



Legislative Issues

McAllen Chamber of Commerce

City and County Legislative Advocacy

Background

City- and County-funded advocacy are long-standing practices that refer to when cities, counties, and other local governments or taxing entities lobby the legislature with taxpayer-funded advocacy efforts. This is often done to change to or advocate for beneficial taxpayer policies, such as property tax relief, local reforms, or critical local issues or projects.

Over the years, key elected “state” officials have sought and advocated legislative priorities to ban taxpayer-funded advocacy because some state-elected officials feel it is wasteful spending by local cities and counties. Several key state-elected officials supported a proposition last session to ban it completely, and the proposition made progress in the session. Governor Greg Abbott stated his support to ban taxpayer funded advocacy by cities and counties during the 86th Texas Legislative Session. The Senate passed SB29, but the bill failed in the House.

Local elected officials say the ban is an effort to silence the voices of local elected officials. Local officials and the organizations representing them say “taxpayer-funded lobbying” is an incorrect term that does not accurately describe what they do. Some city and county elected officials felt SB29 would have left cities and counties at the mercy of large corporations and lobbyists or advocacy firms with legislative agendas counter-productive to local entities, with no way of protecting their local citizens and critical revenue streams from large corporations’ encroachment or by a State of Texas’ power grab.

On December 9, 2020, the City of Dallas approved taxpayer-advocacy because it claims the city must have access to the legislators and the legislative process during the legislative session. Big corporations continue to hire lobbyists and other interest groups to push and promote their interests and legislative agendas. Local governmental entities have felt attacked over the last several sessions and believe they have to protect their interests and authority, as well as to protect specific programs and revenue streams.

The “ban” versus “support” of taxpayer-funded advocacy discussion will continue during the 87th Legislative Session. Legislators will continue the debate and discuss local advocacy, its abolishment or its continuation. Some have suggested a compromise could be reached with well-thought-out reform that could correct any possible perceived abuses.

Pros of Taxpayer-funded Advocacy

- Local governmental advocacy is essential and a productive role for government because it helps identify and sort out the many opposing interests of their constituents, citizens, groups, communities, and regions.
- Local governmental advocacy provides access to legislators, provides educational opportunities, and allows individual cities and counties to explain a particular piece of legislation's pros and cons.
- Taxpayer-funded advocacy is meant to educate lawmakers on the impact of proposed legislation or bills on their constituents, as well as tax ramifications. It is not a waste of taxpayer money.
- Local governmental advocacy is meant to provide lawmakers more in-depth analysis of the impacts of proposed legislation or bills and to make lawmakers aware of their constituents' concerns about those potential impacts. Educating legislators is never a waste of money.
- Cities and counties argue against the idea that they advocate against local taxpayers because they are actually the closest to the citizens and are the easiest “touchpoint” for citizens to express their displeasure on any given issue. “All politics is local,” and cities and county-elected officials understand that fact, first-hand.

Cons of the Taxpayer-funded Advocacy

- Some legislators have voiced concerns that they never see or hear from lobbyists or advocacy groups hired by cities or counties who have been paid to push a particular issue or legislation. The apparent lack of contact and communications raises concerns that taxing organizations are wasting money when they hire outside advocacy firms or lobbyists.
- Some legislators believe local governments should not use taxpayer money to push local agendas or issues in Austin.
- Some legislators believe cities and counties using taxpayer-funded advocacy and lobbying are working against the local taxpayers and businesses in their communities.
- Some legislators see cities and counties as self-serving tax entities on a power grab designed to increase their sphere of influence and expand the tax base and programs, while increasing spending and forcing local tax increases on local taxpayers.

References:

- <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/2020/02/26/community-censorship-or-taxpayer-funded-lobbying-local-control-looms-large-in-texas-house-gop-primaries/>
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- <https://thetexan.news/city-of-dallas-approves-taxpayer-funded-lobbying-contracts/>