



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Georgia Watch and Georgia Alliance for Ethics Reform Call For Greater Transparency at Capitol**

**ATLANTA** – Today on the Capitol steps, Georgia Watch and the Georgia Alliance for Ethics Reform urged state lawmakers to take further steps to strengthen Georgia’s ethics laws.

Georgia Watch executive director Angela Speir Phelps called on lawmakers to do more to close existing loopholes and bring more transparency and accountability to the legislative process.

“There is no shortage of lobbyist money for travel, meals, sporting events or concerts at the Capitol. Whether those gifts wield influence over decisions or not - the appearance of impropriety results in distrust of our elected officials,” said Speir Phelps. “The public should have confidence in those elected to represent us, and the best way we can have confidence is full disclosure.”

The Alliance includes Georgia Watch, Common Cause, the state chapter of the Tea Party Patriots, and the League of Women Voters.

Georgia Watch and the Alliance are calling for ethics reform in four main areas: Lobbyist Gifts and Reporting, the State Ethics Commission, Campaign and Political Action Committee (PAC) Limits, and Conflicts of Interest and Misconduct.

Key provisions of new ethics legislation should include limiting the amount of any one gift to \$100 from a lobbyist for any public official, their immediate family members and staff. This limit should include travel expenses.

“Those elected to represent us should make decisions based upon what's best for the greater good, not what's best for campaign coffers or personal gain,” said Speir Phelps.

Georgia Watch and the Georgia Alliance for Ethics Reform support the following ethics provisions:

#### **1. Lobbyist Gifts and Reporting**

- Limit the amount of any one gift to \$100 from a lobbyist for any public official, their immediate family members and staff. This limit includes travel.
- Disclosure of gifts from lobbyists must occur within five days, punishable by a fine of \$100 per day until the disclosure is submitted.
- Expand lobbyist disclosure to include all expenditures related to gifts for any public official and/or their immediate family members and staff.
- Adjust lobbyist registration fee to make fee more affordable for non-profit groups and small businesses (from \$300 per lobbyist plus \$10 for each additional client to \$150 fee plus \$50 for each additional client).
- Increase the amount of expenditures that require registration as a lobbyist from \$250 to \$1000 to help encourage true citizen lobbying.
- Enforce lobbyist registration and disclosure requirements at the local level.



## 2. State Ethics Commission

- Rename the “Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission” back to the “State Ethics Commission”.
- Restore the rule making authority of the State Ethics Commission.
- Expand the oversight of the State Ethics Commission to include conflicts of interest and misconduct of all state and local public officials.
- Empower the Georgia Supreme Court to appoint all members of the State Ethics Commission.
- Toughen fines for major ethics violations and require minimum fines for such violations.

## 3. Campaign and Political Action Committee (PAC) Limits

- Restrict the total of all transfers out of a candidate’s campaign account to other candidates, political parties, campaign committees and PACs to no more than \$10,000 in any two-year election cycle.
- Require PACs to disclose all expenditures.
- Limit the amount of contributions to PACs and Political Parties from individuals, corporations, unions and PAC to PAC transfers to \$1,000.
- Limit how candidates and public officials can use campaign funds by clearly defining legitimate campaign expenditures in Georgia statutes.
- Clarify language governing candidate disclosure for city and county offices concerning campaigns that raise less than \$20,000.

## 4. Conflicts of Interest and Misconduct

- Georgia public officials at the state and local level or their immediate family members cannot hold state, local or authority contracts.
- No member of the General Assembly may serve as a lobbyist on any local, state or federal level.
- Expand the prohibition of lobbyist serving on state boards, commissions or authorities to registered federal lobbyists.
- Increase the one-year revolving door prohibition on lobbying for legislators to two years.
- Extend the new two-year revolving door prohibition on lobbying for legislators to the executive branch and paid legislative staff members.
- Clarify procedures for handling complaints to House or Senate ethics committees by removing “firsthand knowledge” provision.
- Require financial disclosure like that of the Department of Transportation by other major department heads and members of state boards and commissions such as the Department of Natural Resources, Board of Regents, Certificate of Need Commission, etc.
- Require public disclosure if lawmakers do business with special-interest groups regarding legislation.
- Prohibit lobbyists who make illegal expenditures or transfers from lobbying for 5 years.
- Disqualify any elected or public official who accepts an illegal gift from holding any public office, being employed by any public office, serving as a lobbyist or in a position of trust in the government for 4 years.

For more information on ethics reform and the Georgia Alliance of Ethics Reform, please visit [georgiaethicsreform.com](http://georgiaethicsreform.com).

***Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a nonprofit, nonpartisan 501-(c)(3) watchdog group focusing on consumer education and research in the areas of health care, insurance, identity theft, consumer energy issues and personal finance. For more information, call Georgia Watch at 404-525-1085, or visit us at [www.georgiawatch.org](http://www.georgiawatch.org).***