

July 3, 2026

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Submitted by email to AEFCommittee.Admin@assembly.ab.ca

Re: Submission to the Review of the Lobbyists Act (Statutes of Alberta 2007, Chapter L-20.5)

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) thanks the Committee for the chance to take part in its review of the Lobbyists Act. We are a non-profit advocacy organization represents hundreds of thousands of taxpayers across Canada. We are proud to have more than 30,000 annual donors who make 75,000+ donations per year. The CTF does not accept foreign donations, nor do we accept donations from unions, governments or political parties.

We support lobbyist registration. A public record of who is paid to influence government, and on whose behalf, helps taxpayers see when a decision serves a private interest instead of the public one. We want that record to work well.

Transparency has a purpose, and the purpose is what matters. A lobbyist registry exists to identify paid actors who ask government for a benefit that lands in their own pocket. It does not exist to catalogue ordinary people who tell their elected representatives what they think. Holding that distinction is the theme of this submission.

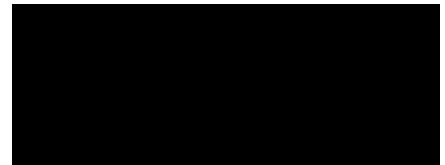
We make two recommendations and raise one caution.

Recommendation 1: Keep the non-profit exemption in section 3(1)(i)

Section 3(1)(i) exempts the officers, directors and employees of a non-profit organization that is not set up to serve management, union or professional interests and does not have a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises. The Committee should keep this exemption as it stands.

The Registrar drew the line when he briefed this Committee on June 29, 2026. He explained that a charity such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation falls inside the exemption, while an industry association that represents profit-making companies does not and must register. That is the right line. It separates groups that press government for a public cause from groups that press government for their members' commercial gain.

Narrowing or removing the exemption would sweep in community groups, charities and citizen advocates whose reason for speaking is public, not commercial. It would tell a volunteer-driven cause to register its officers, log its hours and disclose its advocacy the same way a paid corporate campaign does. That does not add transparency. It buries the real signal, the genuine commercial lobbying, under a pile of noise, and it discourages the ordinary participation in public life that a healthy democracy needs.

**Recommendation 2: Keep a meaningful hour threshold**

An organization's in-house staff become registrable only once their combined lobbying reaches 50 hours a year. The Committee should keep a meaningful threshold and resist pressure to cut it.

A low threshold captures small groups and part-time volunteers who speak to government a few times a year. It turns a modest amount of civic participation into a reporting obligation backed by penalties.

There is a cost argument as well. Alberta is running deficits and carrying a significant debt. Every new reporting rule adds staff, forms and enforcement, on the government's side and on the side of every group caught by it. A lower threshold raises no revenue and cuts no spending. It grows the bureaucracy and the red tape, which is the wrong direction for a province trying to control its costs.

We also want to flag an argument the Committee is likely to hear: that the 50-hour threshold is hard to enforce, so it should be lowered or replaced. The Registrar told this Committee that the threshold is difficult to assess. Difficulty of enforcement is a reason to enforce it well, not a reason to widen the net over more Albertans.

A caution on scope: weigh who is asking

The Committee will hear proposals to expand the Act: a lower hour threshold, a communications registry that logs individual meetings, wider disclosure. Several will come from the officials who run the Act.

We say this with respect for their work: a regulator asked whether its own mandate should grow will tend to say yes. More scope means a bigger budget and more authority. There is nothing wrong with asking a barber whether you need a haircut, as long as you remember what answer you are likely to get. When the Committee weighs a proposal to expand the registry, it should discount for the interest the proposer has in the answer and ask what problem the expansion solves for taxpayers.

Free expression sets a limit

One kind of expansion deserves particular caution: any move to treat citizen advocacy as registrable lobbying, or to build a registry that records the individuals who contact public officials.

Section 2(b) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protects freedom of expression, and political expression sits at the core of that protection. As the Supreme Court of Canada held in *R. v. Keegstra*:¹

The connection between freedom of expression and the political process is perhaps the linchpin of the s. 2(b) guarantee, and the nature of this connection is largely derived from the Canadian commitment to democracy. Freedom of expression is a crucial aspect of the democratic commitment, not merely because it permits the best policies to be chosen from among a wide array

¹ 1990 CanLII 24 (SCC), [1990] 3 SCR 697 at para

of proffered options, but additionally because it helps to ensure that participation in the political process is open to all persons.

When a person tells their Member of the Legislative Assembly what they believe, that is not a transaction to be logged. Instead, it represents participation in our political process that our constitutional democracy intends to protect.

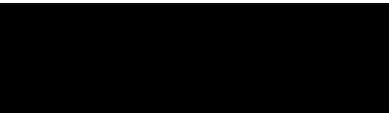
The concern is concrete, because the registry is public. The registry is published under the Act, and written submissions to reviews like this one are normally made public, names included. A rule that pulled ordinary political expression into that system would put private citizens' political views on a public list. People can lose work, or become targets, over their politics. A regime built to reveal paid influence should never become a tool that exposes a citizen for holding an opinion and sharing it with the people who represent them.

This is the line we ask the Committee to hold. Identify the paid actor seeking a private benefit. Protect the citizen exercising a public right. The Act already knows the difference between the two. Keep it that way.

Conclusion

We support a Lobbyists Act that does its real job: showing taxpayers who is paid to influence their government, and what they are asking for. We ask the Committee to keep the non-profit exemption in section 3(1)(i), keep a meaningful hour threshold, and treat any proposal to extend the Act's reach over ordinary Albertans with care.

Sincerely,



Scott Hennig
President & CEO
Canadian Taxpayers Federation