

Submission to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Comprehensive Review of the Lobbyists Act

Submitted by Sariah Seaborn

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future review of the Lobbyists Act. As a Constituency Manager working with Albertans and Stakeholders on a daily basis, I regularly observe interactions between citizens, community organizations, businesses, municipalities, non-profit organizations, and elected officials. These interactions are a valuable part of the democratic process and help ensure that government decision-makers remain informed about the impacts of legislation, policy, and programs.

General Observations

The Lobbyists Act is built upon two important principles: that lobbying government is a legitimate activity and that transparency regarding lobbying supports public confidence in government decision-making. In my view, Alberta's current framework generally achieves these goals while preserving appropriate access to government.

Recommendation 1: Increase Clarity Around Registrable Lobbying Activity

Many individuals and organizations may struggle to determine when routine engagement with government becomes registrable lobbying activity. Additional plain-language guidance, examples, and educational materials could improve understanding and compliance.

Recommendation 2: Review the 50-Hour Threshold for Organization Lobbyists

The existing threshold appears to help distinguish occasional engagement from more significant lobbying activities. However, the Committee may wish to review whether the threshold remains appropriate in light of evolving communication methods and administrative practices.

Recommendation 3: Improve Accessibility of the Public Registry

The public registry is one of the Act's strongest transparency tools. Consideration could be given to improving search functionality, plain-language descriptions, and public awareness of the registry so that information is easier for Albertans to access and understand.

Recommendation 4: Review Reporting Requirements for Administrative Efficiency

Modern electronic filing systems may present opportunities to simplify certain reporting requirements while maintaining transparency and accountability.

Recommendation 5: Maintain Strong Conflict-of-Interest Protections

The provisions respecting paid advisory contracts, contingency fees, and gifts help maintain confidence in government decision-making and should remain a key part of the legislative framework.

Recommendation 6: Continue Monitoring Former Public Office Holder Disclosure Provisions

The current disclosure provisions appear to strike a reasonable balance between transparency and allowing individuals to pursue employment opportunities following public service.

Conclusion

The fundamental structure of the Lobbyists Act remains sound. Future improvements should focus on clarity, accessibility, administrative efficiency, and maintaining strong transparency and conflict-of-interest protections. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input as part of this review.

Respectfully submitted,

Sariah Seaborn