Below you will an accurate depiction of transparency with an emphasis on three areas:

1. **Visibility:** Georgians should be able to engage and closely follow the work of their legislators. (I.E. Georgians should have access to Wednesday morning committee meetings via livestream access.)
2. **Accessibility:** Frankly, Georgians shouldn't be forced to put their health at risk to make their voices heard. Georgians deserve the right to testify virtually. Furthermore, we find the requirement for notarized public testimony during special pre-session hearings an absurd requirement that is both costly and inconvenient.
3. **Clarity:** Georgians deserve clear and consistent access to detailed agendas for every hearing and meeting. How can we be expected to follow the work of our legislators without sufficient notice of a meeting or hearing date? Georgians should not be notified of a change of plans upon the start of a meeting. Instead, meetings and/or hearings should be announced at least 48 hours in advance with an agenda.

In conclusion, it is our strong belief that irrespective of title, position, or status- all should be able to follow along with the government proceedings that affect us especially during this current global health crisis. It is the duty of the Georgia Legislature to act to protect this right. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

We, the undersigned organizations, are dedicated to expanding political participation for all Georgians, and **we urge you to stand with us in amending Georgia's Open Meeting Act.**

Onward,

1. Amplify Georgia
2. All Voting Is Local, Georgia
3. Common Cause Georgia
4. Fair Districts Georgia
5. Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda
6. Georgia Stand-Up
7. Georgia WAND Education Fund
8. New Georgia Project Action Fund

9. Planned Partnership for Southern Equity
10. Planned Parenthood Southeast Advocates
11. Progress Georgia
12. Rep Georgia Institute, Inc.
13. Spark Reproductive Justice NOW!, Inc.
14. Showing Up for Racial Justice-Atlanta
15. Women Engaged
16. Women Watch Afrika, Inc.