

TESTIMONY TO AUSTIN ETHICS REVIEW COMMISSION

November 10, 2015

Consideration of Resolution regarding lobbyists rules

Good evening. Thank you for having this opportunity for the public to weigh in on the proposed resolution on updating the ordinance that governs lobbyists.

I am Frances McIntyre representing the Austin League of Women Voters. As you may know, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, political organization with both men and women members, that promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose candidates or parties.

I am here tonight to express our support for the Resolution you have before you. The reason the League is supporting this resolution is because we believe the citizens of Austin deserve to know who is being paid by companies or individuals who want to influence our Mayor and Council in their favor on governmental issues. Anyone can watch city meetings on TV and see who is trying to persuade the Council one way or another. Lobbyists work on a different level to persuade Council/Mayor outside of public meetings and their activities are not always evident to the public.

This resolution sets out clear rules about who should register as lobbyists. Most of the rules come directly from the State of Texas lobbyists rules, which makes me think they could not be that onerous or complicated.

For instance:

- State Law violation of the rules is a Class A misdemeanor plus an administrative fine. Austin's would be a Class C misdemeanor.
- The State requires reporting of compensation, e-filing, preparation aides and preparer and reporting of subject matter in detail as does this resolution.
- The current Austin Lobbyists Law has a loophole that allows lobbying of upper-middle management city employees. The State law does not have the loophole. The proposed law, attempting to influence any city staff, except clerical or administrative personnel on a discretionary municipal matter, would be defined as lobbying.
- Employees of larger firms would not necessarily need to register. The resolution requires only the lobbying entity to register, pay fees and report standard information.

- Uncompensated citizens are not required to register as lobbyists at any level of government (including the State). In this proposition, the threshold is clearly stated at \$2000 per quarter spent on lobbying to require registration. The State level is \$1000.

The current ordinance is not transparent, fair or enforceable. The proposed resolution is a big step toward a more transparent policy that the Austin citizens deserve. And if the lobbyists who work on State issues can abide by their requirements, it should not be unreasonable for our city lobbyists to comply.

The Austin League approves and encourages this Ethics Commission to endorse this resolution now, so it can proceed in the process and become law as soon as possible.

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