

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 20 16



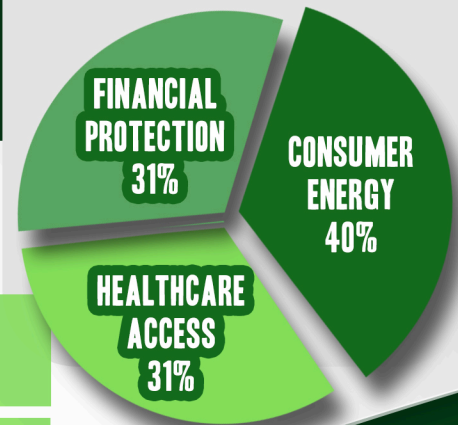
PROTECTING CONSUMERS.  
PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY.  
EMPOWERING CITIZENS.



Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is the state's trusted and relentless advocate for all Georgia consumers. Our mission is to protect and empower Georgia consumers on matters that impact their quality of life through education, advocacy and policy development. We focus our attention on communities that need a champion, particularly those most affected by predatory business practices, the high cost of utilities and healthcare, and restricted access to the civil justice system. We are dedicated to ensuring that all Georgia consumers have a voice in the policymaking process, access to necessary resources, and knowledge of their rights in the consumer marketplace.

In 2016, Georgia Watch staff were featured as experts in the news 58 times, including interviews in *TIME Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*. We served thousands of consumers through workshops, resources, and our toll-free hotline. Nearly 100 consumers contacted us directly for assistance through our toll-free hotline.

## 58 INTERVIEWS AND MENTIONS IN THE NEWS:



## WE SUBMITTED OVER 25 PUBLIC COMMENTS AND BRIEFS

We authored 4 policy papers and legal briefs across all of our project areas.

We submitted public comments 11 times in 2016 to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Department of Public Health, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Public Service Commission, and the Legislature.

We met with legislators and gave testimony on bills in hearings over 35 times in 2016.

We signed on to numerous joint public comments letters.

## 93 CONSUMER CALLS TO OUR HOTLINE



Consumer calls regarding healthcare access and medical bills



General consumer calls, regarding financial protection and energy assistance



More consumer calls to our hotline than in 2015

## CELEBRATING CONSUMER CHAMPIONS



*Financial Protection*  
Attorney General  
Sam Olens

*Healthcare Access*  
Senator P.K. Martin

## Georgia Watch staff and volunteers gave 71 presentations for nearly 1500 people and produced 26 consumer education resources across our program areas

- Through 8 consumer energy workshops, Georgia Watch staff educated 129 consumers about how to save money on their power bills.
- Through 9 workshops, Georgia Watch staff educated 413 consumers and other stakeholders about improving access and value in healthcare.
- We produced 26 educational resources for consumers and military service members.
- Georgia Watch staff trained 68 service providers on scam and identity theft prevention; trainees have since given 38 scam and identity theft presentations in communities throughout the state.



*Civil Justice*  
Erik Health &  
Atlanta Legal Aid Society

*Consumer Energy*  
Commissioner  
Lauren McDonald





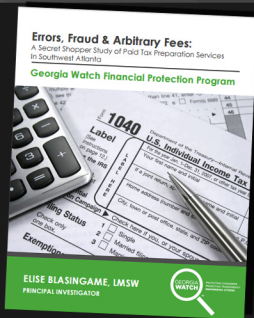
# 2016

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Stopped legislation that would make title pawn loans even more costly for Georgia consumers and urged the CFPB to issue strong federal rules against predatory lending

Released a mystery secret shopper study examining the practices of unlicensed paid tax preparers in Southwest Atlanta, finding a stunning lack of knowledge and professionalism from preparers, wide variance in fees, and inaccuracies in filings



Educated consumers about reducing medical bills, researching doctors, and choosing safer hospitals



Led a collaborative effort with employers, public health, and advocates to promote healthier communities throughout Georgia and develop common approaches to improve the accessibility and value of healthcare



Teamed up with the Attorney General's office to produce a comprehensive Military Consumer Protection Guide to provide essential tools to protect those who protect us

Visited rural Georgia 17 times to educate consumers, engage with stakeholders, and deepen our understanding of rural community health challenges



Stood up for consumers against higher energy bills at the Georgia Public Service Commission more than 20 times and worked to make energy efficiency affordable for all



Called on the Supreme Court to stop erosion of existing accountability for Georgia's public hospitals by filing an amicus brief in a high profile hospital open records act case

We are grateful to our generous **Consumer Champion Celebration** sponsors for their support of our work on behalf of Georgia's consumers:

**PRESENTING**



**CHAMPION**



**WATCHDOG**

John Dalton, MD  
Garden City Group  
Martha Wilber, MD  
Healthcare Georgia Foundation  
Raymond P. Carpenter & Associates, LLC.

**ADVOCATE**



**GUARDIAN**

Center for Responsible Lending  
Georgians for a Healthy Future  
Maura Georgia & Andrew Simpson  
David & Debra Moskowitz  
Danny & Emily Orrock  
Stephanie Benfield  
Andy & Jamie Lord  
The Harris Firm, P.C.

**PARTNER**



**A special thanks to our foundation funders who make our work possible:**

Energy Foundation  
Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Network for Regional Healthcare Improvement  
Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta  
Kaiser Permanente of Georgia  
Consumer Federation of America  
Jane Smith Turner Foundation  
Center for Responsible Lending  
Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment