

Checking Up on Maryland Localities' Compliance with New State Ethics Requirement

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In 2010, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation requiring counties and municipalities to adopt codes of ethics and lobbying rules that were at least as strict as state law. Each county and municipality was required to certify compliance with the Maryland Ethics Commission no later than October 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, although not all localities have complied with this deadline.

The Maryland Ethics Commission created model rules for counties and municipalities, but some are drafting their own lobbying and ethics rules instead. For example, state law requires an individual to register as a lobbyist upon making \$500 or more in legislative or executive branch lobbying expenditures or spending \$100 or more on gifts to influence executive action. In Anne Arundel County, however, the lobbyist registration threshold is making \$100 or more in legislative or executive branch lobbying expenditures or spending \$50 or more on gifts to influence legislative or executive action.

Despite last fall's deadline, some localities have yet to implement finalized codes of ethics. Baltimore County, for example, approved a new code of ethics in December 2011. The Maryland Ethics Commission, however, notified Baltimore County last month that its code of ethics was not in compliance because it permitted elected officials to accept sporting event tickets and needed to be revised.

Given the patchwork of lobbying and ethics rules at the county and municipal levels, it is important to check each locality's rule before engaging in any lobbying or gift giving.