

HB 59 - SUPPORT

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**HB 59 – Ethics – Local Governments – Registration of Lobbyists
January 20, 2022
Before the House Environment and Transportation Committee**

While lobbying laws and regulations are generally considered very strong at the State level in Maryland, they are not as strong – and often not consistent – at the local level. This has led to issues with confusion and compliance of paid lobbying interests and regulations at the local level in recent years.

HB 59 would strengthen the lobbying provisions within county and municipal ethics laws and help reduce confusion and increase compliance by creating greater consistency – for both the general public and for paid lobbyists.

The purpose of requiring individuals and organizations to register as lobbyists is to inspire public confidence in government by providing transparency to the resources being expended to influence public policy. Again, this is taken very seriously at the State level.

In terms of local governments, the State Ethics Commission provides two model ethics ordinances (Model A and Model B) within COMAR regulations that may be used in developing local regulations. Unfortunately, the current guidance in COMAR has created a lack of consistency for lobbying provisions within local ethics ordinances. Many jurisdictions have adopted the weaker lobbying definitions that are allowed by the model B ordinance, and some municipalities have exemptions. HB 59 would create more consistency and would require the use of compensation/expense as the lobbying definition trigger rather than the weaker model B trigger of relying solely on meals, entertainment and gifts.

Currently, many individuals and organizations that are paid or spend money to influence government decisions are not required to register as lobbyists. Many of Maryland’s largest jurisdictions have few or no registered lobbyists.

HB 59 will result in stronger and more consistent local lobbying rules throughout Maryland. Please consider a favorable report for HB 59. Thank you.