



Clean Elections Minnesota
2533 Colfax Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55405

Members of the Campaign Finance Board
190 Centennial Office Building
638 Cedar St.
St. Paul, MN 55155

June 14, 2024

Dear Members of the Minnesota Campaign Finance Board. My name is Mary Hartnett and I'm Executive Director of the non-partisan, non-profit organization, Clean Elections Minnesota (CEM). We educate Minnesotans as well as advocate on issues such as expanded voter access, public transparency and campaign finance reform.

The Legislature has instructed the Campaign Finance Board to study and make recommendations on who should be required to register as a lobbyist when paid to influence state and local officials. This topic has gained attention due to recent legal changes aimed at ensuring that lobbyists at the local level also register and disclose their activities. However, following these changes, there has also been significant lobbying to narrow the scope of who must register, potentially limiting publicly available information about those trying to influence government decisions.

The essential democracy issue at stake is the public's ability to know who is being paid to lobby decision-makers. So far, the testimony received has chiefly been from corporate and private interests. There has been significantly less input from the general public or organizations advocating transparency and accountability. For that reason, we appreciate the Campaign Finance Board holding an additional hearing to receive a broader set of perspectives on this matter

CEM believes transparency and disclosure are fundamental to public trust in government. Minnesota's current lobbying laws, much like our campaign finance laws, are designed to provide visibility into who is influencing public policy decisions. Consequently, we must maintain a system that allows the public, journalists, and lawmakers themselves to see who is being paid to engage with government officials.

Today's threshold for registration, \$3,000 for those directly influencing government officials, is an effective standard. Raising it would mean that unknown, possibly secretive, persons could influence government decisions without transparency for the public.

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We should be cautious about proposals to carve out specific professions from registration requirements. Exempting executives or professionals who engage with lawmakers can obscure the public's ability to know who is attempting to influence policy decisions. This could inappropriately allow significant interests to operate without transparency or accountability.

Therefore, we urge you to recommend broader registration requirements that will serve the public interest. Registering as a lobbyist is not a punishment; it's simply a way to ensure the public is informed about who is advocating for specific interests and policies.

As the Campaign Finance Board continues its deliberations, we urge you to always prioritize public interests—those of residents, workers, communities, and voters--- in matters related to transparency in lobbying.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Mary Hartnett
Executive Director

Ken Peterson
Legislative Committee Chair