

GeorgiaWatch

Protecting Consumers, Promoting Transparency, Empowering C

The Watcher: The newsletter of Georgia Watch, the state's leading consumer watchdog

HAP Director attends briefing at White House



On October 4, 2012, Georgia Watch Health Access Program Director Bill Rencher attended a White House briefing for community health leaders from around the country on the Affordable Care Act (ACA), its implementation, and consumer involvement. Speakers included representatives from the various agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the White House responsible for implementing the ACA, such as the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, HHS regional offices, and the White House Office of Consumer Engagement, as well as the keynote address by HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

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Clark Howard invites you to his home!



For the past ten years, Georgia Watch has represented your interests, not special interests. To celebrate this achievement, **we're having a 10th anniversary gala on Thursday, October 18, from 6:00-8:00PM at the home of Georgia Watch board member Clark Howard.**

Please click on the link below to register. **To purchase tickets online, please click [here](#).** Your support allows Georgia Watch to continue our important work on behalf of all Georgians.

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For more information, to purchase tickets or to sponsor the gala, please call Liz Coyle at 404-525-1085 or email lcoyle@georgiawatch.org.

As Clark says, Georgia Watch is "the only bona fide group in Georgia looking out for consumers" and a

“Perhaps the most interesting part for me was hearing questions posed by advocates from other states,” said Rencher. “Although these states may be further ahead than Georgia in implementing the ACA, their specific and very real concerns give us a glimpse into the issues that Georgia will face if it decides to implement the Medicaid expansion and establish the health insurance exchanges.” For example, advocates from New York were quite concerned about the lack of federal guidance in establishing minimum coverage benefits for policies in their exchange. Georgia Watch will monitor these and other implementation issues in the coming months to make sure that Georgia consumers have a voice in the process.

During his time in Washington, Rencher also met with two national advocacy organizations: Families USA and the National Partnership for Women and Families (NPWF). Families USA is a national healthcare advocacy organization that played an important role in the passage of the ACA. NPWF was the lead partner in the Campaign for Better Care, a national coalition of advocates for quality healthcare with whom Georgia Watch collaborated. “I enjoyed the opportunity to meet and establish a relationship with both of these important organizations and learn more about prior work, as well as about the next phase of issues to confront healthcare consumers once the ACA is fully implemented in 2014.”

“We are excited that Bill was able to have such a successful trip, not only because he represented Georgia Watch at the White House, but also because he was able to continue to cultivate our relationship with HHS, as well as with two very important national organizations,” commented Georgia Watch Executive Director Elena Parent.

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More solar energy options in Georgia?

On September 20, 2012, a privately owned company, Georgia Solar Utilities, Inc. (“GaSU”), filed a request with the Georgia Public Service Commission (“Commission”) seeking authorization to undertake utility scale solar development in Georgia Power Company’s service area. In making this request, GaSU is seeking status as a new solar utility that will finance, develop and contract the construction and operation of large scale solar farms. As a starting point, GaSU has plans to make available an 80 MW project in Putnam County, Georgia, as well as other projects up to 500 MWs each.

Georgia Power currently has the exclusive right under law to provide electric service to residential and small business customers where GaSU is seeking the right to serve. Without a change to Georgia law, it is unclear how GaSU would be able to meet the objectives that it seeks to further.

On September 26, 2012, Georgia Power filed a petition with the Commission seeking authority to purchase 210 MWs of solar generation over a three-year period. As contemplated under Georgia Power’s plan, 60 MWs utility scale solar per year will be purchased over a three year period beginning in 2015, for a total of 180 MWs. The remaining 30 MWs of solar will be procured from small-scale and medium-scale projects in an amount of 10MWs per year over a three-year period, beginning in 2013.

If approved by the Commission, parties interested in providing this solar energy to Georgia Power will have the opportunity to offer bids to do so through requests for proposals that will be issued beginning next year.

Consumer financial safeguards at risk

Congress is considering a bill that would preempt states' authority to regulate payday lenders, check cashers and other short-term installment loan providers. In 2003, Georgia Watch successfully worked to get payday lending banned in Georgia. H.R. 6139, known as the Consumer Credit Access, Innovation and Modernization Act, would allow payday lenders to sidestep state regulation, and it would strip away Georgia's ability to protect consumers from predatory lending practices.

We're very pleased that Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens joined Attorneys General (AGs) from 40 states to urge Congress to oppose the bill. The AGs warned the proposal would preempt state laws and undermine consumer safeguards.

Georgia Watch continues to help consumers safeguard their personal finances. Our Personal Finance Program educates Georgians on issues that impact their wallets and quality of life, including identity theft, home foreclosure and predatory lending. Through a grassroots-centered approach, we educate consumers on their financial options, the importance of credit ratings, and effective ways to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft and fraud.

If you would like Georgia Watch to speak to your group about personal finance issues or any of the consumer issues we monitor, please contact Karla Johnson at kjohnson@georgiawatch.org.

Georgia Watch supports greater opportunities for solar energy options to be made available to Georgia consumers and is pleased at the prospect of increased solar capacity in this state. In carefully reviewing the proposals put forth by GPC and GaSU, we do so with an eye toward consumers' pocketbooks and keeping utility rates low. It also is important to Georgia Watch that the adoption of any solar initiative will not short-change other opportunities to bring more renewable energy options to Georgians in the near term.

Please visit our website at www.GeorgiaWatch.org.