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Georgia Military Consumer Protection Initiative Announced

ATLANTA, GA, September 29, 2015 – Today, Georgia Watch, alongside Attorney General Sam Olens, Director John Sours of the Consumer Protection Unit, and Holly Petraeus, Director of Servicemember Affairs for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, announced the start of the Georgia Military Consumer Protection Initiative. At a press conference held at the Sloppy Floyd Veterans Memorial Building, speakers outlined the importance of empowering service men and women in Georgia to avoid predatory practices in the Georgia marketplace.

"Through our work on addressing predatory lending practices in the state, it has become abundantly apparent that servicemembers in Georgia are particularly vulnerable to payday lending, title pawn, and other harmful consumer credit products," said Georgia Watch Executive Director, Liz Coyle.

Over the next year Georgia Watch will develop a Military Consumer Protection Guide, with input from key stakeholders including Army Community Services, Airman and Family Readiness Centers, and other support units at installations throughout Georgia.

"The Attorney General's office is dedicated to protecting those that serve," said Attorney General Sam Olens, "I look forward to making this guide available so families can make educated choices and avoid unscrupulous services and products."

Once the guide is complete, Attorney General Olens and his staff, along with Director John Sours and the Consumer Protection Unit staff have agreed to review the guide prior to publication to ensure it is accurate, reflects the most recent legal protections available, and provides objective advice on priority consumer issues for military personnel and their families. Georgia Watch will begin the initiative by holding focus groups with military personnel, family members and key staff to inform the priorities of the guide.

"We strongly believe that to make a guide that is relevant, meaningful and accessible, we must begin by engaging with military families and those who serve them," said Elise Blasingame, Director of Community Education and Financial Protection for Georgia Watch.



"There are a lot of military currently serving in Georgia, and many veterans living here, as well," said Holly Petraeus. "Thank you for recognizing that, and for taking this important step to see that they have access to the information they need while here in Georgia to avoid financial predators and to protect their hard-earned money."

The guide will include advice, resources, checklists and worksheets on a number of priority consumer issues for military families, including: short-term lending, banking, prepaid cards, credit, purchasing an automobile, mortgages, housing, education, telemarketing, debt collection, identity theft, common scams, and pathways to redress.

"As a veteran myself, I am determined that we remain vigilant, and in fact redouble our efforts, to stop scams and unfair trade practices aimed at military personnel and their families," said John Sours, Director of the Consumer Protection Unit, Department of Law. "We know that those who make sacrifices every day in their service to our country deserve nothing less than the greatest degree of protection possible."

The project is made possible by the generous support of the Sears Consumer Protection and Education Fund.

Founded in 2002, Georgia Watch is a statewide consumer advocacy organization whose mission is to empower and protect Georgia consumers on matters that impact their wallets and quality of life through education, advocacy and policy development. Georgia Watch works to influence public policies that positively impact consumers, safeguard consumer protections in the area of personal finance, promote access to safe and affordable healthcare, encourage fair utility rates and renewable energy options, protect the right to trial by jury and promote access to the courts. To learn more about the Georgia Military Consumer Protection Initiative, visit www.georgiawatch.org/military/.