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Attorney General Steve Marshall, Local Leaders Caution Public Officials on Ethics Implications of Spending Federal Relief Money

(MONTGOMERY)—Attorney General Steve Marshall and leaders from the Association of County Commissions of Alabama and the Alabama League of Municipalities remind public officials to follow Alabama’s ethics law when making decisions about how to spend an anticipated \$1.8 billion in funds from the American Rescue Plan.

“The State of Alabama is set to receive nearly \$4 billion in federal stimulus funds with \$1.8 billion going directly to city and county governments and school boards,” said Attorney General Marshall. “This unprecedented amount of federal funds to be directed to Alabama local governments, in particular, could present the possibility of costly legal mistakes if officials are not well versed in the state ethics law.”

“The Association is partnering with Alabama’s counties on a statewide approach that will emphasize both ethical responsibilities and identification of projects that can transform our communities,” said Sonny Brasfield, Executive Director, the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. “Each community will have its own needs and resources, and this revenue should be used at the local level to expand on a community’s strengths and address its pressing needs.”

“The League appreciates Attorney General Marshall and his efforts to remind municipal officials of the unique opportunities facing them through the American Rescue Plan Act,” said Greg Cochran, Alabama League of Municipalities Executive Director. “We encourage municipal officials to be mindful and intentional to ensure that all legal parameters have been considered when distributing these funds within their communities. Through the American Rescue Plan, municipalities have a duty to seek out programs and resources that will be transformational now and in the future.”

The Attorney General outlined relevant portions of the ethics law prohibiting officials from:

- Taking actions or casting votes that present a conflict of interest.
- Directing money for personal financial gain, or that of a family member or business partner.
- Soliciting or accepting items of value, whether for yourself or a family member, from a lobbyist seeking to influence your spending decisions.

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The Attorney General also encouraged public officials to review the Alabama Ethics Law, and noted that a refresher course is available by video on the Ethics Commission website: <http://ethics.alabama.gov>.

“Don’t ever forget that the dollars you’re spending are not yours; those belong to the taxpayers,” Attorney General Marshall added. “I’m not sure that anything erodes the public trust more than to see their leaders line their own pockets, or those of their family members, with dollars that don’t belong to them. Violating Alabama’s ethics law can carry a prison sentence of two to 20 years.”