

PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release

Communities poised to access powerful new land bank tools, as Georgia awaits governor's signature on Community Progress-drafted legislation

Law, which passed with bipartisan support, would revise state's 1991 legislation to reflect best contemporary practices and lessons learned in last 20 years.

April 5, 2012 – Georgia communities are poised to access a powerful new set of tools to address vacant and abandoned properties in their neighborhoods. On March 29, the Georgia General Assembly approved the Georgia Land Bank Act, Senate Bill 284, which has now been sent to Governor Nathan Deal for approval. The measure, which was passed with strong bipartisan support, is designed to strengthen communities' ability to take charge of vacant and abandoned property, including foreclosed homes that contribute to cycles of blight and disinvestment in local neighborhoods.

Staff from the Center for Community Progress wrote the bill and provided expertise at the request of the Georgia Association of Land Bank Authorities (GALBA), the statewide organization that worked closely with Georgia officials and stakeholders to garner support in the legislature for the initiative and generate support for the initiative at the grassroots level.

"The Center for Community Progress' involvement in this effort has been critical," says Chris Norman, Executive Director of the Fulton County/City of Atlanta Land Bank Authority and President of GALBA. "Community Progress' technical support was essential in drafting the legislation, they worked to ensure that any concerns from legislators and local land banks were addressed during the process, and they brought invaluable national expertise to the table. We could not have accomplished passage of the legislation without their assistance during the entire process."

The new legislation, which authorizes local Georgia communities to create regional land banks and provides local communities with the option to enact internal financing mechanisms for their local land banks, reflects a substantial revision of the existing Georgia land bank statute, adopted in 1991 as part of the nation's first generation of land bank statutes.

Compared to Georgia's old law, the new legislation permits far greater collaboration among municipalities and counties in the formation of land bank, maximizing possibilities for regional cooperation to tackle broad patterns of vacancy and abandonment. The new legislation also builds in the possibility of an internal financing mechanism for land banks, through means that include using tax revenues generated once a property returns to private ownership and the property tax rolls. The legislation also increases the ability of land banks to acquire properties that are heavily tax delinquent.

Frank Alexander and Sara Toering of the Center for Community Progress crafted the legislation to reflect lessons learned over the past twenty years and incorporate the best elements of new approaches to land bank legislation pioneered by Community Progress and our colleagues across the nation.

With the enactment of this new "third generation" land bank legislation, Georgia joins the State of New York, which approved parallel legislation in 2011, also drafted in collaboration with staff from the Center for Community Progress. Similar legislation is pending in Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Nebraska.

"A growing number of cities and states are looking at land banking as a mechanism to tackle vacant and abandoned property, and the approach is being supported by people that range from local housing court judges to the Chairman of the Federal Reserve System," said Amy Hovey, Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President of Capacity Building for Community Progress. "Land banking is one part of a vast

toolkit – from code enforcement and reform of delinquent property tax sales to new approaches to reuse strategies – that can give communities the real ability to intervene in cycles of blight and abandonment and repurpose vacant properties for productive reuse.”

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The Center for Community Progress works to create vibrant communities and improve the overall economic and social wellbeing of cities and towns in America through the reuse of vacant, abandoned, and problem properties. We serve as the national resource for policy, information, capacity building, and training regarding the redevelopment of vacant, abandoned, and problem properties; we partner with federal, state, and local officials and non-profit organizations that work to reposition these properties; we collaborate with experts on research that contributes to the growing body of public policy on successful reuse; and we serve as the leading national advocacy organization on effective reuse strategies. To learn more, call us at 877-542-4842 x150 or visit www.communityprogress.net.

Join us from June 20-22 in New Orleans for **Remaking America for the 21st Century – Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference**. Bob Edwards and Clarence Page will headline three days of collaboration and networking among hundreds of government and community leaders working to reverse the epidemic of vacant and abandoned property across the nation in what has become the nation’s leading gathering of experts and stakeholders in the field. Visit our website for more information.