

Kevin Abel

Candidate for Georgia Senate District 14

Housing, ADUs and Local Zoning Authority

Question:

As Georgia continues to grow, state policymakers have considered ways to increase housing supply, including policies affecting accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and local zoning.

What role, if any, should the General Assembly play in local land-use and zoning decisions, including ADUs, and how should the state balance housing needs with local control and the interests of established neighborhoods?

Kevin Abel's Response:

Housing costs are putting real pressure on families in our district. Young adults should have the opportunity to live near the communities where they grew up, essential workers should be able to reside in the areas they serve, and older homeowners need options that help them stay close to family as their needs change. Allowing accessory dwelling units may help address these needs; however, I support keeping zoning and land-use decisions in local hands. Local officials and residents understand their neighborhoods, roads, schools, and infrastructure best. The General Assembly should respect that authority while looking for practical ways to expand housing choices, including options for homeowners who want to make better use of their property. I look forward to hearing more from homeowners, local leaders, and housing experts on this issue.

Public Safety and the Criminal Justice System

Question:

Public safety depends on law enforcement as well as an effective judicial and corrections system.

What changes, if any, should the General Assembly make to improve the enforcement of Georgia's criminal laws and the effectiveness of the state's courts, prosecution, corrections, and public-safety systems?

Kevin Abel's Response:

Georgia needs a public safety strategy that enforces the law, protects victims, and addresses problems before they escalate into crimes. The General Assembly should help courts reduce backlogs, improve coordination among police, prosecutors, and corrections, and ensure that violent and repeat offenders are held accountable.

We also need more resources for people to get mental-health and substance-abuse treatment before they reach a crisis or enter the criminal justice system. For people who do face charges, Georgia should expand the use of accountability courts, including drug and mental-health courts. In eligible cases, these courts give judges a way to require treatment, monitor progress and impose consequences if participants do not meet the program's requirements. This strategy can help address the problems contributing to an offense while still holding people accountable.

Finally, a past offense should not remain a barrier to employment when someone is legally eligible to have their record restricted or sealed. I support making programs that help navigate this process more accessible, alongside stronger reentry services that assist individuals in finding work and building stable lives after serving their sentences.

Implementing these changes requires well-trained officers, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, and corrections staff, as well as investment in community mental health resources. We must also measure outcomes so we invest in strategies that truly make our communities safer.

Education and Local Control

Question:

Recent legislation addressing student cell phone use in public schools is one example of the General Assembly setting statewide policy on an issue that also affects the day-to-day operation of local schools.

What role should the state play in setting education policy, and which decisions do you believe are best left to local school districts and boards of education?

Kevin Abel's Response:

The state should set strong academic standards, provide fair funding, protect student safety and hold schools accountable for results. When an issue calls for a consistent statewide approach, the General Assembly has a role in setting policy. Local school boards and educators should have room to decide how to put that policy into practice for their students and communities.

Achieving this takes more than passing legislation. State lawmakers must consult regularly with school boards, superintendents, teachers, and local officials to understand what students need, what strategies work, and where state policies create challenges. The recent legislation on student cell phone use is a good example: while it is reasonable for the state to set overarching policy, lawmakers should also listen to the educators responsible for managing implementation during the school day.

The state must also fund the initiatives it mandates. If the General Assembly requires new programs, equipment, or staffing, it should provide the necessary funding rather than shifting the financial burden onto school districts, local governments, and property taxpayers.