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#### BUREAU OF GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH

938 Lafayette St., Suite 200

New Orleans, LA 70113

Phone 504-525-4152

Fax 504-525-4153

www.bgr.org

## **BGR MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Janet R. Howard  
President & CEO  
504-525-4152 x107

### **BGR Report Calls for Significant Reforms to Contracting Process in Jefferson Parish**

Today BGR releases *Private Services in the Public Interest: Reforming Jefferson Parish's Unusual Approach to Service Contracting*. The report shines light on contracting processes that are highly irregular and uniquely vulnerable to abuse.

Jefferson places the power to select contractors with the Parish Council instead of the executive branch, an abnormal approach for a government with an elected executive. But as the report reveals, this abnormality is relatively minor compared to a second one: the Parish Council's nearly unfettered discretion in the selection of contractors. The Parish Council is free to ignore the work and recommendations of evaluation committees and make its own selections.

Making matters worse, the council regularly defers to the council member in whose district the contracted service will be performed.

The report finds that there is no reason for giving any elected official – whether it be a council member or the chief executive – such expansive power over contractor selection. Best practices indicate that governments should select the firm that performs best on an evaluation committee's scoring of relevant criteria. Granting elected officials wide discretion

invites politics and patronage into a selection process that should be based strictly on getting the best combination of quality and price for the public. And it suffers from a fundamental conflict of interest: Officials with extraordinary power to select service providers are elected in campaigns financed in varying (but almost always significant) degrees by the very people who later seek, and often receive, such contracts.

*Private Services in the Public Interest* draws on best practices to recommend reforms. The report contains more than a dozen recommendations aimed at reducing the discretion of elected officials, enhancing the contract review process and improving other aspects of contracting in the parish.

BGR Chairman Sterling Scott Willis said the contracting process in Jefferson Parish is “a situation crying out for reform.”

“There is a good reason why no community that we examined does contracting like Jefferson Parish does,” Willis said. “Jefferson’s approach is fraught with risk to the public, and it places the Parish Council in an awkward and inappropriate position. In the wrong hands, the current system could easily be abused.”

The report is available on BGR’s website, [www.bgr.org](http://www.bgr.org).

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*BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policy-making and the effective use of public resources in the New Orleans area. For more information call Janet Howard at 504-525-4152 or visit BGR’s website, [www.bgr.org](http://www.bgr.org).*