
ETHICAL GOVERNMENT & LIMITING FRAUD IN GEORGIA (WHAT HAVE REPUBLICANS DONE?)

I continue to work towards making Georgia the most accountable state government in the nation. To that end I support Speaker Ralston's proposal to eliminate all gifts and gratuities to state elected officials.

What Ethics laws have Republicans passed?

Since taking the majority in the Georgia General Assembly, Republicans have passed three different pieces of legislation, all to strengthen our state's ethics laws.

In 2005, after Democrats blocked a Republican Governor's proposals for two straight years, the new Republican majority passed HB 48. A significant element of the legislation was to require legislators, state elected officials, constitutional officers, agency heads and the executive directors of boards, commissions and authorities to wait one year after leaving office before they can register as lobbyists. The bill also required, for the first time, lobbyist expenditures to be published on what is now the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission website.

Legislation in 2010, SB 17, increased reporting requirements for candidates, public officials, and doubled reporting requirements for lobbyists. In addition, fines for certain violations were increased exponentially. The Commission's jurisdiction was expanded to include all local governments. The state's felony bribery statutes were toughened with heavier fines up to \$100,000, imprisonment or both. It established new laws governing conflicts of interest and abuses of official power. In this bill, the definition of "abuse of official power" was codified to mean "threatening to use the powers or personnel of a state entity for personal purposes of coercion, retaliation or punishment." "Conflict of interest" was defined as "mean(ing) that an individual has multiple interests and uses his or her official position to exploit, in some way, his or her position for his or her own personal or professional benefit." It also increased the lobbyist registration fee from \$20 to \$300. A final provision of the bill required that no one who has been convicted of a felony within the last 10 years can register as a lobbyist.

The latest ethics bill, HB 232, which was passed in 2011, clarified the definition of the term "lobbyist" in order to preserve a citizen's right to speak with their elected representative and for the first time required the disclosure of staff when a lobbyist made an expenditure on their behalf to influence a public official.

Aside from Ethics laws, what else has Georgia done to limit corruption?

In 2007, Georgia passed HB 551, the State False Medicaid Claims Act. This bill's intentions were to identify and prevent the submission of false or fraudulent claims to the Georgia Medicaid program.

For the first time in its history, Georgia established specific procedures that allowed private citizens to bring civil actions against people who had obtained state funds through the submission of false or fraudulent claims to state agencies.

In conjunction with the United States Attorney General's Office and other states, Georgia participated in fraud settlements in 2010 with John D. Archebold Hospital for \$13.9 million, and Mariner Healthcare for \$14 million. In 2011, APS Healthcare settled for \$13 million and pharmaceutical company EMD Serono settled for \$44.3 million. All of these settlements utilized elements of the State False Medicaid Claims Act.

In 2012, Georgia passed HB 822, which expanded the State False Medicaid Claims Act. Now, Georgia's Attorney General can root out false or fraudulent claims throughout all of Georgia's state agencies.

Also in 2012, Georgia passed HB 397, a comprehensive revision to the state's rules governing open, public meetings. The bill's primary intent was to insure open meetings laws were as user-friendly as possible for the public.