

2024 Annual Report



Prepared by
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Chief Ethics Officer

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Vision And Mission

Vision

Provide a healthy ethical environment for all public officials and public employees.



DeKalb County
GEORGIA

Board of Ethics
of DeKalb County

Mission



- To provide opinions involving Ethics to all DeKalb County officials and DeKalb County employees who seek advice on ethical issues.
- To receive and hear complaints regarding ethical violations of DeKalb County employees and DeKalb County officials.
- To investigate matters brought by third parties or the Ethics Officer regarding potential violations of the Ethics Code.
- To establish Rules regarding its matters within DeKalb Ethics jurisdiction (legal authority and ability to hear and decide a matter).

About DeKalb County Ethics



The Ethics Officer's assessment of DeKalb County suggests an improved ethical standing compared to previous years. This evaluation is based on factors such as the efficiency of handling cases, the number of complaints related to ethical violations, increased outreach to the Ethics Office, transparent communication with other departments, increased in-person training, public engagement, and the successful establishment of rapport and relationships with public officials and employees.

ETHICS



Meet Our Board



BOB DALLAS
CHAIR



CHIQUITA WRIGHT
VICE CHAIR



SCOTT MATHEWS
SECRETARY

Meet Our Board



ROSA WAYMON
BOARD MEMBER



GEORGE FERENCE
BOARD MEMBER



TOM CLEMENTS
BOARD MEMBER

Meet Our Board



CATHEA SIMELTON-TREMINIO
ALTERNATE BOARD MEMBER



JASON CECIL
ALTERNATE BOARD MEMBER

Board of Ethics Committees

• Human Resources-Personnel:

- Tom Clements – Chair
 - Bob Dallas
 - Rosa Waymon
- **Budget:**
 - Chiquita Wright - Chair
 - Scott Mathews
- Cathea Simelton-Treminio

• Oversight:

- George Ference - Chair
 - Jason Cecil
 - Vacant

Meet Our Staff



ELISA MURPHY
ETHICS OFFICER



KRISTIN RODGERS
ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR



HAKIM HILLIARD
GENERAL COUNSEL



JURISDICTION

For the DeKalb County Board of Ethics to proceed, it necessitates both personal and subject matter jurisdiction (ability to hear and decide a case). In terms of personal jurisdiction, the Board of Ethics exercises authority over public officials and employees within DeKalb County. However, it **does not** extend to state public employees or public officials, employees or officials of other municipalities, superior court personnel (including judges, staff, and court officials), and specific roles within the legal system.

Subject matter jurisdiction is defined by the Ethics Board's authority to address certain matters, including conflicts of interest, abuses of public office, inappropriate gifts, misuse of county property, and accounting and audit irregularities. Clarifying these jurisdictional boundaries is crucial for the effective functioning of the Board of Ethics in addressing ethical concerns within its purview.

The next page discusses the 18 cases heard in 2024.

2024 Ethics Cases



The Board of Ethics heard eighteen cases in 2024. Out of the eighteen (18) cases, four (4) cases had jurisdictional issues, thirteen (13) did not prevail because the preliminary investigation determined that the Board of Ethics had previously considered and dismissed similar allegations, complainant (one who filed) failed to follow-up or correct defects in the complaint, the evidence did not support the allegations, or the complaint expressed conclusions or opinions without any specific, actionable allegations. One (1) case proceeded to an Enforcement or Evidentiary hearing, which ended in a settlement, where the respondent was assessed and agreed upon a fine and a public reprimand.

→ Solution

Continued ongoing training through monthly emails, in-person training, Zoom training, Ethics Forums, our website, and training within our internal database will help maintain an ethical environment.

→ Challenge

To educate the citizens, employees, and public officials on what is considered an ethical violation.

CASES HEARD IN 2024:

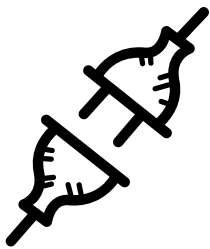
1. Anonymous v. Prentiss Noland, Lou Walker Senior Center
2. Anonymous v. Tamara Dillard, Little Creek Farm Conservancy
3. Musa Ghanayem et al. v. Commissioner Robert Patrick
4. Sammy Gilstrap v. Michael Parker of DeKalb Police Department
5. Nicole Doe v. Alethea Mack of Stone Mill Elementary
6. Deborah Jennings v. Princess Starr
7. Michael Cooper v. Stephen Bradshaw
8. Darren Petty v. Aaron Kimble
9. Darren Petty v. Shaun Harris
10. Monique N. v. DeKalb County Sanitation Department
11. Gwendolyn Farris v. Alesia Brooks
12. D. S. Alexander v. Pat D. Spencer
13. Jessica Carr v. Tracy Muhammed
14. Megan Shell v. Sgt. Floyd
15. Asher Haig v. Derrick Cain
16. Asher Haig v. Demetrius Brown
17. Asher Haig v. Alisa Dawson
18. Robert Sims v. DeKalb County Fire Department



HOTLINE REPORTS

Hotline Anonymous Reports:

We received 46 anonymous reports. Upon receiving anonymous reports through the hotline, we attempted to guide them on the subsequent steps in the complaint process. As custodians of the hotline's recordkeeping and ethics report processing, our office manages the reports obtained throughout the County. Unfortunately, most of the reports are something other than ethical violations or the reports are items that we do not have jurisdiction over in DeKalb County. Following each report to the anonymous hotline number, we promptly issued corresponding letters detailing the next steps. If any reports involved potential crimes, we forwarded to the proper agency or agencies.



**DISCONNECTED
CALLS/CALLER
DID NOT FINISH
THE CALL**
4 - CALLS



**ALLEGED SEXUAL
HARRASSMENT**
5 - CALLS



COURT
10 - CALLS



OVERTIME/TRAINING
4 - CALLS



**POTENTIAL
CRIME(S)**
6 - CALLS



SCHOOL RELATED
3 - CALLS



**NEIGHBORHOOD
DISPUTES**
4 - CALLS



MISCELLANEOUS CALLS

- **3 - UTILITY ISSUES**
- **3 - ELECTION LAW**
- **1 - SPA TREATMENT**
- **1 - MOLD**
- **1 - PROBLEM W/ PRESS**
- **1 - UNSCHEDULED MEETING**

Training



2024 had a clear training focus with a greater frequency of robust trainings. We focused on in-person training, the first annual Ethics Forum, Zoom and Teams training.

- **Ethics Forum: The Ethics Forum took place on April 11, 2024. We conducted a panel and compared Henry County to DeKalb County to gain new insight. We invited civic leaders, appointed and elected officials, Board of Commissioners, citizens, and all individuals interested in Ethics. We had a full house and enjoyed meeting with all who intended. The goal was for all to be better informed.**
- In-Person Training: The Ethics Officer trained numerous departments and DeKalb leaders, which included but was not limited to members of the judiciary, law department, non-profit leaders, Watershed Department, Planning and Sustainability Department, Procurement Department, Fire Department, and members of the Sanitation Department. The Ethics Officer tailored each training toward that department.
- Zoom or Microsoft Teams Training: For some of the larger departments such as Watershed Department, the Ethics Officer conducted sessions via Zoom.
- CV360 - Our Internal Database: In December with the help of the Human Resource Department, Ethics launched its first end of the year training. We launched this project for all non-exempt employees and public officials to have a high-level, but comprehensive overview of Ethics training. Training included the following topics: gifts, conflicts of interest, duties of public employees and public officials of DeKalb County, ethics laws, and sexual harassment. The goal is to be proactive and to avert litigation.
- New Employee Training: The Ethics Officer trains in-person every other Monday for all new employees.

Overall Training	2023	2024
Number of New Hires Trained	1209	1303
EMAILS	Monthly emails delivered to approximately 6400 employees and public officials started 10/2023	15 emails (Ethics Blasts) delivered to approximately 6400 employees and public officials
INTERNAL TRAINING	In-Person and Zoom trainings reached several departments	6400+ employees- CV360, In-Person, and Zoom/Teams Training

Training



All full-time employees and a vast majority of part-time employees received the monthly Ethics Blast. The Ethics Blast dealt with customer service, duties of employees, duties of the Board of Ethics, conflicts of interest, gifts, etc. The emails tend to garner a reaction and it is a fun and quick way to get a code of conduct out to the majority of DeKalb County employees and public officials. Additionally, for the first time we recognized National Ethics Awareness Month in March. Included are a few of the Ethics Blasts that received the most reactions:

A Reminder:
Customer Service
involves both our
internal and external
customers.

Please keep in mind
the following
ethical attributes
when dealing with
customers!

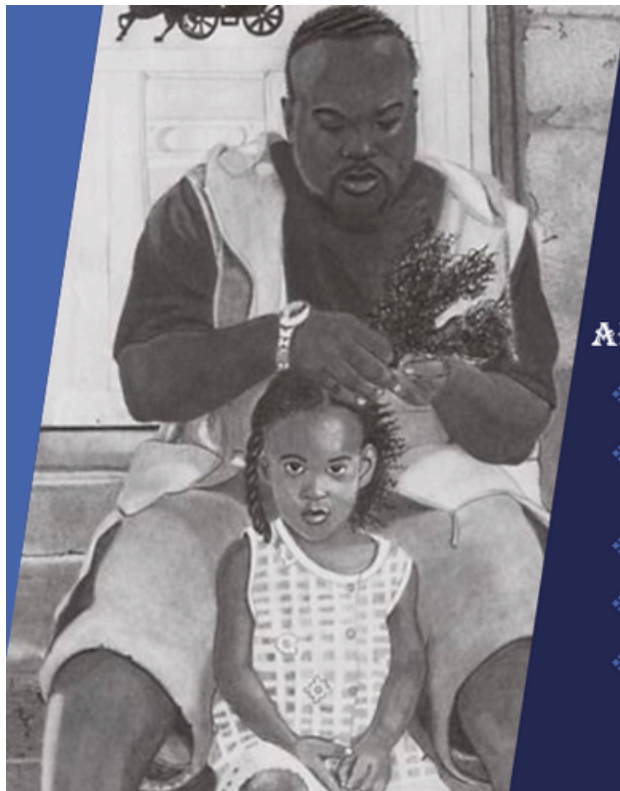
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Solution based
- Empathy
- Transparency
- Treat customers the way you want to be treated
- Build trust with customers
- Clear communication skills
- Commitment to clients
- Conflict resolution
- Cultural competence
- Fairness
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Promote a culture of ethical behavior

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Training

What is a Gift!

- Anything of value such as a discount, entertainment, trip(s), hospitality, forgiveness of debt, etc.
- Services such as transportation, local travel, lodgings, and meals. No matter how it is provided!
- If you are an employee or public official, the DeKalb County Code permits nominal gifts of \$40 from one source at any one time so long as the source is not a **Prohibited Source**. Remember, a Prohibited Source is anyone who is doing business or attempting to do business with the County. Prohibited Source also includes anyone regulated by the County.



HAPPY FATHER'S DAY

JUST LIKE FATHERS, THE ETHICS OFFICE
APPRECIATES YOUR CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO:

- ❖ YOUR POSITION IN DEKALB COUNTY;
- ❖ YOUR STRENGTH, INTEGRITY, AND PERSEVERANCE TO YOUR JOB;
- ❖ YOUR BELIEF THAT WE ARE BETTER -TOGETHER;
- ❖ YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE; AND
- ❖ YOUR TREATMENT TO THOSE IN THANKLESS JOBS AND TREATING PEOPLE THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED.

Training

CV360/INTERNAL DATABASE:

In December 2024, we launched for the first time in our history, a quick and easy way to increase each employees' knowledge of gifts, conflicts of interest, sexual harassment, and key components to proper ethical conduct. Our goal continues to be taking a proactive approach and maintaining an ethical culture. Below are two examples of the slides each non-exempt employee had to review:



A Gift is the following:

- ▶ Anything of value such as a discount, entertainment, trip(s), hospitality, forgiveness of debt, etc.
- ▶ Services such as transportation, local travel, lodgings, and meals. No matter how it is provided!





Rule 4.5 - Review for Jurisdiction. The ethics officer shall determine within five business days of receipt of a complaint whether an ethics complaint alleges a violation of the DeKalb County's Code of Ethics and whether the complaint meets the jurisdictional requirements of the Code of Ethics. If the ethics officer determines that the ethics complaint does not contain the necessary information under rule 4.2 or 4.3 or that the ethics complaint does not meet the jurisdictional requirements of the Ethics Code, the ethics officer shall advise the complainant that he or she shall have ten business days from the date of notice to correct and refile the complaint directly with the ethics administrator. If the complainant fails to refile and correct the complaint within 10 business days, the complaint shall be dismissed by the Board of Ethics within 30 days of receipt of the original complaint unless extended by a majority vote of the Board of Ethics or dismissed at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Ethics if the Board has adjourned. Likewise, if the ethics complaint does not meet the jurisdictional requirements of the Ethics Code, the ethics officer shall advise the Board of Ethics. Additionally, if the ethics officer determines that the complaint does not allege any act that, if true, would constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics, then the ethics officer shall recommend dismissal of the complaint and notify the complainant and respondent prior to seeking formal board action on the recommendation. Nothing shall preclude the ethics officer from communicating with the complainant prior to the time the matter is submitted to the Board of Ethics.

Rule 7.5 Right of Review. The decision of the Board of Ethics shall be final. Such decision shall be subject to review by petition for review to the DeKalb County Superior Court. A final decision rendered pursuant to Rule 5.4, 5.9, and Rule 7.1 shall be subject to appeal in the same manner as a final decision of the board.

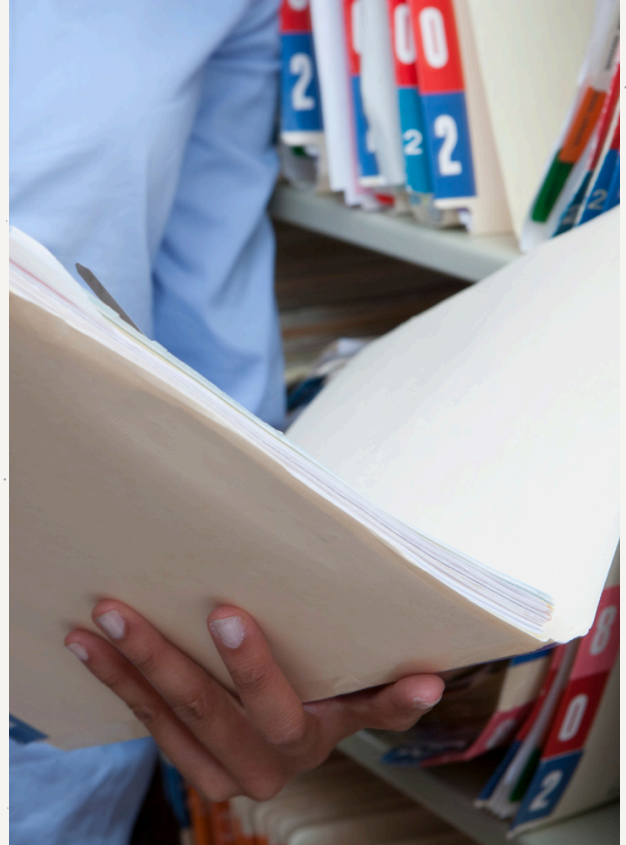
Two rule revisions occurred with the Rules of the Board. Rule 4.5 changed so the rule fell in line with the DeKalb County Ethics Code. Georgia legislators revised Rule 7.5 from the use of the word "appeal" to "petition of review." This rule gives a respondent a right to appeal (petition for review) a final decision of DeKalb Board of Ethics to the DeKalb County Superior Court.

OPEN RECORDS REQUESTS

2024 - 10 Requests

2023 - 23 Requests

2022 - 06 Requests



CONCLUSION

THE BOARD OF ETHICS AND THE STAFF accomplished all goals set for 2024.

All Ethics cases were completed in 2024 and all DeKalb County public employees and public officials received training. The DeKalb County Board of Ethics is a stable, professional, and transparent force. We increased transparency by providing monthly reports at our public meetings and moving our public meetings from Zoom to in-person. Lastly, we launched our first ever Ethics Forum that detailed how other counties create a more ethical environment and further used the event to meet and greet with civic leaders, directors, Board of Commissioners, and our DeKalb County citizens.