

Hefty Fines for Municipal Lobbying Violations

March 2021

In February 2021, the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission issued substantial fines, totaling \$162,500, for the failure of two entities and affiliated individuals to register as lobbyists and file disclosure reports in violation of the City's Municipal Lobbying Ordinance. This comes on the heels of \$45,000 in penalties issued by the Commission in December 2020, as reported in the previous edition of *Election Law News*, on a man and his company who violated lobbyist registration and disclosure filing requirements.

Also in February, the Chicago Board of Ethics assessed over \$12,000 in fines to individual lobbyists who violated local lobbyist filing requirements. Chicago may impose fines of \$1,000 per day for late filings, and several fines were listed as ongoing in addition to the \$12,000 already assessed at the time of the Board's press release. Chicago is set to expand its \$1,000 per day penalties to include nonprofit lobbying violations on April 1, 2021, as a new ordinance takes effect after several delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Failure to comply with local lobbying laws can quickly become costly. The sizable fines issued in Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as the changes set to take effect to Chicago's lobbying ordinance, serve as a reminder that local lobbying laws are ever-changing and vary widely across localities. Individuals and organizations that are unfamiliar with or unaware of municipal lobbying law requirements face a serious risk of exposure to significant fines. Wiley routinely advises clients on local lobbying law compliance issues, including whether activities in cities across the United States will trigger local registration and reporting requirements.

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