STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNIFORM GUIDANCE AND *GOVERNMENT AUDITING STANDARDS*

YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

MAULDIN & JENKINS

CPAs & ADVISORS

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

REPORT OF INDEPENDENT CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNIFORM GUIDANCE AND *GOVERNMENT AUDITING STANDARDS*

YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

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MAULDIN & JENKINS
CPAs & ADVISORS

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT ON INTERNAL CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL REPORTING AND ON COMPLIANCE AND OTHER MATTERS BASED ON AN AUDIT OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS PERFORMED IN ACCORDANCE WITH *GOVERNMENT AUDITING STANDARDS*

Board of Commissioners
of Stephens County, Georgia
Toccoa, Georgia

We have audited, in accordance with the auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America and the standards applicable to financial audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards* issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, the financial statements of the governmental activities, the business-type activities, the aggregate discretely presented component units, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information of Stephens County, Georgia (the "County") as of and for the year ended June 30, 2024, and the related notes to the financial statements, which collectively comprise Stephens County, Georgia's basic financial statements, and have issued our report thereon dated December 19, 2024. Our report includes a reference to other auditors who audited the financial statements of the Stephens County Department of Public Health, the Stephens County Development Authority, and the Stephens County Hospital Authority as described in our report on Stephens County, Georgia's financial statements. This report does not include the results of the other auditors' testing of internal control over financial reporting or compliance and other matters that are reported on separately by those auditors. Our report also includes a reference to the change in accounting principle resulting from the implementation of Governmental Accounting Standards Board Statement No. 100, *Accounting Changes and Error Corrections*.

Report on Internal Control Over Financial Reporting

In planning and performing our audit of the financial statements, we considered the County's internal control over financial reporting ("internal control") as a basis for designing audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances for the purpose of expressing our opinions on the financial statements, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the County's internal control. Accordingly, we do not express an opinion on the effectiveness of the County's internal control.

A *deficiency in internal control* exists when the design or operation of a control does not allow management or employees, in the normal course of performing their assigned functions, to prevent, or detect and correct, misstatements on a timely basis. A *material weakness* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control such that there is a reasonable possibility that a material misstatement of the entity's financial statements will not be prevented or detected and corrected on a timely basis. A *significant deficiency* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control that is less severe than a material weakness, yet important enough to merit attention by those charged with governance.

Our consideration of internal control was for the limited purpose described in the first paragraph of this section and was not designed to identify all deficiencies in internal control that might be material weaknesses or significant deficiencies and, therefore, material weaknesses or significant deficiencies may exist that were not identified. Given these limitations, during our audit we did not identify any deficiencies in internal control that we consider to be material weaknesses. We identified a deficiency in internal control, described in the accompanying schedule of findings and questioned costs as item 2024-001 that we consider to be a significant deficiency.

Report on Compliance and Other Matters

As part of obtaining reasonable assurance about whether the County's financial statements are free from material misstatement, we performed tests of its compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts and grant agreements, noncompliance with which could have a direct and material effect on the financial statements. However, providing an opinion on compliance with those provisions was not an objective of our audit, and accordingly, we do not express such an opinion. The results of our tests disclosed no instances of noncompliance or other matters that are required to be reported under *Government Auditing Standards.*

The County's Response to the Finding

Government Auditing Standards requires the auditor to perform limited procedures on the County's response to the finding identified in our audit and described in the accompanying schedule of findings and questioned costs. The County's response was not subjected to the auditing procedures applied in the audit of the financial statements and, accordingly, we express no opinion on the response.

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is solely to describe the scope of our testing of internal control and compliance and the result of that testing, and not to provide an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control or on compliance. This report is an integral part of an audit performed in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards* in considering the entity's internal control and compliance. Accordingly, this communication is not suitable for any other purpose.

Mauldin & Jenkins, LLC

Atlanta, Georgia
December 19, 2024

MAULDIN & JENKINS
CPAs & ADVISORS

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT ON COMPLIANCE FOR EACH MAJOR FEDERAL PROGRAM; REPORT ON INTERNAL CONTROL OVER COMPLIANCE; AND REPORT ON THE SCHEDULE OF EXPENDITURES OF FEDERAL AWARDS REQUIRED BY THE UNIFORM GUIDANCE

Board of Commissioners
of Stephens County, Georgia
Toccoa, Georgia

Report on Compliance for Each Major Federal Program

Opinion on Each Major Federal Program

We have audited Stephens County, Georgia's (the "County") compliance with the types of compliance requirements identified as subject to audit in the OMB *Compliance Supplement* that could have a direct and material effect on each of the County's major federal programs for the year ended June 30, 2024. The County's major federal programs are identified in the summary of auditor's results section of the accompanying schedule of findings and questioned costs.

In our opinion, the County complied, in all material respects, with the types of compliance requirements referred to above that could have a direct and material effect on each of its major federal programs for the year ended June 30, 2024.

Basis for Opinion on Each Major Federal Program

We conducted our audit of compliance in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS); the standards applicable to financial audits contained in Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States; and the audit requirements of Title 2 U.S. Code of Federal Regulations Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance). Our responsibilities under those standards and the Uniform Guidance are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of Compliance section of our report.

We are required to be independent of the County and to meet our other ethical responsibilities, in accordance with relevant ethical requirements relating to our audit. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion on compliance for each major federal program. Our audit does not provide a legal determination of the County's compliance with the compliance requirements referred to above.

Responsibilities of Management for Compliance

Management is responsible for compliance with the requirements referred to above and for the design, implementation, and maintenance of effective internal control over compliance with the requirements of laws, statutes, regulations, rules and provisions of contracts or grant agreements applicable to the County's federal programs.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of Compliance

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether material noncompliance with the compliance requirements referred to above occurred, whether due to fraud or error, and express an opinion on the County's compliance based on our audit. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, Government Auditing Standards, and the Uniform Guidance will always detect material noncompliance when it exists. The risk of not detecting material noncompliance resulting from fraud is higher than for that resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Noncompliance with the compliance requirements referred to above is considered material, if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, it would influence the judgment made by a reasonable user of the report on compliance about the County's compliance with the requirements of each major federal program as a whole.

In performing an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, Government Auditing Standards, and the Uniform Guidance, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.

- Identify and assess the risks of material noncompliance, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the County's compliance with the compliance requirements referred to above and performing such other procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

- Obtain an understanding of the County's internal control over compliance relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances and to test and report on internal control over compliance in accordance with the Uniform Guidance, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the County's internal control over compliance. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and any significant deficiencies and material weaknesses in internal control over compliance that we identified during the audit.

Report on Internal Control Over Compliance

A *deficiency in internal control over compliance* exists when the design or operation of a control over compliance does not allow management or employees, in the normal course of performing their assigned functions, to prevent, or detect and correct, noncompliance with a type of compliance requirement of a federal program on a timely basis. A *material weakness in internal control over compliance* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control over compliance, such that there is a reasonable possibility that material noncompliance with a type of compliance requirement of a federal program will not be prevented, or detected and corrected, on a timely basis. A *significant deficiency in internal control over compliance* is a deficiency, or a combination of deficiencies, in internal control over compliance with a type of compliance requirement of a federal program that is less severe than a material weakness in internal control over compliance, yet important enough to merit attention by those charged with governance.

Our consideration of internal control over compliance was for the limited purpose described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of Compliance section above and was not designed to identify all deficiencies in internal control over compliance that might be material weaknesses or significant deficiencies in internal control over compliance. Given these limitations, during our audit we did not identify any deficiencies in internal control over compliance that we consider to be material weaknesses, as defined above. However, material weaknesses or significant deficiencies in internal control over compliance may exist that were not identified.

Our audit was not designed for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control over compliance. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.

The purpose of this report on internal control over compliance is solely to describe the scope of our testing of internal control over compliance and the results of that testing based on the requirements of the Uniform Guidance. Accordingly, this report is not suitable for any other purpose.

Report on Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards Required by the Uniform Guidance

We have audited the financial statements of the governmental activities, the business-type activities, the aggregate discretely presented component units, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information of Stephens County, Georgia as of and for the year ended June 30, 2024, and the related notes to the financial statements, which collectively comprise the County's basic financial statements. We issued our report thereon dated December 19, 2024 which contained unmodified opinions on those financial statements. Our audit was performed for the purpose of forming opinions on the financial statements that collectively comprise the basic financial statements. The accompanying schedule of expenditures of federal awards is presented for purposes of additional analysis as required by the Uniform Guidance and is not a required part of the basic financial statements. Such information is the responsibility of management and was derived from and relates directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the basic financial statements. The information has been subjected to the auditing procedures applied in the audit of the financial statements and certain additional procedures, including comparing and reconciling such information directly to the underlying accounting and other records used to prepare the basic financial statements or to the basic financial statements themselves, and other additional procedures in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. In our opinion, the schedule of expenditures of federal awards is fairly stated in all material respects in relation to the basic financial statements as a whole.

Mauldin & Jenkins, LLC

Atlanta, Georgia
December 19, 2024

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCHEDULE OF EXPENDITURES OF FEDERAL AWARDS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

Federal Grantor/Pass-Through Grantor/Program Title	Federal Assistance Listing Number	Grant Number	Federal Expenditures
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY			
Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds -	21.027	N/A	$ 1,029,773
Passed Through State of Georgia			
Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds - Public Safety and Community Violence Reduction Grant	21.027	GA-0013856	683,309
Passed Through State of Georgia Office of Planning and Budget			
Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds - SFRF - Broadband Grant	21.027	GA-0011819	2,656,182
			4,369,264
Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund	21.032	N/A	87,361
Total U.S. Department of Treasury			4,456,625
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY			
Passed Through Georgia Emergency Management Agency			
Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)	97.042	OEM22	19,246
Total U.S. Department of Homeland Security			19,246
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR			
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	15.226	N/A	89,593
Total U.S. Department of the Interior			89,593
Total Expenditures of Federal Awards			$ 4,565,464

See accompanying note to the schedule of expenditures of federal awards.

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

NOTES TO SCHEDULE OF EXPENDITURES OF FEDERAL AWARDS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

BASIS OF PRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTING

The accompanying Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards is presented using the modified accrual basis of accounting. Under the modified accrual basis of accounting, expenditures are recognized when the related liability is incurred.

In instances where the grant agreement requires the County to match grant awards with local funds, such matching funds are excluded in the accompanying Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards.

The County did not utilize the 10% de minimus indirect cost rate.

The County did not pass any federal awards to sub-recipients.

Federal grant programs which are administered through State agencies (pass-through awards) have been included in this report. These programs are operated according to Federal regulations promulgated by the Federal agency providing the funding.

The information in this schedule is presented in accordance with the requirements of Title 2 U.S. *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 200, *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards*. Therefore, some amounts presented in this schedule may differ from amounts presented in or used in the preparation of the financial statements.

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCHEDULE OF FINDINGS AND QUESTIONED COSTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

SECTION I
SUMMARY OF AUDITOR'S RESULTS

Financial Statements

Type of report the auditor issued on whether the financial statements audited were prepared in accordance with GAAP:	Unmodified
Internal control over financial reporting: Material weaknesses identified?	____ yes ___X__ no
Significant deficiencies identified?	___X__ yes _____ none reported
Noncompliance material to financial statements noted?	_____ yes ___X__ no

Federal Awards

Internal Control over major federal programs: Material weaknesses identified?	_____ yes ___X__ no
Significant deficiencies identified?	_____ yes ___X__ none reported
Type of auditor's report issued on compliance for major federal programs:	Unmodified
Any audit findings disclosed that are required to be reported in accordance with 2 CFR 200.516(a)?	_____ yes ___X__ no

Identification of major federal program:

Name of Federal Program or Cluster	Federal Assistance Listing Number
COVID-19 Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds	21.027

Dollar threshold used to distinguish between Type A and Type B programs:	$750,000
Auditee qualified as low-risk auditee?	_____ yes ___X__ no

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCHEDULE OF FINDINGS AND QUESTIONED COSTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

SECTION II
FINANCIAL STATEMENT FINDINGS

Finding 2024-001 Segregation of Duties (Repeat finding)

Criteria: Internal controls should be in place which provide reasonable assurance that an individual cannot misappropriate funds without such actions being detected during the normal course of business.

Condition: During our review of the internal control procedures of the County, we noted that appropriate segregation of duties does not exist in various areas of County operations, including the offices of the Tax Commissioner, the Law Library, and the County's Finance Department. Several instances of overlapping duties were noted during interviews regarding internal control procedures.

Context: Failure to properly segregate duties among recording, distribution, and reconciliation of accounts can lead to misappropriation of funds that is not detected during the normal course of business. Examples of segregation of duties issues are as follows:

- Law Library - We noted that the same person who is responsible for receipting the cash is also responsible for recording the receipt, preparing the deposit, preparing the disbursements, and reconciling the account.
- Tax Commissioner's Office - We noted segregation of duties issues involving the preparing, signing, and mailing of checks. The same person who prepares the checks also approves and signs the checks. After the checks are signed they are returned to the clerk who receipted the money for the month.
- County Finance - We noted individuals involved in the preparation of payroll are also involved in other payroll duties including timekeeping and distribution. Also, the individual responsible for maintaining the detailed capital asset records is also responsible for handling the general ledger function.

Effect: Failure to properly segregate duties among recording, distribution, and reconciliation of accounts can lead to misappropriation of funds that is not detected during the normal course of business.

Cause: The failure to properly segregate duties is due to the limited number of individuals available in each office to perform each of the duties.

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCHEDULE OF FINDINGS AND QUESTIONED COSTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

SECTION II
FINANCIAL STATEMENT FINDINGS

Finding 2024-001 Segregation of Duties (Repeat finding) (Continued)

Recommendation: Although we understand the limited number of employees involved and the resulting overlapping of duties, we recommend that there be adequate segregation of duties to ensure proper recording and recognition of accounting transactions and to lessen the potential for misappropriation of County assets. The duties of recording, distribution, approving, writing and signing of checks, and reconciliation of accounts should be segregated among employees.

Views of Responsible Officials/Corrective Action: We concur. The offices listed above are in the process of reviewing their respective systems to evaluate and determine the most efficient and effective solution to properly segregate duties among recording, distribution, and reconciliation of accounts to provide reasonable assurance that an individual cannot misappropriate funds without being detected during the normal course of business.

SECTION III
FEDERAL AWARDS FINDINGS AND QUESTIONED COSTS

None reported

STEPHENS COUNTY, GEORGIA

SCHEDULE OF PRIOR AUDIT FINDINGS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

Finding 2023-001 Segregation of Duties

Criteria: Internal controls should be in place which provide reasonable assurance that an individual cannot misappropriate funds without such actions being detected during the normal course of business.

Condition: For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2023, there was not appropriate segregation of duties among recording, distribution, reconciliation of cash accounts, and other operational functions in the offices of the elected officials and the various funds of the County.

Auditee Response/Status: Unresolved. See current year finding 2024-001.

Stephens County Board of Commissioners

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Tara Simmons, Chairman
Chris Rickman, Vice-Chairman
Dennis Bell, Commissioner
Debbie Whitlock, Commissioner
Chuck Wright, Commissioner

Christian Hamilton, County Administrator
Samantha Turner, County Clerk
Brian Ranck, County Attorney

MANAGEMENT'S CORRECTIVE ACTION
FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

Finding 2024-001 Segregation of Duties

Name of the Contact Person Responsible for the Corrective Action Plan: James Elrod, Finance Director.

Corrective Action Plan: The County Finance department and the offices of the Tax Commissioner and the Law Library are in the process of reviewing their respective systems to evaluate and determine the most efficient and effective solution to properly segregate duties among recording, distribution, and reconciliation of accounts to provide reasonable assurance that an individual cannot misappropriate funds without being detected during the normal course of business.

***Anticipated Completion Date*:** Future fiscal years.