

# It Is Time for the Texas Legislature to Ban Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying

**T**axpayer-funded lobbying is undermining the voice of Texans in government and diluting one of their most precious rights—the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances. In 2021, local governments in Texas spent millions of dollars in taxpayer money to hire registered lobbyists, often to fight against the very people funding them. This practice is a direct threat to citizens’ constitutional rights and must be stopped.

## **The Problem: Drowning Out Citizens’ Voices**

Texans’ right to petition their government is enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and dates back to the Magna Carta of 1215. Despite this, taxpayer-funded lobbying is increasingly silencing citizen voices in Austin.

Local governments, backed by taxpayer dollars, are employing lobbyists to advocate against the interests of the very people they represent. In one instance from 2019, rural Texans testified against bills that would have expanded property tax abatements for politically connected businesses. Yet, for every citizen who showed up, there were multiple lobbyists representing local governments, businesses receiving the abatements, and their associated organizations, all working against

the public’s interest.

Texans overwhelmingly petition their state officials to lower taxes and curb government spending. However, lobbyists hired by local governments are advocating for more spending and higher taxes, creating an unbalanced battle where citizens are often outnumbered and ignored.

## **The Scale of the Issue**

In 2021, local Texas governments spent \$75 million on registered lobbyists, not including the salaries of in-house lobbyists or the funds funneled to pro-government associations such as the Texas Municipal League, the Texas Association of Counties, and the Texas Association of School Boards. The total cost of this taxpayer-funded lobbying is likely much higher. The Texas Public Policy Foundation reports that local government lobbying expenses have skyrocketed, nearly doubling from \$41 million in 2017 to \$75 million in 2021. This unchecked spending is not only wasteful but also corrosive to the democratic process.

Taxpayer-funded lobbyists are not just hired to pass legislation; they are hired to kill citizen-priority legislation, stop investigations and audits into government practices, and block efforts to improve

transparency.

## Protecting Against Government Corruption

One of the most dangerous aspects of taxpayer-funded lobbying is its use to shield government entities from accountability. Lobbyists paid with public funds are often deployed to block audits, investigations, and transparency measures that could expose waste, fraud, or corruption within local governments.

This is not just about passing or defeating legislation—it's about protecting against government corruption. Public officials should not be using taxpayer dollars to prevent accountability or conceal misconduct. Yet, this is precisely what happens when taxpayer-funded lobbyists work to suppress audits or limit oversight. This practice undermines public trust and weakens the foundations of good governance.

### The Solution: Ban Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying

To restore Texans' right to petition their government without interference, the Texas Legislature must take decisive action. Here are key steps that must be implemented:

1. ***Ban Lobbying with Public Funds:*** Local governments should be prohibited from using taxpayer money to employ or contract with registered lobby-

ists. Public funds should not be used to pay for any lobbying expenses.

2. ***Prohibit Membership Dues to Lobbyist Organizations:*** Prohibit Membership Dues to Lobbyist Organizations: Government agencies, cities, counties, and school boards should be barred from using taxpayer money to pay membership dues to any organization that employs or contracts with registered lobbyists, such as the Texas Municipal League or Texas Association of School Boards.

3. ***Stop Influence on Legislative Measures:*** Political subdivisions must be prevented from using public money to influence the passage or defeat of any legislative measure.

4. ***Ban Lobbying by Businesses Receiving Tax Abatements:*** Any business receiving property tax abatements from local governments should be prohibited from employing or contracting with registered lobbyists. These businesses should not be able to lobby for more taxpayer-funded perks.

### Conclusion

Taxpayer-funded lobbying is an abuse of public trust. The voices of Texans are being drowned out by well-funded lobbyists hired with their own tax dollars. Worse, taxpayer-funded lobbyists are being used to block government transparency, shield corruption, and oppose the interests of

those they claim to represent. The Texas Legislature must act to restore the balance of power and protect the citizens' right to petition their government without interference from local govern-

ments and special interests. By implementing these reforms, we can ensure that the interests of Texans—not lobbyists—are heard in Austin.



*The Huffines Liberty Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan research institute.*

**Our mission is to advance the cause of liberty, prosperity, and virtue in the State of Texas by educating citizens so they may hold their elected officials accountable.**

**We look beyond the obvious and develop researched solutions based upon the common sense liberty principles of individual rights, fiscal restraint, personal responsibility, limited government, and social conservatism.**

**The Huffines Liberty Foundation encourages and educates citizens so they are better informed to tackle the toughest challenges.**