



M U L T I S T A T E

[Campaign finance agency dismisses Abrams violations, fines 30 candidates for missing or late info](#) (Georgia)

The Georgia Government Transparency & Campaign Finance Commission has dismissed two charges against Democratic gubernatorial nominee Stacey Abrams.

Commission attorney Joseph Cusack said on Tuesday that Abrams' attorney, Joyce Gist Lewis, provided him with the evidence needed to clear up potential violations stemming from two transactions by the Abrams campaign.

In one, the commission contended that Abrams received \$3,865 of in-kind contributions from Friends of Stacey Abrams and Georgia Next prior to filing paperwork declaring her intention to run. Lewis was able to produce documents that showed the campaign contributions were received after Abrams' declaration of intent to run had been filed.

Abrams also appropriately amended her contribution disclosure filings to reflect the correct information, Cusack said.

The second count stemmed from a law firm invoice the commission alleged was not properly included on Abrams' campaign contribution disclosure reports. Cusack said the Abrams campaign produced evidence that it had paid that invoice.

"She's given me every single piece of evidence I've asked for," Cusack said of Lewis' co-operation in the matter.

"I think this is the perfect example of both sides working together, supplying the information that the commission needs to show that Ms. Abrams was in compliance," commission Chairman James Kreyenbuhl added.

The commission upheld a slew of other charges against 30 Georgia candidates facing fines for failing to file sufficient personal financial disclosure information.

A [bill](#) passed during this year's legislative session that took effect in March requires candidates to disclose the past five years of income information, which many candidates neglected to do.

The consent orders process put in place by the commission allowed the candidates to agree to the charges and pay a fine.

Four Democratic candidates who survived the recent spring primaries and runoffs agreed to pay fines for campaign violations.

State Sen. [Jen Jordan](#), D-Atlanta, the Democratic nominee for attorney general, and Janice Laws Robinson, the Democratic nominee for insurance commissioner, each agreed to pay a penalty of \$625 for omitting past years' income details on their financial disclosure reports.

Both state Rep. William Boddie, D- East Point, the Democratic nominee for labor commissioner, and Alisha Thomas Searcy, the Democratic nominee for state school superintendent, failed to file personal financial disclosure reports on time. Each agreed to a \$1,000 civil penalty and a \$125 late fee.

Non-Democrats faced penalties as well.

[Kartik Bhatt](#), who ran for state labor commissioner in the May Republican primary, did not file his personal finance disclosure statement and also received and spent campaign funds prior to filing a declaration of intent to run. Bhatt agreed to a \$5,000 civil penalty.

[David Raudabaugh](#), the Libertarian candidate for Georgia agriculture commissioner, faced a \$625 fine for not including past years' income on his personal financial disclosure report.

U.S. Rep. [Jody Hice](#), R-Greensboro, who lost to Republican incumbent Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in the primary, received a \$1,000 civil penalty for failing to file his personal financial disclosure report on time.

The [complete list](#) of consent orders is available on the commission's website.

[Judge refuses to block Alaska campaign disclosure rules](#) (Alaska)

A federal judge on Thursday denied a request to block campaign finance provisions of a ballot measure approved by Alaska voters in 2020, finding that the plaintiffs had not demonstrated a likelihood of success on their outlined claims.

U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason in a written ruling also said that in the context of elections, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that “lower federal courts should ordinarily not alter ... election rules on the eve of an election.” She said the plaintiffs “waited over one year to seek preliminary injunctive relief.”

There is a special election for U.S. House and a primary in Alaska on Aug. 16.

The lawsuit was filed earlier this year on behalf of political donors and third-party groups known as independent expenditure groups. They argued the disclosure rules are unconstitutional and burdensome.

The plaintiffs had asked that the challenged portions of the initiative be blocked while the case was ongoing.

The challenged disclosure rules included disclaimers required for ads and required reporting around contributions greater than \$2,000 that are given to or received by independent expenditure groups.

Daniel Suhr, an attorney for the plaintiffs and a managing attorney at the Chicago-based Liberty Justice Center, in a statement said: “We remain confident in our arguments. This was only a preliminary ruling and we plan to continue vigorously pursuing the case to protect Alaskans’ First Amendment freedoms.”

The Alaska Department of Law, which defended the initiative provisions, in a statement said that in denying the preliminary injunction, Gleason’s decision “provides clarity for the remainder of this election cycle as to the requirements people must follow.”

The plaintiffs in the case are listed as Doug Smith and Robert Griffin of Anchorage; Allen Vezey of Fairbanks; Albert Haynes of Wasilla and Trevor Shaw of Ketchikan. The lawsuit describes each of them as sometimes donating more than \$2,000 to organizations that make independent expenditures.

The Alaska Free Market Coalition and Families of the Last Frontier, described as independent expenditure groups, are also plaintiffs.

The defendants are members of the Alaska Public Offices Commission, which enforces campaign finance rules in the state.

[Milwaukee Ald. Chantia Lewis convicted of misconduct in office, campaign finance felonies, removed from office](#) (Milwaukee, WI)

Milwaukee Ald. Chantia Lewis was removed from office Monday after her conviction in Milwaukee County court on two felonies related to her conduct in office.

She pleaded guilty to a count of misconduct in public office and no contest to a count of intentionally accepting an illegal campaign finance disbursement.

Three other counts — [two felonies and a misdemeanor](#) — were dismissed and read into the record, meaning they could be considered at sentencing on Aug. 25.

The case is being overseen by Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Milton L. Childs.

Lewis, 42, appeared remotely because she had symptoms of COVID-19, her attorney Michael Chernin said.

Lewis made a base salary of \$73,222 a year as a Common Council member. She represented the 9th Aldermanic District on the city's northwest side and [briefly entered the Democratic race](#) for U.S. Senate.

Prosecutors said she took at least \$21,666 in campaign funds and false travel reimbursements from the city between 2016 and 2020.

The criminal complaint stated that she used campaign funds for family trips and basic personal expenses such as car and credit card bills, engaged in "double-dipping" by filing for reimbursement from the city for city-related travel expenses that she had actually paid out of her campaign account and violated campaign finance laws, including by structuring a campaign contribution to avoid the limits.

Lewis was [charged in September](#).

Lewis contends she lacked knowledge

While Lewis' comments were mainly one-word responses to questions from Childs, at one point she said she did not "necessarily agree" with an element of the misconduct in office charge that states she knew that her conduct was illegal.

She said she did not agree "that I was aware of the process and how to do a campaign finance report."

That prompted Chernin to say that Lewis did her own bookkeeping and that her conduct violated the law. But, he said, she was arguing she did not know her conduct was illegal at that time.

"There were disbursements out of her campaign account that should not have occurred," he said. "So she knew that she was taking those funds out of her campaign account, and ... the conduct itself was knowing, but apparently what she's saying is that she did it out of the absence of knowledge."

However, Childs said if she were entering a guilty plea she would have to acknowledge that her conduct was outside of her authority, a stance with which Assistant District Attorney Matthew Westphal agreed.

"The knowledge element is not knowledge that she did something, it's knowledge of the illegality or forbidden nature of the conduct itself," Westphal said.

After a brief private conversation with Chernin, Lewis agreed to that element of the charge.

Prosecutor to argue for time in House of Correction

Westphal said he would argue at sentencing that Lewis spend 12 months in the Milwaukee County House of Correction followed by three years on probation.

Hanging over her were she to violate the terms of probation would be a 3¹/₂-year sentence in the state prison system — broken down by 18 months in prison and two years of extended supervision.

After the hearing, Chernin declined to say what sentence he would argue for, though he said at the hearing that mitigating circumstances would be part of their argument.

Childs does not have to follow the recommendation of the defense or prosecution and could impose the maximum penalties. Each of the charges on which Lewis was convicted carry a maximum penalty of 3½ years in the prison system and a fine of \$10,000.

Lewis' removal leaves three open council seats

Lewis was removed from her seat under a [state law](#) that requires forfeiture of a right to office when convicted of a campaign finance violation, Westphal said in court.

Childs entered that order Monday.

Lewis' departure leaves three of the 15 Common Council seats vacant, after Mayor Cavalier Johnson left his District 2 seat after he was elected mayor earlier this year and Nik Kovac left his District 3 seat to become Johnson's budget director. Special elections for the District 2 and 3 seats will take place this fall.

It was not immediately clear when Lewis' seat would be filled.

Common Council President José G. Pérez must call a special election to be held after the Nov. 8 general election. Pérez told the Journal Sentinel he would work with his council colleagues and the city Election Commission to decide on a date for a special election.

"It is what it is and there are consequences for your actions," Pérez said of Lewis' removal. "We have been working with 12 alders for a while now, and our priority is to get the Second and Third filled, and now the Ninth."

The council has been functioning as if it had three vacancies because when Johnson was council president he removed Lewis from all committee assignment duties once the charges were filed against her.

In a statement Monday, Johnson called Lewis' guilty plea "an important step forward in holding her accountable for her financial misdeeds."

"City officials hold a public trust, and every one of us has an obligation to the people of Milwaukee to operate with the highest level of integrity," he said. "I expect that of every member of my administration and of all my colleagues in elective office."

Ald. Mark Borkowski said while he considers Lewis "a dear friend," elected officials are not above the rules. He said he knew it did not bode well for her when he saw the length of the 43-page complaint.

"Obviously, the process took its course, and she's no longer on the Common Council," he said. "I'm very sorry because she's a wonderful person, she had a lot to offer the council. However, rules are rules, and we all have to play by them."

And, he said, it's challenging for the remaining council members to try to make decisions for districts that do not have a representative to advocate on the many issues that come before the council.

The criminal complaint states that Lewis used campaign funds for attendance at a worship conference in Florida, tuition at Agape Love Bible College, and family trips to Georgia and the Wisconsin Dells. She is also accused of using campaign funds on personal expenses such as car and credit card payments, vehicle repairs and rent on an apartment in Milwaukee.

The complaint also states that she provided inaccurate information about her campaign account balances, contributions and spending; put campaign contributions into her personal bank accounts; and filed for reimbursement from the city for city-related travel expenses that she had actually paid for out of her campaign account.

The complaint also states that she violated campaign finance laws, including through the structuring of a campaign contribution to avoid the limits.

[Proposed ordinance would force people, groups who lobby Louisville Metro to register, disclose funding](#) (Louisville, KY)

Louisville Metro Council is considering an ordinance that sponsors hope will generate more transparency from paid lobbyists and other businesses and interest groups that try to influence local legislation. The ordinance would also bar council members from profiting off of lobbying their colleagues immediately after leaving office.

Under the proposal authored by District 9 Council Member Bill Hollander, a Democrat, anyone who's paid to influence the decisions of Louisville Metro Council would have to register as a lobbyist.

That would involve filling out a registration statement listing their name, address and employment information, similar to what's required at the state level. Law firms, businesses or

interest groups that employ a lobbyist would also have to file a statement outlining what legislation they are trying to influence.

Hollander said the public should have a better understanding of what goes on in City Hall and who influences local policy-making.

“We have a \$1.3 billion budget, and I think any Metro Council member would tell you they’ve heard from lobbyists,” he said. “We hear from lobbyists on a very regular basis on a variety of things. Just letting the public know who’s lobbying, I think, is important and transparent.”

The proposal is currently being considered by Council’s Government Oversight and Audit Committee. In addition to registering, lobbyists and their employers would also be required to file paperwork any time they spend money on behalf of an elected official, a candidate for office or their immediate family members. That includes spending on events, food and drinks and advertising for or against legislation. The lobbyist would also have to disclose how much they’re paid.

If a city official asks for feedback or input from an outside group or individual, their response wouldn’t be considered lobbying.

Perhaps the most consequential part of the proposed ordinance is the “cooling off” period, also known as a revolving door prohibition. Elected officials, including the mayor and Metro Council members, would be barred from taking a job lobbying city government for two years after leaving office. That mirrors similar restrictions on legislators in the Kentucky General Assembly.

“The idea is that someone who is intimately knowledgeable about the system and individuals in a government have an unfair advantage [over concerned residents],” Hollander said. “The ‘cooling off’ period limits that advantage.”

This ordinance is just one of a package of proposals Hollander put forward earlier this year aimed at increasing transparency in local government. In March, Metro Council approved a measure [requiring elected officials and city leaders to make yearly disclosures](#) of their financial and business interests. Another ordinance [prohibiting council members from having private conversations with developers](#) about zoning decisions is currently stalled in committee.

Hollander introduced the trio of ordinances in January and February, after a lawsuit against some Metro Council members alleging corruption and favoritism became public. Emails released as part of the litigation appeared to show District 26 Council Member Brent Ackerson, a

Democrat, working behind the scenes with a developer to push through an apartment project over the objections of neighbors and the city's Planning Commission.

Tallahassee officials approve 10-year ban on corruption-related felons lobbying

(Tallahassee, FL)

Tallahassee city commissioners approved a [10-year ban on lobbying](#) for anyone convicted of fraud-related crimes, the latest in measures intended to stamp out back-door dealings.

The unanimous vote Wednesday came after commissioners first weighed a lifetime ban, then 20 years and eventually landed on a decade.

The move came the day after Paige Carter-Smith, one of three defendants convicted in the FBI's long-running public corruption probe in Tallahassee, returned home from a Marianna federal prison camp.

Commissioners aim to bar anyone convicted of a corruption-related crime including bribery, theft and honest services fraud from quickly returning to try to influence elected officials.

Several cited the ongoing FBI investigation which ensnared former Tallahassee mayors Scott Maddox and Andrew Gillum, Carter-Smith, Gillum's close advisor Sharon Lettman-Hicks and local businessman and hotelier J.T. Burnette.

All but Gillum and Lettman-Hicks, who were arrested last month, have been sentenced or are serving federal sentences. Gillum and Lettman-Hicks have pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Those arrests and the public spectacle have put Tallahassee and its officials in the spotlight and fostered a "bad reputation" that corruption is rampant in Tallahassee, said City Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox.

Without anything on the books, the ordinance is a way to address whether felons with ties to corruption could register as lobbyists, she added.

"We had an elected official, a career elected official, who participated in something that cost us some integrity and got under scrutiny," said Williams-Cox said. "This is to make sure that everyone knows: 'Don't come to Tallahassee with ill intentions of doing something that has been done before.' "

After Maddox was convicted last year, City Commissioner Jeremy Matlow proposed bans for lobbyists convicted of honest services fraud and a suite of other ethics reform measures.

City Hall critic Erwin Jackson also championed the cause and pushed for even more stringent regulations.

City Commissioner Curtis Richardson echoed concerns from several public speakers that the ordinance introduces a slippery slope similar to requirements more than a decade ago when an application for employment at City Hall asked whether a person had a criminal history.

That was removed under an initiative called “Ban the Box.”

“I think we are conflating this with something that was good that happened in our community with banning the box,” Williams-Cox replied.

Commissioners also approved a 1900% increase in lobbyist registration fees collected by the city.

Now, lobbyists will have to pay a \$500 annual registration fee. Previously they paid \$25 per client.