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Georgia Association of CVBs Opposes Discriminatory Legislation

Savannah, GA (Sept. 21, 2016) – Last Wednesday while speaking to the members of the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Tourism held during the state’s Governor’s Tourism Conference in College Park, the Georgia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus (GACVB) again voiced their opposition to any legislation that would allow discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation or practice.

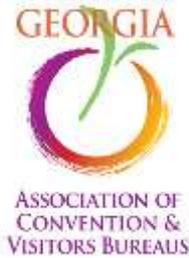
Joseph Marinelli, President of Visit Savannah and Chairman of GACVB’s Public Policy Committee, presented the Joint Committee with GACVB’s Legislative Priorities for the 2017 session with opposing discriminatory legislation as their #1 priority.

“Earlier this year when the Georgia legislature proposed new legislation referred to as ‘religious freedom legislation’, the phones lit up at our member Convention & Visitors Bureaus around the state from numerous confirmed and prospective convention customers who expressed their concerns about bringing their members, customers and clients to a location where their delegates could face discrimination. Some stated they would cancel and move their meeting to another state. Others suggested that they would never again return to our state” said Marinelli.

Mark Vaughan, Vice President of the Atlanta CVB echoed Marinelli’s statements. “Just the first twenty convention planners working with us at the Atlanta CVB who were considering cancelling their events in our state if HB 757 passed would have resulted in an economic loss of \$990 million and impacted the income for thousands of tourism industry professionals that make their living in our state.”

GACVB’s partner organizations, the Georgia Hotel & Lodging Association, the Georgia Restaurant Association, the Georgia Travel Association and the Savannah Area Tourism Leadership Council also expressed their organizations’ commitment to opposing any discriminatory legislation in the 2017 session.

Michael Owens, President and CEO of the Savannah Area Tourism Leadership Council stated that “Georgians must continue to guard against harmful legislation that could have disastrous economic results. We need to look no further than the first amendment of our Constitution to safeguard our religious institutions without damaging the



reputation of our State and jeopardizing the jobs and financial wellbeing of thousands of Georgia taxpayers.”

Immediately after the Joint Committee meeting, Governor Nathan Deal was applauded at the Tourism Awards Luncheon with a standing ovation by over 500 attendees of the three day Governor’s Tourism Conference. Jay Markwalter, President of GACVB and Director of Sales of the Augusta CVB, welcomed Governor Deal by saying “Our industry is extremely thankful to our Governor, our travel and tourism industry champion – our hero for Georgia hospitality, and on behalf of the 439,000 associated that work in the Georgia tourism and hospitality industry, we thank you for your continued support.”

On September 8th members of the GACVB Public Policy Committee joined Governor Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal in Birmingham, AL where he was presented with the Southeast Tourism Society's Governmental Tourism Leadership Shining Example Award. The Shining Example Awards Program, an industry fixture since 1985, is comprised of 17 awards within 13 categories and recognizes outstanding contributions in tourism within the entire Southeast region. “GACVB felt that Governor Deal was extremely deserving of this award and nominated him because he rose above politics to show exceptional leadership and courage in the face of great adversity” said Markwalter.

About GACVB: The Georgia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus’ mission is to be the unified voice of Georgia’s 80+ destination marketing organizations and provide industry education and professional development opportunities to members. For more information, visit www.gacvb.com.