



*For Immediate Release*

## **Five DeKalb County Citizen Groups Urge Residents to “Vote Yes” on Ethics Reform Legislation**

[DeKalb County, GA]—Five active, engaged community and civic groups comprised of DeKalb County residents have come together to urge DeKalb County’s voters to approve the ethics legislation on the November 3, 2020, ballot.

The five groups—DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council, DeKalb Strong, Concerned Citizens for Effective Government, Restore DeKalb, and Pride Rings in Stone Mountain (PRISM)—have all signed onto supporting the legislation, which was championed by Rep. Viola Davis during the last legislative session.

The current 2020 referendum remedies the appointment process, which was the subject of a 2018 Georgia Supreme Court ruling that found that all members of the ethics board must be appointed by elected officials. The referendum calls for four appointing authorities: the State House delegation (3 appointments); the State Senate delegation (3 appointments); the Tax Commissioner (1 appointment); and the Clerk of the Superior Court (2 alternates). The approval by voters of this remedy, followed by swift and transparent action by the appointing authorities, will result in the county having a seated ethics board on January 1, 2021.

Unlike 2019’s legislation, the 2020 referendum retains key provisions of the popular 2015 legislation, which voters endorsed by 92%, including:

1. The Board of Ethics remains independent; no one under the purview of the Board of Ethics is making appointments to the Board.
2. DeKalb employees continue to have direct access to the ethics office to express concerns about ethics violations.
3. The position of Ethics Officer is retained and still vested with the authority to investigate and file ethics complaints, as well as provide training and advice to county employees.
4. The Board’s authority to investigate and report to the public has not been weakened.

Additional enhancements to the 2015 legislation include: 1) the addition of an Ethics Administrator to receive complaints; 2) a requirement for county officials or employees with a conflict of interest on an official county action to recuse themselves; 3) a ban on members of the DeKalb Purchasing and Contracting Department accepting gifts from anyone who might

conduct business before the department; and 4) the appointment of two alternate board members to serve if needed.

The groups are also calling for the appointing authorities to make a public call for applications in early November and the use of a uniform, coordinated application/interview process that is transparent and readily understood by the public.

“The Board of Ethics helps to preserve and protect the public’s trust in government,” states the group of five, adding: “If this is a purpose you support and you have the qualifications to serve on the Board, we encourage you to apply. It will take all of us working together to ensure that County officials (elected or appointed), employees, and vendors understand that, in DeKalb County, we take ethics in public service seriously. “

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For more information, visit [www.dekalbcitizens.org](http://www.dekalbcitizens.org).

*About DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council*

The DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council (DeKalb Citizens) is registered as a nonprofit corporation in the state of Georgia and is recognized for exemption under IRS Section 501(c)4. DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council is a group of community members from throughout DeKalb County, Georgia, whose mission is to educate the citizens of DeKalb County about county governance issues and to advocate for informed citizen engagement. The organization’s members research topics, including filing open records requests and seeking out best practices from other jurisdictions. The goal is for DeKalb County to model excellence in citizen engagement and county responsiveness to citizen concerns.

[www.dekalbcitizens.org](http://www.dekalbcitizens.org).

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