

FIELD REPORT : Q3 2020

# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY AND THE FREEDOM TO VOTE

 **BUSINESSFORWARD**  
FOUNDATION

# INTRODUCTION



This report looks at what businesses across Georgia have to say about voting rights, transparency in government, and keeping money out of politics. It is meant to serve as a resource for local, state, and Congressional officials and media.

These business leaders share a simple, but powerful, point: State officials passing laws to suppress the vote and protect special interests in Georgia are putting our remarkable record of attracting new investment and creating jobs at risk.

State legislators in Georgia introduced 29 bills this session that would have made voting more difficult. The slate of election laws included provisions to create stricter voter ID and notarization requirements, prohibit same day registration, and decrease the number of ballot drop-off locations.<sup>1</sup>

For years, large corporations and dark money groups have dominated politics and overshadowed the voices of voters and small business owners who understand the political and economic needs of their communities. The *For the People Act* would level the playing field and ensure a Georgia government that reflects voters' vision to prioritize local investments.

Business Forward has worked with more than 5,150 entrepreneurs, executives, and small business owners across Georgia. If you are interested in learning more, we encourage you to reach out at [info@businessfwd.org](mailto:info@businessfwd.org) and participate in one of our trainings.

## KEY THEMES FROM BUSINESS LEADERS ON DEMOCRACY REFORMS

### SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS WANT MONEY OUT OF POLITICS MORE THAN ANYONE.

We're tired of being asked for contributions — and tired of being criticized for the ones we give. The only people who like the current system are incumbents and entrenched, special interests. Our system will work better if we take big, dark money out of campaigns.

### TRANSPARENCY IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN BUSINESS. WE NEED MORE OF IT IN GOVERNMENT.

We're responsive to our stockholders, employees, and customers. Government should be more responsive to its citizens. Increased disclosure of political donations would ensure a government that listens to Main Street — not just big, corporate donors.

### IF WE ALLOW CORRUPTION IN ELECTIONS, IT WILL SPREAD TO THE REST OF GOVERNMENT.

Protecting the integrity of our elections is key to preventing corruption in government. Gerrymandering and voter suppression are both ways to stay in office. An official without fear of her next election is more likely to break the rules.

### WE BENEFIT FROM OPERATING IN THE WORLD'S "SAFE HAVEN" FOR BUSINESS. WE NEED TO PROTECT THAT.

Ignoring government corruption will make us look like the rest of the world, and that will make it harder for us to attract investment, open new markets, and create new jobs.

### OUR EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, AND SUPPLIERS WORK HARD EVERY DAY. WE SHOULDN'T MAKE IT HARDER TO VOTE.

Restrictive voter laws are messing with something that isn't broken. My employees manage long commutes, second jobs, night school, and family. They're not lazy. They're just busy — and responsible. We should make it easy for them to vote.

### RESTRICTIVE VOTER LAWS DIVIDE OUR COMMUNITIES, AND NO ONE WANTS TO INVEST IN DIVIDED COMMUNITIES.

States compete with one another for new investment and jobs, and companies look for a talented workforce, sound infrastructure, good schools, and a strong community. These election laws send the wrong signal and will turn off investors. Once you start losing bids, it gets harder to catch up.

# CORRUPTION AND RESTRICTIVE VOTING LAWS HIT GEORGIA WHERE IT HURTS — NEW INVESTMENT



Georgia enjoys the lowest cost of doing business and the most favorable regulatory environment in the country. It ranks just outside America's top 10 on population growth over the last decade and GDP performance in 2020. Georgia's economy has prospered for years because it has welcomed investors, workers, and their families.

But recent efforts by state legislators to suppress the vote and protect special interests threaten to divide our communities, make it harder for us to cooperate, and discourage new investment and jobs. Companies looking to invest in new cities — for example, by building a new lab or factory, or opening a new call center — tend to look for a talented workforce, good schools, sound infrastructure, and a strong community. These self-interested bills send a “closed for new business” message to the rest of the country.

**# OF ANTI-VOTER BILLS INTRODUCED: 29**

#1

LOWEST COST OF DOING BUSINESS (2020)<sup>2</sup>

#1

FAVORABLE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT (2020)<sup>3</sup>

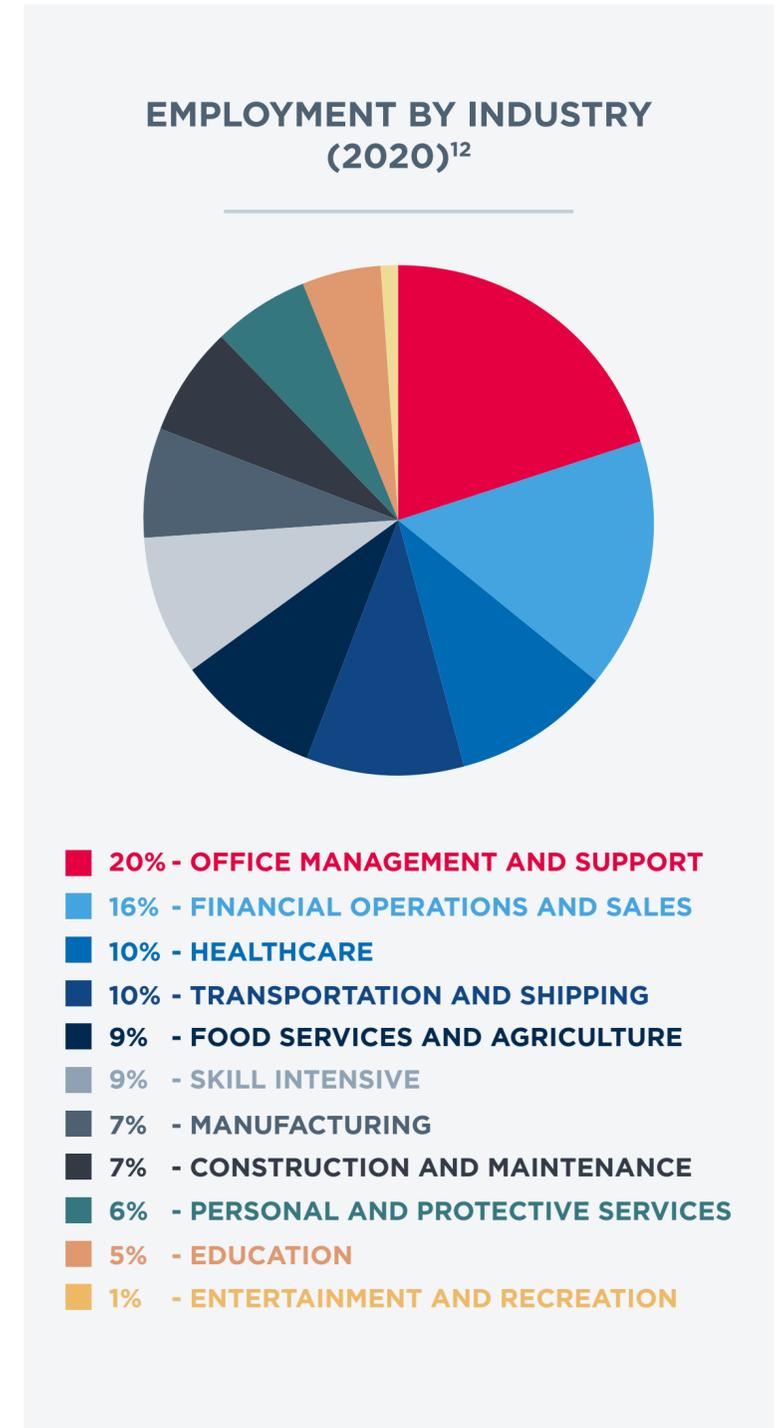
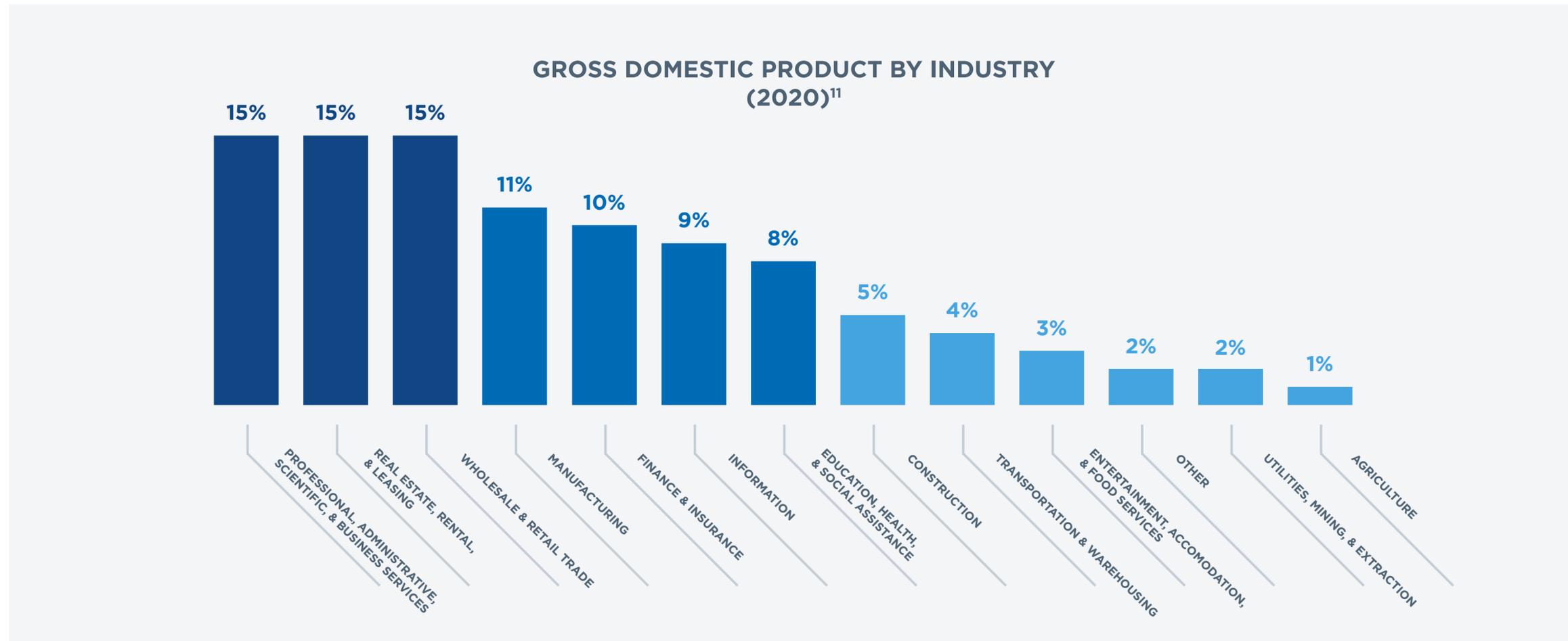
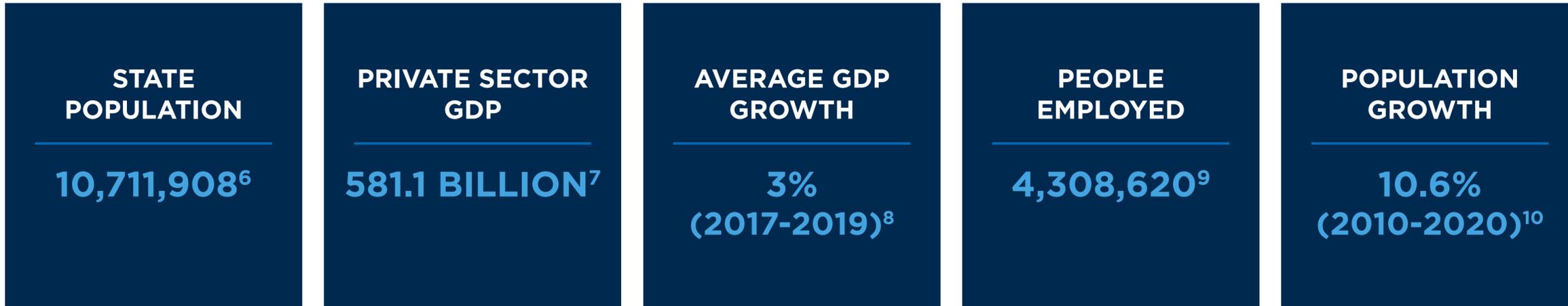
#11

BEST GDP PERFORMANCE (2020)<sup>4</sup>

#11

POPULATION GROWTH (2010-20)<sup>5</sup>

# A SNAPSHOT OF GEORGIA'S ECONOMY



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

AIG Insurance employs Georgians at its locations across the state, including an office in Atlanta.<sup>13</sup>

“ AIG denounces all efforts to restrict the constitutional right of Americans to vote... Election laws that layer unnecessary obstacles and barriers to the right to vote and that knowingly disenfranchise black, brown and other underrepresented groups, represent a significant step backward for all Americans.<sup>14</sup> ”

- PETER ZAFFINO  
CEO, AIG



American Express operates banks and offices throughout Georgia, including a central office in Atlanta.<sup>15</sup>

“ Ensuring equal and easy access to vote, for all those who are eligible to participate in each state, is critical to upholding the principles our country was founded upon. Unfairly limiting that right is wrong... As a company and leadership team, we support this message and stand against any efforts to suppress voting which is a fundamental right that belongs to all Americans.<sup>16</sup> ”

- STEPHEN J. SQUERI  
CHAIRMAN & CEO, AMERICAN EXPRESS



American Airlines has a major presence in the state, operating frequent flights to and from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.<sup>17</sup>

“ To make American’s stance clear: We are strongly opposed to this [anti-voter bill]... We value the democratic process and believe every eligible American should be allowed to exercise their right to vote, no matter which political party or candidate they support... Any legislation dealing with how elections are conducted must ensure ballot integrity and security while making it easier to vote, not harder.<sup>18</sup> ”

American Airlines 

Apple has six stores and 1,516 employees in Georgia, concentrated in Atlanta.<sup>19</sup>

“ Apple believes that, thanks in part to the power of technology, it ought to be easier than ever for every eligible citizen to exercise their right to vote. We support efforts to ensure that our democracy’s future is more hopeful and inclusive than its past.<sup>20</sup> ”

- TIM COOK  
CEO, APPLE



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Bank of America has 82 financial centers across the state, including 39 in the greater Atlanta area. On CNN, CEO Brian Moynihan explained that voter suppression should not be tolerated.<sup>21</sup>

“The right to vote should be distributed in the broadest sense and anything that goes against that should not be tolerated... it’s [the states’] decision, but if we had a standard we could hold people to, that would be good.”<sup>22</sup>

- BRIAN MOYNIHAN  
CEO, BANK OF AMERICA

**BANK OF AMERICA** 

Coca-Cola is headquartered in Atlanta and employs several thousand Georgians.<sup>23</sup>

“Voting is a foundational right in America, and we have long championed efforts to make it easier to vote. We want to be crystal clear and state unambiguously that we are disappointed in the outcome of the Georgia voting legislation. Throughout Georgia’s legislative session we provided feedback to members of both legislative chambers and political parties, opposing measures in the bills that would diminish or deter access to voting... Additionally, our focus is now on supporting federal legislation that protects voting access and addresses voter suppression across the country.”<sup>24</sup>

- JAMES QUINCEY  
CHAIRMAN & CEO, THE COCA-COLA COMPANY

*Coca-Cola*

Best Buy, one of the state’s major electronics retailers, employs Georgians at its 30 retail locations across the state. In early April, the company announced its opposition to anti-voter legislation.<sup>25</sup>

“An election cannot be free nor fair if every eligible voter is not given a full chance to vote, or if laws exist that make it harder to do so. To the extent that proposed pieces of legislation are designed to make it more difficult for eligible Americans to cast a ballot, we offer our strong opposition and urge legislators to vote no.”<sup>26</sup>

**BEST  
BUY** 

With 28 stores in Georgia and a long history of providing low-income families with Internet access via “Lift Zones,” Comcast has strong community partners in Georgia. Two of the company’s first Lift Zones were in the greater Atlanta area.<sup>27</sup>

“We believe that all Americans should enjoy equitable access to secure elections and we have long supported and promoted voter education, registration and participation campaigns across the country to achieve that goal. Efforts to limit or impede access to this vital constitutional right for any citizen are not consistent with our values.”<sup>28</sup>

  
**COMCAST**

# CASE STUDY: GEORGIA AND CIVIC ALLIANCE PROTECT VOTING ACCESS



The Civic Alliance is a nonpartisan group of businesses working to build a future where everyone participates in our democracy. On April 2, it issued the following statement protecting voting access. More than 280 businesses have signed on, including more than 35 operating in Georgia.<sup>29</sup>

## THE RIGHT TO VOTE IS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR DEMOCRACY.

We believe every American should have a voice in our democracy and that voting should be safe and accessible to all voters.

We stand in solidarity with voters — and with the Black executives and leaders at the helm of this movement in our nonpartisan commitment to equality and democracy. If our government is going to work for all of us, each of us must have equal freedom to vote and elections must reflect the will of voters.

Our elections are not improved when lawmakers impose barriers that result in longer lines at the polls or that reduce access to secure ballot dropboxes. There are hundreds of bills threatening to make voting more difficult in dozens of states nationwide. We call on elected leaders in every state capitol and in Congress to work across the aisle and ensure that every eligible American has the freedom to easily cast their ballot and participate fully in our democracy.



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Delta Air Lines operates frequent flights in and out of Georgia, at their hub at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Savannah International Airport and several regional airports.<sup>30</sup>

“ The right to vote is sacred. It is fundamental to our democracy and those rights not only need to be protected, but easily facilitated in a safe and secure manner... [The claim of widespread voter fraud] is simply not true. Unfortunately, that excuse is being used in states across the nation that are attempting to pass similar legislation to restrict voting rights...we stand together in our commitment to protect and facilitate your precious right to vote.<sup>31</sup> ”

- ED BASTIAN  
CEO, DELTA AIR LINES



Intel has an office in Alpharetta and two other locations in Atlanta.<sup>32</sup>

“ Our country is stronger with more voting, not less, and with the evolution of technology, voting can be more secure, equitable and accessible. We oppose any legislation that seek to reduce the voting rights or opportunities of American citizens.<sup>33</sup> ”

- PAT GELSINGER  
CEO, INTEL



General Motors has nearly 1,400 employees in Georgia. It invests more than \$448 million a year in its 99 state suppliers. Last year, the automaker paid \$128 million in taxable wages to Georgians.<sup>34</sup>

“ We are calling on Michigan lawmakers and state legislatures across the nation to ensure that any changes to voting laws result in protecting and enhancing the most precious element of democracy.<sup>35</sup> ”



Founded in Atlanta in 1978, Home Depot is still headquartered in Georgia's capital city and is the largest employer based in the state.<sup>36</sup>

“ We believe that all elections should be accessible, fair and secure and support broad voter participation. We'll continue to work to ensure our associates, both in Georgia and across the country, have the information and resources to vote. For example, we promoted voter participation in the last election through our internal Get Out The Vote initiative, confirming 15,500 voter registrations among our associates.<sup>37</sup> ”



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Hyatt operates hotels across the state, including in Savannah, Augusta, Columbus and 20 in the Atlanta area.<sup>38</sup>

“ At Hyatt, we firmly believe that voting, a cornerstone of our democracy, is a fundamental right. Hyatt’s purpose is to care for people so they can be their best, and we see voting as an important way to help citizens care for our communities — independent of an individuals’ race or political affiliation. This is consistent with our longstanding commitment to equity and inclusion, and our belief that it is important for every voice to be heard. We look to our elected officials to ensure that every voter has a voice and to bring confidence to election results.<sup>39</sup> ”



IBM has been doing business in Georgia since 1987 and has several offices across the state, including two in Atlanta.<sup>40</sup>

“ IBM believes that fair and equal access to voting is critical to our democracy. We urge elected officials nationwide to pursue policies that promote voter participation and build confidence in our voting infrastructure through processes that are fair, reliable and secure.<sup>41</sup> ”



The largest hospitality chain in the world, Marriott operates more than 215 hotels in Georgia.<sup>42</sup>

“ Access to voting should not be eroded or made harder but rather, enhanced. Expanding access to voting will increase voter participation, strengthen our democracy, and ensure that more voices are heard in our quest to create what the Preamble of the Constitution called “a more perfect union.” We oppose any effort to restrict voting rights or access to polls as contrary to the spirit of democracy.<sup>43</sup> ”



Georgians across the state drive for Lyft, which helps people get to their favorite local establishments. The rideshare company’s economic impact in Atlanta in 2018 alone was \$77 million.<sup>44</sup>

“ Lyft is firmly opposed to any laws limiting voting by mail, reducing the number of days people can vote, or pushing any other restrictions on access for eligible voters — particularly those disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities... At Lyft, we will continue to look for ways to make access to transportation less of a barrier to voting, and speak out against voting restrictions that make it harder for Americans to participate in their democracy.<sup>45</sup> ”



# CASE STUDY: GEORGIA AND BLACK ECONOMIC ALLIANCE DEFEND DEMOCRACY



The Black Economic Alliance is a nonpartisan alliance of Black business leaders and allies focused on driving economic progress for the Black community through public policy and advocacy. The group issued the following statement on April 14. Hundreds of executives, lawfirms, nonprofits, and corporations have signed on, including more than 40 businesses operating in Arizona.<sup>46</sup>

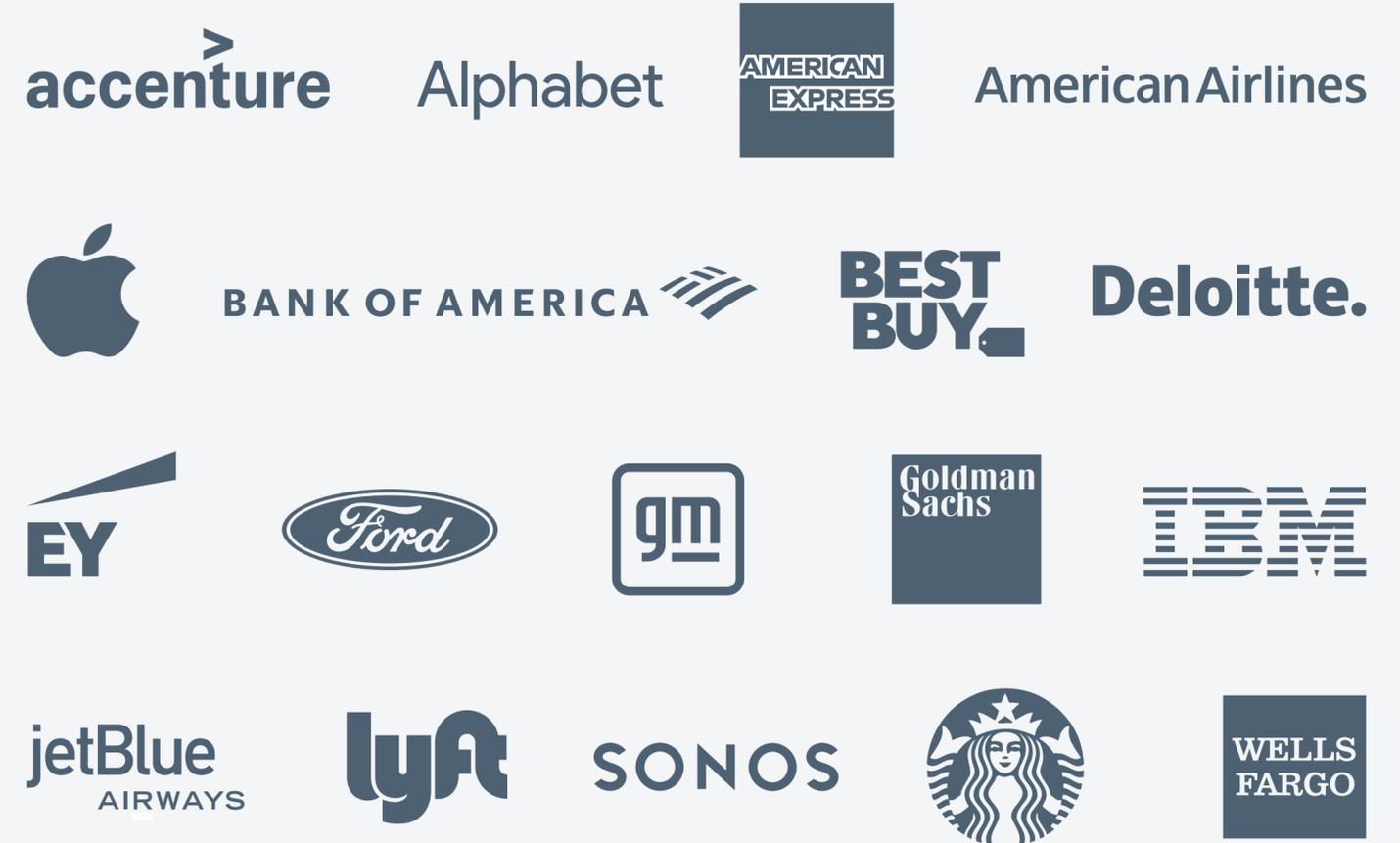
## WE STAND FOR DEMOCRACY.

A Government of the people, by the people. A beautifully American ideal, but a reality denied to many for much of this nation's history. As Americans, we know that in our democracy we should not expect to agree on everything.

However, regardless of our political affiliations, we believe the very foundation of our electoral process rests upon the ability of each of us to cast our ballots for the candidates of our choice.

For American democracy to work for any of us, we must ensure the right to vote for all of us. We all should feel a responsibility to defend the right to vote and to oppose any discriminatory legislation or measures that restrict or prevent any eligible voter from having an equal and fair opportunity to cast a ballot.

Voting is the lifeblood of our democracy and we call upon all Americans to join us in taking a nonpartisan stand for this most basic and fundamental right of all Americans.



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Southern Company, a Fortune 500 company headquartered in Atlanta, is one of the country's largest energy providers.<sup>47</sup>

“ Broad participation is the first and most important principle of voting and our election system must encourage and allow for the full participation of all citizens. Our companies will continue to support efforts that promote fair, accessible, transparent and secure voting. Our commitment must remain to these enduring principles. We will continue to support efforts that facilitate a balanced approach to the election bills that have been introduced in Georgia.<sup>48</sup> ”



United Airlines is one of the largest carriers in Georgia and flies to and from both Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta and Savannah Hilton-Head international airports.<sup>49</sup>

“ Some have questioned the integrity of the nation's election systems and are using it to justify stricter voting procedures, even though numerous studies have found zero credible evidence of widespread fraud in U.S. elections. Legislation that infringes on the right to vote of fellow Americans is wrong. We believe that leaders in both parties should work to protect the rights of eligible voters by making it easier and more convenient for them to cast a ballot and have it counted.<sup>50</sup> ”



Southwest frequently flies in and out of Georgia at their hub Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport and Savannah Hilton-Head International Airport.<sup>51</sup>

“ The right to vote is foundational to our democracy and a right coveted by all. We believe every voter should have a fair opportunity to let their voice be heard. This right is essential to our nation's success.<sup>52</sup> ”



UPS houses its world headquarters in Atlanta, with more than 200 store locations across Georgia. The company has several thousand employees in the state.<sup>53</sup>

“ UPS believes that voting laws and legislation should make it easier, not harder, for Americans to exercise their right to vote. UPS will continue to work with elected officials across the country to strengthen our democracy by facilitating equitable poll access and voting.<sup>54</sup> ”



# GEORGIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Verizon Wireless operates call centers and stores in Georgia. From Savannah to Fairburn, the service company has employees at more than 140 store locations.<sup>55</sup>

“

We strongly oppose the passage of any legislation or the adoption of any measure that would make it harder for voters, including historically marginalized groups -- people of color, seniors, students and people with disabilities -- to exercise their fundamental right to cast a ballot... Voting is a civic action that not only brings us together, it also shapes our future. We call upon all policymakers to be guided by these fundamental principles, which are the cornerstone of democracy.<sup>56</sup>

”

**verizon**<sup>v</sup>

Wells Fargo has the nation's largest network of branches and operates close to 210 in Georgia. It also has call centers in the state and donates millions of dollars per year to local nonprofits, schools and community organizations.<sup>57</sup>

“

Wells Fargo supports the right of every American to exercise their voice by voting. This is a key pillar of our democracy and we oppose legislation that attempts to limit this right or is discriminatory in nature. We also encourage Congress to establish Federal Election Day as a national holiday, thereby establishing the importance of this right.<sup>58</sup>

”

**WELLS  
FARGO**

WestRock, a packaging company headquartered in Atlanta, has more than 320 manufacturing facilities, design centers, research labs, and sales offices around the world.<sup>59</sup>

“

We believe that Democracy works best when every American can make their voice heard through a secure, accessible and fair election process. The role of our government should be to ensure that everyone has an equal and unfettered access to vote in each election. As the newly enacted voting rights law in Georgia is implemented, we will remain steadfast in our support for a strong electoral system - one that not only secures the opportunity for all to vote but also protects the election process going forward.<sup>60</sup>

”

 **WestRock**

# CASE STUDY: EXPLAINING THE COST OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC LAWS

## MICROSOFT: WHY WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GEORGIA'S NEW ELECTION LAW

Just last month, Microsoft shared its decision to invest substantially in Atlanta. As I announced together with Georgia's Governor and Atlanta's Mayor, our company is making significant investments that will put Atlanta "on the path toward becoming one of Microsoft's largest hubs in the United States in the coming decade, after Puget Sound and Silicon Valley." We are creating thousands of new jobs, and we are proud to become a rapidly growing member of Atlanta's important business community.

That's why we are concerned about many aspects of Georgia's new "Election Integrity Act." Two things are clear to us. First, the right to vote is the most cherished aspect of democracy. And second, this new law has important provisions that unfairly restrict the rights of people to vote legally, securely, and safely. That's why we voiced concern about this legislation even before it was passed.

We are concerned by the law's impact on communities of color, on every voter, and on our employees and their families. We share the views of other corporate leaders that it's not only right but essential for the business community to stand together in opposition to the harmful provisions and other similar legislation that may be considered elsewhere.

It's also important for the business community to be principled, substantive, and concrete in explaining its concerns. Let me share some of the new law's provisions that we believe will harm individuals' ability to exercise their right to vote: [Restrictions on voting drop boxes, absentee ballots, and provisional ballots]...

We hope that companies will come together and make clear that a healthy business requires a healthy community. And a healthy community requires that everyone have the right to vote conveniently, safely, and securely. This new law falls short of the mark, and we should work together to press the Georgia legislature to change it.<sup>61</sup>

## SMALL BUSINESS MAJORITY: GEORGIA VOTING LEGISLATION LIMITS RIGHTS, MAY HARM SMALL BUSINESSES

“ Gov. Kemp's decision to sign legislation limiting voting rights is a blow to small business owners and all Georgians who should have a voice in selecting the lawmakers who make the policies that impact their livelihoods...  
Entrepreneurs agree: our democracy is strongest when all Georgians have fair access to voting.

But the argument here is not purely one of democratic process, it's also a matter of practicality. We know from the recent past that statewide laws restricting the rights and freedoms of specific groups have far-reaching economic consequences that impact businesses both large and small, and the reaction to these new voting laws will likely be no different. This is the wrong move for our state, and we expect the blowbacks to be swift and severe.<sup>62</sup>”

- RACHEL SHANKLIN  
GEORGIA OUTREACH MANAGER,  
SMALL BUSINESS MAJORITY

## DEMOCRACY REFORMS MATTER TO SMALL BUSINESSES

We are small business owners, executives, entrepreneurs, and investors from across the United States, and we are writing to urge you to support the For the People Act, a set of reforms for protecting and improving American democracy. The bill strengthens voting rights, promotes accountability in government, enhances election security, and increases transparency in political spending.

Rebuilding trust in elections is a critical step toward assuring voters that their votes will count and voices will be heard. Key reforms to democracy would ensure a government that reflects voters' vision to increase local investment, create good jobs, and foster equitable economies. Local business leaders understand what their communities need to achieve these goals.

Americans want a system that works for every voter. For far too long, barriers to voting have undercut the power and representation of Black, Latinx, AAPI, Native Americans and people with disabilities. As businesses committed to supporting the communities our employees live and work in, we urge Congress to take immediate action.

## JOIN GEORGIA BUSINESS LEADERS IN SUPPORT:

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN](#) 

Joseph Pretto  
Engineer  
Dawsonville

Kenneth Kyles  
Engineer  
Marietta

Norman Strickland  
Brunswick

Robert Hakes Jr.  
Kingsland

Sally Spelbring  
Lawrenceville

Rebecca Uber  
McDonough

Chrisseda Columbus  
CEO/Facility Director  
CCME Training Service  
Atlanta

Penny Rodriguez  
Veteran Benefits  
Administration  
Decatur

Charlene Maddox  
McDonough

Fritz-Gerald Delice  
Owner/CEO  
Delice Income Tax Services  
Dacula

Frank Atuahene  
President  
Sustainable Development  
for Environmental Health  
Statesboro

Mary Anne Fulton  
Chatham County  
Savannah

Nick Cox  
Emerson

Sara Buchanan  
Founder & CEO  
Career Match iQ  
Smyrna

Sherril Gary  
Jonesboro

Yolanda C.  
Owner  
Your Money Counts Inc.  
Lithia Springs

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