

## Atlanta Mayor Bottoms' campaign fined \$37,000 for violations in 2017 race

Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms' campaign has signed an agreement with the state ethics commission, agreeing to pay a fine of \$37,000 for various campaign finance violations during the 2017 mayor's race.

In the agreement, Bottoms' campaign admits to accepting \$6,900 in campaign donations that exceeded state limits on the amount individuals can contribute. The campaign also acknowledges receiving another \$110,797 in contributions that violated other state statutes.

Many of violations were due to improper paper work. But after the election, Bottoms also raised money to retire campaign debt. The amount raised exceeded the debt, and the campaign kept the balance, which is a violation.

The agreement was formally approved by the ethics commission Thursday.

David H. Emadi, ethics commission executive director, said an audit of the campaign's bank records found some of the improper contributions "purely procedural."

The commission — whose formal name is the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission — launched investigations in 2019 into the campaigns of Bottoms and Mary Norwood, who lost to the mayor by less than 1,000 votes in the December 2017 runoff.

The commission initially alleged in December 2019 that Norwood's campaign accepted \$168,975 in improper contributions, and that Bottoms' campaign accepted \$382,773 in similarly improper contributions. Those determinations were made based on campaign finance disclosure reports.

Those numbers were significantly scaled back after the commission examined each campaign's bank records.

Norwood, who now chairs the Buckhead Council of Neighborhoods, agreed to pay a \$27,000 fine in August and told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that she did so with a personal check. She admitted to accepting \$80,750 in improper campaign contributions, the majority of which resulted from not filing the correct form.

While Norwood turned over her campaign's bank records almost immediately after receiving a subpoena from the commission, Bottoms refused to do so for nearly a year.

At one point, a spokesman for Bottoms campaign referred to Emadi as an untruthful and an overzealous prosecutor. In September, it appeared as if the case was heading to court.

Then Bottoms' campaign retained lawyer *Carey Miller of the Robbins Firm*, and provided the bank records to the commission late last year.

"I know we heard of a similarly situated case a number of months ago in the Norwood campaign," Emadi said. "I would say, and I think Mr. Miller would agree, that this penalty and fine assessed is consistent in scope and proportionality with that. I think this is a fair outcome."

Miller told the commission that the matter had a unique, long and complex history due to health issues, the COVID-19 pandemic and a little confusion.

"At the end of the day the mayor has been consistent in her insistence that the complaint and the additional allegations don't point to any intentional nefarious act," Miller said.

Both fines are considered steep, but they are nowhere near the largest in state history.

In 2008, the Georgia Association of Realtors agreed to pay a \$80,000 fine for running an undisclosed \$200,000 media campaign that helped get Georgia Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle elected.