



## Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

September 22, 2016

Mr. Rod Loyola, MLA  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship  
c/o Committee Clerk  
3rd Floor, 9820 107 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5K 1E7

### **RE: Lobbyists Act Review**

Dear Mr. Loyola:

I am pleased to provide this submission on behalf of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) in response to the recent call issued by the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship relating to the mandatory five-year review of the Alberta Lobbyists Act.

ECVO is a registered charity that works to strengthen the nonprofit sector in the Alberta Capital Region. Our organization also supports a number of collective impact initiatives in the areas of poverty elimination, mental health and social inclusion.

When the Lobbyists Act Legislation was proposed in 2007, Alberta's nonprofit sector raised concerns about how they would be affected. This led to the current exemption for public benefit nonprofits. The concerns raised in 2007, and subsequently in 2011, the year of the last mandatory review, were as follows:

1. The increased administrative burden that would divert human resources in community-based organizations from the delivery of essential programs and services;
2. The "chilling" effect the legislation would have on communication with government;
3. The complexity of identifying financial supporters of lobbying activity when the mix of revenues for nonprofit organizations includes donations, membership fees and core and project funding agreements;
4. The fact that the legislation could prevent organizations from providing donor anonymity.

ECVO, along with colleague organizations, recently distributed a brief survey coordinated by the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. Of the 121 Alberta nonprofits responding to the survey, eighty-nine percent responded that the Government should be asked to maintain the current exemption.

The reasons provided by nonprofit stakeholders for why this provision should remain intact are consistent with what has been communicated to the Alberta Government in the past.

- Communicating with public officials is fundamental to how many nonprofits that work in the public interest fulfill their missions. These organizations are interwoven through virtually all aspects of society and it is their duty to represent community needs, priorities and issues to elected and paid officials. They are NOT seeking personal or private benefit.
- The information nonprofits and charities amass as they go about their work helps shape sound policy and effective government services. It is important that these organizations can participate with government in research, advisory councils and other consultative processes without concerns about potential conflicts of interest or dual roles.
- If the exemption was removed, organizational resources would be diverted from true areas of need. Nonprofits would not only be required to register, develop systems for tracking activities and submit regular filings, but many would also need to factor this legislation into their organizational policy, position descriptions, risk-management frameworks, and quality management processes. This is further exacerbated by limited administrative capacity which can lead to high rates of non-compliance.
- It can be argued the requirements of the legislation are not onerous; however, our stakeholders raised very legitimate concerns about the cumulative or 'layering' effect of statutory reporting. Each individual piece of legislation requires an assessment of how it applies and what is required to comply.
- Information from other jurisdictions suggests that where legislation applies to public benefit organizations, it is oftentimes difficult to define the boundaries between providing timely and necessary information to government regarding programs and policies, and participation in lobbying activities.

The role and work of public benefit nonprofit organizations has not changed. What has changed more recently is that, owing to the state of Alberta's economy, organizations are stretched to respond to heightened need amidst a challenging fiscal environment. Many remain under-resourced and lack the capacity to take on a greater administrative burden.

In the absence of a strong rationale for lifting the existing exemption, **we urge the Government of Alberta not to make changes to the Lobbyists Act that would create an unnecessary burden for Alberta's nonprofits working in the public interest and for public benefit.**

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We are happy to answer any questions you may have regarding our submission – please direct any inquires by way of Russ Dahms, our Executive Director at (780) 809-0886 or by email to [director@ecvo.ca](mailto:director@ecvo.ca).

Your consideration is appreciated.

Sincerely,

  
Cliff Higuchi, Chair  
ECVO Board of Directors

cc: Leslie Evans, chair of Public Policy and Government Relations Committee