



Georgia

3/3/2022

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Aunna Dennis, and I am the executive director of Common Cause Georgia. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to upholding the core values of American democracy. We work to create open, honest, and accountable government that serves the public interest; promote equal rights, opportunity, and representation for all; and empower all people to make their voices heard in the political process.

Common Cause Georgia supports Senate Bill 580, which would amend O.C.G.A. § 21-5-35 to extend the existing limitations on members of the General Assembly seeking or accepting campaign contributions during a legislative session to also include any political action committee (PAC) that is affiliated with or that coordinates with a member or such member's campaign committee. This amendment is a practical addition that will ensure the purpose of the original law is served.

The standing rule that members of the General Assembly and their campaign committees cannot seek or accept contributions during the legislative session guards against potential conflicts of interest. It is an important ethical consideration that such contributions could influence legislators as they sponsor, debate, and vote on bills before the General Assembly during legislative session. Additionally, accepting campaign contributions during this time creates an imbalance between new candidates and incumbents and the members of the General Assembly running for reelection could unfairly wield that advantage.

Just as a contribution directly to a member's campaign committee can create an appearance of corruption or conflict of interest that undermines the public's faith in Georgia government, so too could a contribution to a PAC affiliated with or coordinating with a member. Such PACs are naturally understood as extensions of members and their campaign committees and including them in the reach of Chapter 5 of Title 21 is a natural extension of the existing law's aim. By allowing members' PACs to accept donations while their campaign committees cannot, the spirit of the law is entirely circumvented. The addition of PACs to this limitation will only serve to strengthen an existing, agreed upon goal that is in the best interest of government body accountable to Georgia's citizens.

Accordingly, Common Cause Georgia supports SB 580 and urges this body to adopt it proposed amendment.



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Sincerely,

Aunna Dennis

Executive Director  
Common Cause Georgia