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## Lobbyists Would Have to Disclose More Details on Political Spending

By Nathan Eagle CONNECT | 02/25/2014



Nathan Eagle/Honolulu Civil Beat

Sens. Les Ihara and Clayton Hee talk before session started, April 30, 2013.

The public may soon see more timely and detailed reports from people who are paid to try to influence policy decisions in Hawaii.

That's good news for a state with [lax lobbying laws](#). A nationwide survey conducted two years ago found [Hawaii lagging far behind](#) — especially when it comes to disclosure — and the Legislature has done little since then to address the problem.

Now, state lawmakers are advancing legislation this session that would require lobbyists to account for the money they are spending by breaking it into categories that show how much goes toward food, entertainment, gifts, loans and other areas.

Nonprofits and others advocating for greater government transparency say passing the proposed measures would be a small but significant reform.

"While lobbyists currently are required to file an expenditure report, these forms do not provide enough information to help the public decipher how lobbyists are spending their resources," Common Cause Hawaii Executive Director Carmille Lim said.

The form the Ethics Commission uses gives lobbyists the option of disclosing their expenses in several categories, but doing so is voluntary. Many lobbyists simply fill in the lump sum and leave the other slots blank.

[Senate Bill 2634](#) would make it mandatory to categorize each expenditure by dollar amount and describe its nature and purpose. The bill is expected to clear the Judiciary and Labor Committee, chaired by Sen. [Clayton Hee](#), Tuesday and move on to a vote before the full Senate.

A separate bill, which the same committee passed after making a few changes to it Monday, aims to make lobbying disclosure reports available in a more timely manner — particularly after a special legislative session.

The issue arose out of the two-week special session last fall to [legalize gay marriage](#).

Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent lobbying lawmakers, but the public couldn't see who was spending the money or how it was being used until January, two months after the [special session ended](#).

[Senate Bill 2629](#), as amended, would require lobbyists to submit their disclosure reports within 30 days of the end of a special session.

The original bill, introduced by Sen. [Les Ihara](#), would have made the reports due within 10 days but there were concerns over lobbyists' ability to comply on that tight a deadline.

The National Organization for Marriage spent \$118,969 supporting gay marriage, mostly on media advertising,

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according to the [expense report](#) it filed Jan. 30.

Hawaii Family Advocates spent \$23,317 lobbying against the legislation, according to its [amended report](#) filed Feb. 12.

The group's president, Honolulu attorney James Hochberg, was the only person to oppose SB 2629 Monday.

He told lawmakers that passing the bill would be a "burden" on people who take an interest in the Legislature.

Hawaii Family Advocates paid Hochberg \$8,831 for his work as a lobbyist during the most recent reporting period, May 1 through Dec. 31, according to his [expense report](#) filed Feb. 3.

"Our approach in Hawaii is mostly to provide disclosure so that the public can form their own opinions on the influences at work in the Legislature," Ihara said. "It's important to provide that information and these two bills do that."

A group of interested citizens came together last year under the auspices of the [Collaborative Leaders Network](#) to review the state's lobbying laws and consider whether they should be reformed or strengthened to provide more transparency about who's trying to influence public policy and how they're going about it. (Developing a process to work on important issues is the aim of the Collaborative Leaders Network, funded by [The Omidyar Group](#), which represents the personal, professional and philanthropic interests of Civil Beat Publisher and CEO [Pierre Omidyar](#) and his wife, Pam.)

[Peter Adler](#), a Honolulu facilitator and mediator, is helping lead the project. The group expects to issue a report on its work within the next few weeks. He said Monday that the conversations with lobbyists, NGOs, executives and elected officials have been productive.

The bills moving through the Legislature now are not part of the group's work although Adler said they are tracking the measures.

Part of the group's work was to evaluate the [State Integrity Project](#), a nationwide project in 2012 that looked at how accountable state governments are to their citizens. Hawaii received a D- for lobbying disclosure, one of 14 measures used to rank states in a national scorecard of sorts.

- *Contact Nathan Eagle via email at [neagle@civilbeat.com](mailto:neagle@civilbeat.com) or Twitter at [@NathanEagle](https://twitter.com/NathanEagle).*

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Do discussions include people from NGOs who lobby lawmakers but are not paid to do so? Do other states regulate them as well as paid lobbyists?

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