



## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Georgia Watch recognizes 2016 Consumer Champions**

ATLANTA, October 17 – Last week, Georgia Watch presented its 2016 Consumer Champion Awards to advocates, regulators and legislators at a celebration at Turner Field. The award recipients were recognized for their work to protect and empower consumers in Georgia.

Attorney General Sam Olens has been a strong advocate for Georgia consumers and military families since becoming Attorney General in 2011. Attorney General Olens and the Department of Law's Consumer Protection Unit were a crucial partner with Georgia Watch in the development of a comprehensive Military Consumer Protection Guide. Georgia Watch is presenting him with the Consumer Champion in Financial Protection Award.

Sen. P.K. Martin (R-9) is Secretary of the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee and Vice Chairman of the Higher Education Committee. Georgia Watch is honoring Sen. Martin with the Consumer Champion for Health Access Award for his introduction and passage of the Provider Directory Improvement Act (Senate Bill 302) during the 2016 Legislative Session. This new law requires monthly updates of health insurance provider directories, annual accuracy audits by insurance plans, and protections for consumers who rely on inaccurate information contained in a provider directory.

Georgia Watch will present the Tommy Malone Access to Civil Justice Consumer Champion Award to attorney Erik Heath, his brave client, Tony Strickland, and the advocacy team from the Atlanta Legal Aid Society for their work to protect Georgia consumers from unfair garnishment procedures. Under Erik's leadership, the garnishment statute in Georgia was found unconstitutional by Judge Marvin Shoob of the federal District Court for the Northern District of Georgia in the Strickland v. Alexander case. This legal success led to a legislative victory with the drafting and passage of a

revised garnishment statute providing for notice and clear instruction to consumers wishing to contest garnishments and timely reimbursement of exempt funds.

Vice Chairman of Georgia's Public Service Commission and State Representative for 20 years, Lauren "Bubba" McDonald has been a leading voice for the expansion of renewable energy in Georgia. Georgia Watch honors Commissioner McDonald with the Champion for Consumer Energy Award for his efforts to protect Georgia Power customers from rising construction costs at nuclear Plant Vogtle. In March, to protect ratepayers from cost overruns, he proposed suspending collection of the nuclear tariff on customers' bills in 2017.

"Georgia Watch is proud to recognize these consumer champions for standing up for the interests of Georgia consumers and protecting 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 nonprofit statewide consumer advocacy organization working to empower and protect Georgia consumers through education, advocacy and policy development. Georgia Watch focuses on safeguarding consumer protections in personal finance, ensuring lower utility bills and cleaner energy, defending the availability of quality, affordable healthcare, protecting the right to trial by jury, and promoting access to the courts.