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Georgia Watch recognizes five Consumer Champions

ATLANTA, GA, September 30, 2015 – Yesterday, Georgia Watch presented its 2015 Consumer Champion awards to five advocates and legislators for their work to protect and empower consumers in Georgia. Keynote speaker Holly Petraeus, Director of Servicemember Affairs for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, spotlighted the importance of helping consumers, especially those serving in the military, to avoid financial predators and to protect their hard-earned money.

Rep. Penny Houston (R-Nashville) received the “Consumer Champion Award in Financial Protection.” Rep. Houston was a strong voice in the fight against allowing predatory debt settlement into our state during the last legislative session. Rep. David Clark (R-Buford) presented the award to Rep. Houston for her dedication to protecting Georgia consumers from financial exploitation by raising important questions about how debt settlement would impact our state’s most vulnerable consumers.

Dr. Harry Heiman, Director of Health Policy at the Satcher Health Leadership Institute and Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine received the “Consumer Champion in Health Access Award.” Last year’s recipient, Senator Chuck Hufstetler, presented the award to Dr. Heiman for his work as a healthcare consumer advocate in Georgia, including his outspoken support for Medicaid expansion, his recent service as Board Chair of Georgians for Healthy Future, and his support of the work at Georgia Watch to strengthen Georgia’s healthcare workforce and encourage nonprofit hospital community engagement.

Joanne Mathis and Vicki Johnson were both honored as this year’s “Consumer Champions in Civil Justice,” for improving access to justice for older adults in Georgia through the passage of House Bill 72. Vicki Johnson is the Legislative Chair for the Georgia Council on Aging and Joanne Mathis is the Lead Legislative Volunteer for AARP. Together, they were active in the drafting of HB 72, a bill that expanded protections for seniors in Georgia. Rep. Wendell Willard (R-Sandy Springs), bill sponsor for HB 72, presented the award to Mathis and Johnson.

Rep. Harry Geisinger (R-Roswell), was honored last night as the “Consumer Champion in Consumer Energy.” Before he passed away in May, the late Rep. Geisinger lent his expertise on energy issues to his role as vice chairman of the House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications Committee. In 2014, he chaired a subcommittee that helped lead to



passage in the 2015 session of the Solar Power Free Market Financing Act, a law that makes it easier for property owners in Georgia to install solar panels at their homes or businesses. Last year's recipient, Rep. Mike Dudgeon (R-Johns Creek), and sponsor of the Solar-Financing bill, presented the award to Rep. Geisinger's wife of 55 years, Mrs. Pat Geisinger.

"Georgia Watch is proud to recognize these Consumer Champions for standing up for the interests of Georgia consumers and to help protect their legal rights," said Georgia Watch Executive Director Liz Coyle. "We owe them each a debt of gratitude for the energy they put forth every day to make Georgia a model for consumer protection."

Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a statewide consumer advocacy organization whose mission is to empower and protect Georgia consumers on matters that impact their wallets and quality of life through education, advocacy and policy development. Georgia Watch works to influence public policies that positively impact consumers, safeguard consumer protections in personal finance, promote access to safe and affordable healthcare, encourage fair utility rates and renewable energy options, protect the right to trial by jury and promote access to the courts.