

**An Open Letter to Senator Elena Parent, Senator Sally Harrell and
Representative Mary Margaret Oliver regarding
SB-507: a bill to incorporate the City of Vista Grove.**

Dear Senator Parent and Senator Harrell:

On March 12, with the support of Representative Oliver, you submitted a bill to incorporate the City of Vista Grove to be addressed during the current Legislative Session. We, as the leadership of DeKalb Strong, and as citizens of DeKalb County, are deeply disappointed and dismayed by this action. This action was counter to your previous public statements and our long-standing expectations about the process to be directed toward identifying appropriate solutions to the thorny issues around future annexation and municipalization in DeKalb County.

We offer three key points why this bill is a very bad idea for the citizens of DeKalb County as a whole.

Point 1: A major justification for this bill is to proactively address the ongoing issue with annexations. We understand that this has been driven by a handful of annexations along the borders of Tucker and Brookhaven occurring since the failure of the LaVista Hills cityhood initiative in 2015. Recently, DeKalb County commissioned an impact study from the Carl Vinson Institute (CVI) to inform the discussions with the DeKalb community about a comprehensive solution to the problems caused by new city formation and annexations. This study shows, and the objective facts demonstrate, that cityhood initiatives are complex and county-wide issues affecting several hundred thousand residents, not only those of us who reside in North and Central DeKalb. At a minimum, SB-507 wholly ignores the issues addressing our fellow citizens in South DeKalb. This bill can only be viewed as a piecemeal effort, and not a comprehensive solution, that gives no regard to impacts on large numbers of DeKalb residents.

Point 2: The bill demonstrates the understanding that a City of Vista Grove is the only path you will consider for the sections of North Central DeKalb illustrated on the map accompanying the bill. You said the bill was introduced simply to foster discussion. Experience shows that one does not drop a bill in the State Legislature to “start a discussion.” One drops a bill to promote a position. It is clear that this now is your position. However, this is not the position held by many of your constituents, as demonstrated by this letter.

Point 3: SB-507 was crafted behind closed doors without any broad public input. That is a fact. It is disrespectful of voters and it is not a best practice of good governance. The lack of transparency accompanying this process is troubling, to say the least.

Next Steps:

DeKalb Strong does not intend to argue the merits of this incorporation bill pro or con. The bill is premature and disregards due process for such important issues that impact so many of DeKalb’s citizens. Even the supporters of the new city claim to have no knowledge of this map or other elements of SB-507 before it was introduced last week.

We at DeKalb Strong insist you withdraw the bill immediately. After you do this, all interested parties can begin the process of community input. This will allow a broader range of solutions to be examined, and the data from the recent CVI study more thoroughly and effectively utilized for the benefit of all DeKalb citizens. We also expect that no other bills regarding annexation or incorporation will be

introduced until after there is a comprehensive county-wide discussion of annexation and municipalization solutions performed. We at DeKalb Strong would, of course, welcome being part of the discussion and the solution.

Time is of the essence. Let's do the next right thing - withdraw SB-507.

Respectfully,

The board of DeKalb Strong

Marjorie Hall

Jackie Hutter

Mary Lindsey Lewis

Ron McCauley

Will Steele

John Turner

Gail Walldorff