

House Bill 1390

By: Representatives Peake of the 137<sup>th</sup> and Scott of the 153<sup>rd</sup>

**A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT**

1 To amend Article 7 of Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
2 relating to setoff debt collection, so as to authorize a setoff of certain debts owed to  
3 governing authorities of local government with respect to ambulance fees and fees of  
4 emergency medical personnel dispatched pursuant to a "911" emergency call; to change  
5 certain provisions relating to definitions; to provide for procedures, conditions, and  
6 limitations; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

7                   **BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:**

8                   **SECTION 1.**

9 Article 7 of Chapter 7 of Title 48 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
10 setoff debt collection, is amended in Code Section 48-7-161 relating to definitions relative  
11 to the setoff of debt collection, by revising paragraph (1) as follows:

12         "(1) 'Claimant agency' means and includes, in the order of priority set forth below:  
13             (A) The Department of Human Resources with respect to collection of debts under  
14             Chapter 9 of Title 37, Article 1 of Chapter 11 of Title 19, and Code Section 49-4-15;  
15             (B) The Georgia Student Finance Authority with respect to the collection of debts  
16             arising under Part 3 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20;  
17             (C) The Georgia Higher Education Assistance Corporation with respect to the  
18             collection of debts arising under Part 2 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20;  
19             (D) The State Medical Education Board with respect to the collection of debts arising  
20             under Part 6 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20;  
21             (E) The Department of Labor with respect to the collection of debts arising under Code  
22             Sections 34-8-254 and 34-8-255 and Article 5 of Chapter 8 of Title 34, with the  
23             exception of Code Sections 34-8-158 through 34-8-161; provided, however, that the  
24             Department of Labor establishes that the debtor has been afforded required due process  
25             rights by such Department of Labor with respect to the debt and all reasonable  
26             collection efforts have been exhausted;

(F) The Department of Corrections with respect to probation fees arising under Code Section 42-8-34 and restitution or reparation ordered by a court as a part of the sentence imposed on a person convicted of a crime who is in the legal custody of the department;

(G) The State Board of Pardons and Paroles with respect to restitution imposed on a person convicted of a crime and subject to the jurisdiction of the board; and

(H) The Department of Juvenile Justice with respect to restitution imposed on a juvenile for an offense to which a child victimization is a significant factor.

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(I) Governing authorities of local government with respect to the collection of ambulance fees and fees of emergency medical personnel dispatched pursuant to a "911" emergency call; provided, however, that the governing authority establishes that the debtor has been afforded required due process rights by the governing authority with respect to the debt and all reasonable collection efforts have been exhausted."

## SECTION 2.

Said article is further amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

"48-7-171.

(a) Except as otherwise provided in this Code section, all procedures and requirements of this article shall apply with respect to governing authorities of local government with respect to the collection of ambulance fees and fees of emergency medical personnel dispatched pursuant to a "911" emergency call.

(b) Such governing authorities may submit for collection under the procedure established by this Code section all emergency response debts which they are owed.

(c) Such governing authorities, whenever possible, shall obtain the full name, social security number, address, and any other identifying information, required by regulations promulgated by the department for implementation of this Code section, from any person for whom the governing authorities provide any such emergency services and who the governing authorities can foresee may become a debtor under the terms of this Code section.

(d) A debtor who protests the debt shall file a written protest with the claimant agency at the address provided in the governing authority's notification of intention to set off. The protest must be filed within 30 days of the date of the notice of intention to set off and must contain the debtor's name, address, and tax identification number, identify the type of debt in dispute, and give a detailed statement of all the reasons that support the protest. The requirements of this subsection are jurisdictional.

1       (e) To recover costs incurred by the department pursuant to this subsection, an  
2 administrative fee, not to exceed \$25.00, shall be added to the debt by the governing  
3 authority.

4       (f) Before submitting a debt to the department, the governing authority shall appoint a  
5 hearing officer to hear a protest of a debtor. This hearing officer is vested with the  
6 authority to decide a protest in favor of either the debtor or the governing authority. The  
7 governing authority shall certify to the department, on a form prescribed by the department,  
8 that a hearing officer has been appointed and shall inform the department of the name,  
9 address, and telephone number of the hearing officer. If this hearing officer is unable to  
10 serve at any time, the governing authority shall appoint another hearing officer.

11      (g) Upon receipt of a notice of protest, the governing authority shall notify the department  
12 that a protest has been received and shall hold an informal hearing at which the debtor may  
13 present evidence, documents, and testimony to dispute the debt. The governing authority  
14 shall notify the debtor of the date, time, and location of the informal hearing. At the  
15 conclusion of the informal hearing the officer shall render his or her determination. Upon  
16 receipt of a sworn certification from the hearing officer that he or she held an informal  
17 hearing and ruled in favor of the governing authority, the department may proceed to  
18 collect the delinquent debt regardless of a subsequent appeal by the debtor.

19      (h) A debtor may seek relief from the hearing officer's determination by requesting, within  
20 30 days of the determination, a contested case hearing before an administrative law judge.  
21 A request for a hearing before an administrative law judge must be made in accordance  
22 with the rules of said judges.

23      (i) If a portion of the delinquent debt is collected by the department and the determination  
24 of the hearing officer in favor of the governing authority is later reversed or the debtor  
25 prevails in a claim for refund, the governing authority shall refund the appropriate amount  
26 to the taxpayer, including the appropriate amount of the fee. That portion of the refund  
27 reflecting the department's fee must be paid from governing authority funds. If the  
28 governing authority is found to be entitled to a portion of an amount collected by set off,  
29 it is not required to refund the setoff fee retained by the department.

30      (j) If a refund is retained in error, the governing authority shall pay to the taxpayer interest  
31 calculated as provided in Code Section 48-2-35 from the date provided by law after which  
32 interest is paid on refunds until the appeal is final.

33      (k) If the governing authority determines that money has been erroneously or illegally  
34 collected, the governing authority, in its discretion, may issue a refund, even if the debtor  
35 does not file a protest or file a claim for refund.

(I) A collection may not be contested more than one year after the date it was made. The date of collection must be conclusively determined by the department. This provision shall be construed as a statute of repose and not as a statute of limitation.

(m) A debtor may make a claim for refund of an amount collected pursuant to this Code section within one year from the date the amount is collected, in the same manner as seeking relief from a hearing officer's determination pursuant to this Code section.

(n) This Code section does not create a right to jury trial where one does not already exist. When a debtor otherwise is entitled to have a jury determine the issue of indebtedness, that right is preserved specifically. If a right to a jury trial already exists and the debtor wishes to exercise that right, the debtor is not required to request a contested case hearing before an administrative law judge but instead must file in the appropriate superior court and serve the pleadings on the governing authority within 30 days from the date of the hearing officer's determination. The complaint must name the governing authority as a defendant and the allegations of the complaint must contest the debt and any potential setoff.

(o) Governing authorities shall indemnify the department against any injuries, actions, liabilities, or proceedings arising from performance under the provisions of this Code section."

### SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.