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## PEACH POLICY PAPERS

### PPC Chair's Corner

By Robin Steagall, MSPP, RDN, LDN

Fall is a time of beauty and, just as the leaves turn from green to gold, a reminder that change is the only constant in our lives. This time of year brings me renewed energy for cooking and baking with crisp apples and savory pumpkins. It is also a time of renewed connections with my neighbors as the sticky heat of summer passes into the cool evenings of autumn.

That same energy transfers to the policy and advocacy activities of the Georgia Academy. I have had the pleasure to meet with dietetic professionals throughout Georgia who are engaged in defending dietetic licensure. The Public Policy Committee (PPC) and our Political Action Committee (GAND-PAC) have been meeting with key legislative and regulatory officials to strengthen relationships and promote the work of dietetic professionals throughout Georgia.

This edition of our policy newsletter is influenced by the mid-term elections and the convergence of local, state, and federal policy with our constitutionally guaranteed right to elect the individuals who will represent our interest at all levels of government. I recently asked the Georgia Academy's lobbyist, Jet Toney, to share his thoughts on advocacy and civic engagement during an increasingly heated political environment. His insights are shared in the interview below.

I want to thank you all for your thoughtful engagement and support of, not only GAND policy priorities and licensure defense, but your continued commitment to the highest standards of professionalism and ethics, which are hallmarks of the dietetics community.

In health,  
Robin

### ACTION ITEMS

Things to Know

- VOTE on November 8th in the General Election. Find your polling place [here](#). Open from 7:00am-7:00pm on election day – you are allowed to vote if you are in line before the polls close. Bring your valid photo ID.
- [Sign-up](#) for Advocacy Training – 11/13/2022 or 12/11/2022 @ 3:00pm. Approved for 1.5 CEs.
- Donate to the GAND Licensure Defense Fund [online](#) or Venmo/PayPal @EatrightGA – put licensure defense in the comment section
- Donate to GAND-PAC [here](#).
- Do you have an NPI #? If not, find out more [here](#) and register for free.
- The Academy **Action Alerts** are a quick & easy way to advocate for nutrition-related bills & you can take action on current alerts [here](#). Options for members & non-members to participate!



## Q & A: ADVOCACY, DIETETICS, AND DEMOCRACY

with Jet Toney, Cornerstone Communications Group

### How can dietetic professionals assure democracy in Georgia?

Dietetic professionals [by themselves] cannot assure democracy. The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights are the documents, which provide the closest assurance that democracy remains dynamic and vibrant in our nation. What RDNs and NDTRs, and all other Americans, can do is vote and advocate. Without broad voter participation, there is no democracy. Without advocacy, there is movement toward autocracy.



Advocacy Day 2022

### Why is advocacy a strong contributor to democracy at the state level?

Georgia's elected officials, especially those closest to their constituents, are best equipped to make well-informed decisions when citizens representing a variety of perspectives and life experiences communicate with the elected officials. State legislators, who make the bulk of decisions about health care policy and scope of practice laws in Georgia, are empowered to make the best law when citizens (RDNs and NDTRs) invest time in giving the legislators their knowledge and personal perspective on important issues.

### What is the role of Political Action Committees (PACs) in democracy?

Political Action Committees would not likely exist were the costs of running election campaigns not so expensive. The reality of political service is that getting elected is terribly expensive. When organizations such as GAND establish, maintain, and adequately fund a PAC, the organization is equipped to contribute to the re-election campaigns of those officials who have demonstrated support for NDTRs, RDNs and LDs. Such campaign contributions can be delivered by members and officers of GAND, the GAND-PAC committee members, or GAND's professional lobbyists. The most effective delivery of GAND-PAC contributions includes representatives of all of these parties, especially when a GAND member who lives in an elected official's district is involved.

### Why should I support GAND-PAC when it contributes to a candidate I don't personally support?

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for any PAC Board is educating contributors on the criteria for determining which elected officials or candidates are awarded contributions. Foremost, PACs contribute to elected officials who have demonstrated support for the mother organization's public policy goals. Secondly, PACs contribute to members who commit to run for public office. Additionally, PACs contribute to those legislators who are in positions of responsibility to determine whether legislation will move forward or be defeated. PAC Boards must determine to whom contributions will be made based on the issues specific to the mother organization's primary public policy goals and not the personal policy interests of individual members.

# GAND – POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (GAND-PAC)

## Why I serve on the GAND PAC board by Holly Porter (PAC Chair)

I was first bitten by the public policy bug when I attended the Academy's 2011 Public Policy Workshop in Washington D.C. Before then, I had always voted, but I never felt personally connected to the political process. My perspective changed after spending a day at the Capitol, visiting my legislators' offices. That was an empowering experience for me. I realized that these individuals work for the public (i.e. me, along with my fellow constituents) and they owe us the time to hear what is important to us as citizens. I do not expect my legislators to always agree with me, but they need to at least hear me out. And when we can effect positive change at the policy level, that change will benefit many people. This kind of effort felt worth my time and energy.

So, when I saw the call for GAND PAC trustees last year, I decided to get involved. I am now serving as chair of the GAND-PAC board of trustees. With the hostile mood in today's politics, this can feel like a frustrating time to be involved in the political process. Political action committees are not always viewed in a positive light. So, I approach this work by putting "politics" aside and focusing on the policies.

The goal of any political action committee is to raise and contribute money to the campaigns of candidates who are likely to advance the group's interests. Accordingly, GAND-PAC exists to support GAND's policy goals, which are focused on protecting consumers and improving the health of Georgia. These are goals, in my mind, that should be above the fray, notwithstanding those who oppose our stance on licensure.

Our PAC gives us an opportunity to meet with candidates when they are attentive to potential contributors during their campaign. That candidate may be less attentive once in office when their time is dominated by legislating or the daily rigor of running a statewide agency. To provide a recent example, our lobbyist Jet Toney, GAND President Ashley Matthews and I met with Tyler Harper, a candidate for . The Department of Agriculture is charged with agriculture and consumer protection in Georgia. The commissioner is clearly involved with food and food safety more than any other elected state official; their views on raw and processed food production and distribution are given weight. We had a warm and productive conversation with Mr. Harper. We learned that he had worked with nutrition and dietetics students while he studied at UGA and we all agreed that we have shared interests that we can partner on if he is elected. This was a worthy investment and we will continue to cultivate this relationship.

We have more contributions and meetings planned for the waning days of the election cycle. Stay tuned for further updates. We also continue to seek another trustee for our board. If any of you are interested in public policy and want to get involved, please email me!



GAND PAC Meeting with Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. Left to right: Robin Steagall, Holly Porter, Sec. Raffensperger, Kristin Cuculovski, Theavy Tep-Rutkowski

**Board of Trustees:** Holly Porter (Chair): [hollybporter@me.com](mailto:hollybporter@me.com), Kristin Cuculovski (Secretary), Joan Fischer (Treasurer), Robin Steagall (Trustee), Katherine Bechdol (Trustee) Ashley Matthews (liaison to the GAND Board), Cicely Thomas (liaison to the GAND Board)





## Barbara Ann F. Hughes Nutrition Policy, Advocacy & Education Award

Congratulations to Cicely Thomas, M.Ed, RDN, LD, President-Elect of the Georgia Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She applied and received the 2022 Barbara Ann F. Hughes Nutrition Policy, Advocacy & Education Award for \$1,000 from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Award and Scholarship Foundation.

This award is to provide continuing education stipends for nutrition professionals on the subjects of policy initiatives and advocacy. Preference was given to members of the Nutrition Education for the Public Dietetics Practice Group. It is open for any Academy member to apply. If you are interested in applying for this award or other financial awards, visit <https://www.eatrightfoundation.org/apply-for-funding/awards>.

Shout out to the Augusta District Dietetic Association (ADDA) for hosting an incredible Fall Banquet and fundraiser for licensure defense In September. Over twenty-two Augusta district members volunteered for advocacy training and information to help us in our licensure defense efforts.



The West Georgia RDN Networking Group hosted a fun licensure defense event, at I Wish You Wood art studio in Newnan, GA. A big thank you to Melissa Brillhart for organizing this event and bringing together a dynamic group of dietetic professionals.

## GAND PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### PPC MEMBERS

**Public Policy Chair (PPC)** – Robin Steagall, MSPP, RDN, LDN  
**Georgia Academy President** – Ashley Matthews, MS, RDN, LD, CNSC, PMP  
**Georgia Academy President-Elect** – Cicely Thomas, M.Ed, RDN, LD  
**State Policy Representative (SPR)** – Caitlin Waddle, MS, RDN, LD  
**State Regulatory Specialist (SRS)** – Alex Webb, RDN, LD  
**Nutrition Services Payment Specialist (NSPS)** – Sue Tocher, MS, RDN, LD, CDCES  
**Consumer Protection Coordinator (CPC)** – Katherine Bechdol, MS, RDN, LD  
**Legislative Affairs Secretary** – Kristin Cuculovski, MS, RDN, CSO, LD/N  
**State Legislative Monitor** – open

### PPC LIAISONS

**GAND Political Action Committee Chair** – Holly Porter  
**Augusta District Liaison** – Sunitha Zechariah, PhD, RDN, LD, CNSC, FAND  
**Greater Atlanta District Liaison** – Caitlin Waddle, MS, RDN, LD  
**West GA Area District Liaison** – Melissa Brillhart, MA, RD, LD  
**Student Liaison** – Alana Ahrens – Georgia State University  
**Student Liaison** – Destiney McDaniel – Georgia State University  
**Student Liaison** – Valentina Paez – University of Georgia