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Macon elected officials owe thousands to Georgia Ethics Commission

By [Laura Corley](#)

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November 2024 Election Day in Bibb county. (Jason Vorhees | The Melody)

Local elected officials in Bibb County owe thousands of dollars in fines to the state for allegedly failing to file campaign finance disclosure reports on time or, in some cases, not filing at all.

All told, 16 local officials serving on either the school board, water authority or county commission owe a total of at least \$7,125 to the Georgia Ethics Commission for more than 50 disclosures that were late or missing.

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All public officers and candidates for public office are required to file six campaign finance report disclosures during an election year and three disclosures during a non-election year. Public officers also must file a personal financial disclosure yearly.

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Personal financial disclosures show each candidate's personal investments, interests, financial positions, property ownership, spouse's investments and businesses owned. Campaign Finance Disclosure reports show who is giving money to campaigns and how much, as well as how those candidates or officers are spending the money.

"It's important for the public to know who politicians are getting money from because it could be influencing their decisions," Middle Georgia State University professor of political

science Christopher Lawrence said. “Politicians receive money from donors. The donors, although there is no explicit quid pro quo ... they wouldn’t be doing it if they didn’t think they were going to get something out of it, right?”

Late filers are fined \$125 for each late report. All reports must be submitted regardless of lateness.

“There might be some malicious cases, but I think more often than not, it’s just paperwork that doesn’t get filed because it’s not a priority or ... with the fines not being all that large then maybe there’s not enough incentive to do it in a timely manner,” Lawrence said.

In May, the ethics commission notified Macon Water Authority Board Chairman Gary Bechtel of his failure to file four years worth of campaign finance and personal finance disclosures. However, records show Bechtel filed the dozen or so missing reports, some dating back to 2021, in late June.

“It was an oversight on my part,” Bechtel told The Macon Melody, adding that he didn’t raise any money to report. “I make no excuse for it.”

Haley Barrett, spokesperson for the state ethics commission, said a consent order for Bechtel is set to be presented to state commissioners in September. Bechtel said he was told he owes \$1,500 to the commission.

In another case of alleged ethics rules violations, Myrtice Johnson has not filed a personal financial disclosure since being elected to represent the east side of Bibb County on the school board in 2020.

Johnson submitted an affidavit promising not to raise more than \$2,500, which Macon-Bibb County Elections Supervisor Tom Gillon said took the place of any campaign finance disclosures through May 2024.

The ethics commission did not respond to questions about whether it communicated with Johnson about the missing disclosures. Attempts to reach Johnson were unsuccessful.

Local candidates are required to file regular reports with the local elections office, which then reports late and non-filers to the state. But that will change in 2027 due to recent legislation that will require local office holders and candidates to file directly with the state.

“It will be a lot of work on Ethics’ part, at least at the beginning,” Gillon said.

Here are the fines owed or paid by local candidates as of July:

- Myrtice Johnson, who represents East Macon on the school board, owes at least \$1,500 to the commission for late and missing reports from 2021 to present

- Sundra Woodford, who represents central Bibb County on the school board, owes at least \$375
- Seth Clark, who represents the Vineville, Ingleside and Pleasant Hill neighborhoods on the county commission, owes \$500
- Frank Patterson, who represents West Macon on the Macon Water Authority board, owes \$625
- Paul Bronson, who represents part of East and northeast Macon on the Macon-Bibb County Commission, owes \$750
- Wade McCord, tax commissioner, owes \$625
- James Freeman, who represents the north side of Macon on the school board, owed \$500 and paid it in April.
- Rebecca Grist, state court solicitor, owes \$250
- Daryl Morton, who serves at large on the school board, owes \$250

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story misstated outstanding amounts owed by some candidates due to [out-of-date information](#) provided by the Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission.