

Chicago Amends Lobbying and Ethics Ordinance

September 2011

The Chicago City Council passed an ordinance in late July revising many of the city's lobbying and ethics laws. Most of these changes, which were part of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's larger ethics reform proposals, took effect on September 8, 2011.

The new law makes an important change to the definition of a "lobbyist." Now, any person paid or compensated to lobby for a not-for-profit entity must register as a lobbyist if the not-for-profit entity lobbies on behalf of for-profit entities or individuals engaged in for-profit enterprises. There are, however, exemptions for directors, officers, employees and volunteers associated with nonprofit entities in certain situations.

The new ordinance also changes the frequency, contents and filing process for lobbying activity reports. First, registered lobbyists must file on a quarterly basis rather than semiannually. Second, the reports also must disclose campaign contributions to candidates for city office. Third, the Chicago Board of Ethics must create an online system, post lobbying activity reports online and allow the public to view and search lobbying activity reports over the Internet. In addition to these reporting changes, lobbyists will be permitted to register using the online system. All of these registration and reporting changes are effective on May 1, 2012.

Existing gift and loan restrictions also will be expanded to further limit the ability of lobbyists to make gifts to city officials and employees. Specifically, under the new ordinance, a lobbyist is subject to a limit of \$50 per gift and \$100 in aggregate gifts per calendar year. Cash gifts are prohibited regardless of amount. A lobbyist also is explicitly prohibited from providing a loan to an elected official or a city employee.

Finally, the new ordinance contains a post-employment lobbying restriction that mirrors an Executive Order Mayor Emanuel issued on May 16, 2011. Under the new law, certain city employees are prohibited from lobbying the city within two years of leaving municipal employment.