

March 23, 2022

Testimony on HB 59
Ethics – Local Governments – Registration of Lobbyists
Environment and Transportation

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 59 which aims to strengthen our local ethics laws by improving the guidance provided to local jurisdictions throughout the state.

While the vast majority of local governments have made good faith attempts to update their ethics codes, there are many jurisdictions that have fail to cover what would be considered a lobbyist at the state level. In jurisdictions like Montgomery County, Baltimore City and Hyattsville an individual can spend a significant amount of time and money influencing decisionmakers and not be required to register as a lobbyist because the code is modeled after option B in COMAR.

HB 59 aims to address this by improving the definition of lobbying in option B which currently only requires registration if a person appears before a public official or employee and spends more than \$100 on things like food, entertainment, or gifts with intent to influence. HB 59 would bring the definition of lobbying closer to that in option A which covers more lobbying activity.

Strong ethics laws are the cornerstone of accountable government. They assure the public that elected officials are acting in the public interest. Transparency in lobbying at all levels of government is also a critical element of a functioning democracy as ensure the public knows who is working to influence decisionmakers. HB 59 is a part of the solution, and for the reasons outlined above we urge a favorable report.