

A Brief History of Wisconsin's Lobbying Law

1858 -- Wisconsin's first lobbying law enacted -- prohibits any person "having a pecuniary or other interest, or acting as the agent or attorney of any person in procuring or attempting to procure that passage or defeat of any measure before the legislature . . . in any manner to influence any member of the legislature for or against such a measure, without first making known to such member the real and true interest he has in such measure, either personally or as such agent or attorney".

Also prohibits contingency fees for lobbyists.

1899 -- Establishes lobbying registry for every person, corporation or association which employs any person "to promote or oppose in any manner, the passage by the legislature of any legislation affecting the pecuniary interests of any individual, association or corporation as distinct from those of the whole people of the state".

Registry includes names of both lobbyists and their employers and identification of subjects of legislation that will be lobbied.

Statement of expenses to be filed within 30 days after final adjournment of the legislature showing "all expenses paid or incurred . . . in connection with the employment of legislative counsel or agents, or in connection with promoting or opposing . . . any legislation".

1905 -- Prohibits "any person employed for a pecuniary consideration, to act as legislative counsel or legislative agent . . . to attempt personally and directly to influence any member of the legislature . . . otherwise than by appearing before . . . committees' or by newspaper publications, public addresses, or written statements delivered to each member of the legislature (with 25 copies to be delivered to the Secretary of State).

Prohibits lobbyists on the floor of either house of the legislature.

1945 -- Requires weekly expense statements from lobbyists showing "for each day the disbursements made or obligations incurred, which shall be listed separately for meals, refreshments, entertainment, transportation and miscellaneous, to whom paid or to be paid, the total number of persons for whom the disbursements were made or obligations incurred, the amount for personal expense, and the subject of legislation or number of each bill or resolution in connection with which such disbursements were made or obligations incurred".

1947 -- Prohibits "attempting to influence the vote of legislators on any measure pending or to be proposed by the promise of support or opposition at any future election, or by any other means than a full and fair argument on the merits thereof, or by making public any unsubstantiated charges of improper conduct on the part of any other lobbyist or of any legislator, or engaging in practices which reflect discredit on the practice of lobbying or the legislature".

Establishes licenses for lobbyists, and provides for revocation or suspension of license for violating lobbying law.

Changes lobbyist's weekly expense statement to monthly statement.

1957 -- Prohibits lobbyists and principals from "[d]irectly or indirectly furnishing or being concerned in another's furnishing to the governor, any legislator, or to any officer or employee of the state, to any candidate for state office or for the legislature, any food, meal, lodging, beverage, transportation, money, campaign contributions or any other thing of pecuniary value".

1978 -- First iteration of current lobbying law: (1) expands lobbying to include attempting to influence administrative rulemaking; (2) permits campaign contributions during window; (3) abolishes monthly reporting by lobbyists; (4) requires six-month reporting by principals; (5) abolishes restrictions on lobbyists' permitted arguments and modes of practice.

1989 – Administration and enforcement of the lobbying law transferred from the Secretary of State to the Ethics Board.

Redefines lobbying to include time spent preparing to attempt to influence legislation or administrative action, appearing at public hearings or meetings, or serving on a committee in which general preparation occurs.

The class of individuals to which a lobbyist, or lobbying organization, is prohibited to furnish anything of pecuniary value changes from all state employees and officials to agency officials whose responsibilities include participation in rule-making activities, legislative employees, and elected state officials.

Expands reporting requirements for lobbying organizations to include expenditures made for research and preparation for lobbying. Requires lobbyists and lobbying organizations to maintain a contemporaneous record of time spent in all lobbying activities.

1998 – Organizations that employ a lobbyist are required to identify to the Ethics Board the bills, rules, and budget topics in which they are interested within 15 days of their first lobbying communication on each matter. Each lobbying organization must provide a reasonable estimate of the proportion of its time spent lobbying associated with each identified matter that accounts for 10% or more of lobbying time.

1999 – Organizations that employ a lobbyist are required to identify each topic of a lobbying communication that does not relate to a pending bill or administrative rule.

2005 – Registration and reporting exemptions applicable to state and local officials are extended to officials of American Indian tribes in Wisconsin.

2008 – Administration and enforcement of the lobbying law transferred from the Ethics Board to the Government Accountability Board.