



**DeKalb County Board of Commissioners**  
**Commissioner Kathie Gannon, Super District 6**

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Dear Governor Kemp,

The DeKalb Board of Ethics has been unable to create a quorum since a Georgia Supreme Court ruling invalidated the appointment process to the Board. Fixing the method of appointment process was a relatively easy fix, but then more and more changes were introduced and the resulting ethics bill for DeKalb is substantially weaker. It is instructive to remember that the current ethics law was approved by a referendum of over 92% of DeKalb voters in 2015. After a series of scandals, there was a strong appetite for effective ethics legislation. There is no evidence the citizens now want a watered-down ethics law. In addition, the law was based on a model ordinance and best practice. I respectfully request that you NOT sign SB7.

Some points to consider:

- Currently a law degree and five years of experience are required for the Chief Ethics Officer. These job requirements were based on model ordinances and best practices. The Ethics Officer is supposed to conduct county wide training and to help elected officials steer clear of ethics violations. Under the proposed bill, the Ethics Administrator must have a bachelor's degree and no work experience is required. Lowering the educational standards and diminishing the role of the Ethics Officer is an indicator that ethics is less important than previously determined.
- The terms for the Board of Ethics are reduced from 3 years to two years and limited to two terms. This will create more turnover, reduce institutional knowledge and require more frequent appointments.
- The DeKalb CEO will have the power to approve the Board of Ethics policies and procedures. This compromises the independence of the Board of Ethics. This is not typical of other citizen boards.
- The proposed legislation requires employees to go through the County Human Resources Department before filing an ethics complaint. It is generally agreed that bureaucracies have a tendency to protect senior management. Requiring employees to go through HR, will chill employee complaints.
- Currently the ethics officer has the responsibility to report criminal activity to law enforcement agencies. The ethics administrator does not have that duty.
- If someone gives false or misleading information to the Ethics Administrator, there is no penalty, nor can the Administrator bring to the Board of Ethics the fact that a person is deliberately misleading the Ethics Administrator. To restate that point – there is no penalty for lying to the Ethics Administrator.
- The new Ethics Administrator cannot initiate an investigation. Even if for example, a County Commissioner used their County website to solicit campaign contributions, the Ethics Administrator could not file a complaint.

I know you have many more important issues on your desk. But for us in DeKalb County, this new ethics legislation is much weaker and sends all the wrong signals – to citizens, to employees, local businesses and to potential members of the Board of Ethics. The Delegation solved the appointment process and shot holes through the ethics legislation. This bill won't fly with DeKalb voters. Please do not even allow it to go that far!

Thank you for your consideration.

Kathie Gannon  
 Commissioner, Super District 6  
 DeKalb County Board of Commissioners

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