



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
**GWINNETT JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**  
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**PATSY AUSTIN-GATSON**  
District Attorney

**JOHN MELVIN**  
Chief Assistant

**March 30, 2026**

***Via Hand Delivery***

Jenny Carter  
County Attorney  
Gwinnett County

Re: **Solicitor-General Lisamarie Bristol – Unlawful Diversion Practices; Demand for Immediate Action**

Dear Ms. Carter,

I write to request immediate intervention by your office regarding ongoing actions by Solicitor-General Lisamarie Bristol that are in direct violation of Georgia law and that continue despite clear notice and an opportunity to correct the conduct.

The Solicitor-General's Office has implemented a system under which criminal and traffic citations are resolved in exchange for payments made directly to private nonprofit organizations. This practice is illegal.

Georgia law is explicit. O.C.G.A. § 15-18-80(f) requires that any diversion-related fee be collected by the clerk of court and paid into the general fund of the political subdivision. There is no statutory authority permitting a prosecuting attorney to require or direct payments to private charities as a condition of dismissing a criminal case. Nor is there authority to create parallel financial obligations outside the statutory framework.

To eliminate any doubt, I notified Solicitor-General Bristol of this legal defect in a formal letter dated March 12, 2026. That letter is attached. Its significance is that it placed her on unequivocal notice that her conduct violates Georgia law and requested that the practice cease immediately.

Her response is also attached. Rather than addressing the law, she asserted that this Office lacks authority to raise the issue and refused to engage with the statutory requirements. The significance of that response is clear: she has been informed of the illegality and has chosen to continue.

Also attached is a legal memorandum prepared for the District Attorney detailing the statutory framework and the specific ways in which this practice violates Georgia law. That memorandum explains that:

- diversion-related payments must be collected by the clerk of court;
- funds must be deposited into public accounts, not private entities; and
- prosecutors do not have authority to impose or redirect financial obligations outside that system.

Additionally, I have attached a pretrial diversion letter issued by the Solicitor-General's Office to a defendant. That document demonstrates that financial obligations are imposed as structured conditions of diversion, confirming that these are not voluntary charitable acts but required payments tied to case outcomes.

I have also attached the Solicitor-General's March 5, 2026, press release. That document is significant because it publicly confirms that cases are being resolved through "donations" to specified nonprofits. This is an announced policy—not an isolated incident.

Critically, I am now also attaching a certified court transcript from a State Court proceeding. That transcript is significant because it demonstrates that this practice has been occurring for an extended period of time and has been implemented in actual cases. In that proceeding, counsel and the court discuss a diversion arrangement requiring a specific monetary "donation" to a named charity as a condition tied to dismissal. The transcript reflects that the defendant, in reliance on that representation, made the payment and completed the required conditions. This is direct evidence that the unlawful practice is not theoretical—it is operational and has been relied upon by defendants.

Further attached are the Motion to Enforce Plea Agreement and the State's Response filed in that same case. Those filings are significant because they document, in formal pleadings, that:

- the Solicitor-General's Office communicated a diversion resolution conditioned on a monetary payment to a nonprofit;
- the defendant relied on that condition and performed; and
- the State subsequently attempted to disavow the agreement.

Taken together, these materials establish a clear and ongoing pattern:

- The Solicitor-General is conditioning case outcomes on payments to private organizations;
- Those payments are not collected through the clerk of court;
- Public funds that should flow through statutory channels are being diverted; and
- This practice has been occurring for some time and has been implemented in actual cases affecting real defendants.

This is not a discretionary policy choice. It is a violation of Georgia law involving both State and county funds.

The continued operation of this system exposes Gwinnett County to significant legal, financial, and reputational risk. It also undermines the statutory framework governing criminal prosecutions and the integrity of the court system.

Accordingly, I am requesting that the County Attorney's Office take the following actions immediately:

1. Issue a formal legal determination that the current practice is unlawful;
2. Direct the Solicitor-General, in writing, to cease immediately any practice conditioning dismissal of charges on payments to private entities;

3. Require that all diversion-related financial obligations be brought into compliance with Georgia law; and
4. Initiate a review of funds that have been diverted outside the statutory system.

This matter now requires prompt action. If corrective action is not taken, the Gwinnett County Grand Jury will open an investigation pursuant to its statutory oversight authority under OCGA §15-12-72(b)(2). The facts, as reflected in the attached materials, warrant that review.

This Office remains willing to work toward a lawful diversion framework. However, continued inaction in the face of an ongoing statutory violation is not acceptable.

I would appreciate your prompt response outlining the steps your office will take.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Melvin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

John Melvin  
Chief Assistant District Attorney  
Gwinnett Judicial Circuit