



*For Immediate Release*

## **DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council Says “Vote Yes” on DeKalb Ethics Referendum on November Ballot**

[DeKalb County, GA]— DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council is encouraging voters to “vote yes” on the Ethics Referendum that is on the ballot for DeKalb Voters in the November general election. The revisions to the Ethics Act, which passed in 2015 by 92% of DeKalb County voters, remedy the appointment process and maintain the independence of the Ethics Board.

The major change to the 2015 Ethics Act addresses the appointment process: four appointing authorities – the House and Senate legislative delegations, Tax Commissioner and Clerk of the Superior Court – are responsible now for making the appointments. None of the appointing authorities is under the purview of the Board of Ethics.

Other changes include: 1) the addition of an Ethics Administrator to receive complaints; 2) a requirement for those 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.

DeKalb Citizens has followed the legislative process that produced this bill and bases the “vote yes” recommendation on four findings:

- 1. The Board of Ethics remains independent; no one under the purview of the Board of Ethics is making appointments to the Board.** Unlike the 2019 bill, this bill does not provide for the CEO to make a Board of Ethics appointment and does not call for the Board of Ethics to submit its policies and procedures for review by the CEO and confirmation by the Board of Commissioners.
- 2. DeKalb employees continue to have direct access to the ethics office to express concerns about ethics violations.** Unlike the 2019 bill, this bill does not require employees to funnel complaints about their immediate supervisor through the Human Resources Department and exhaust Merit System remedies before turning to the Board of Ethics.
- 3. The position of Ethics Officer is retained, and the Ethics Officer is 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 remains strong.** The 2019 bill included a provision that required the Board of Ethics to abandon the investigation of elected officials or county employees if they resigned, retired, or completed their term of office. The 2019 bill also included a provision that prevented the Board from rendering any decision on a complaint against a candidate within 45 days of an election.

DeKalb Citizens (DCAC) is encouraging the appointing authorities to work together to use a uniform, coordinated application and interview process so there is transparency and public accountability.

“In our view, these initial appointments – and the process for making them – signals an important new beginning for the Board of Ethics,” states Mary Hinkel, chair of DeKalb Citizens Advocacy Council. “After the successful vote in November, we urge citizens of DeKalb County to step up and volunteer to serve on the Board. If we are to reflect the diversity, expertise, and experience of DeKalb citizens, there must be a qualified pool of candidates to draw from who represent the racial, geographic, gender, and professional diversity of our county.”

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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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