

HB 1926 -- FAIR INFLUENCE IN GOVERNMENT ACT

SPONSOR: Ross

This bill establishes the Fair Influence in Government Act that prohibits the use of public funds for lobbying purposes. In its main provisions, the bill:

(1) Prohibits any state agency, political subdivision, or private entity that receives any amount of funding appropriated by the state or any amount collected from any local tax authorized by statute to use any public resources to pay the costs of employing or contracting for the services of any person who lobbies on behalf of the state agency, political subdivision, or private entity receiving state appropriations in an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of any legislative measure;

(2) Prohibits any state agency or political subdivision from using any public resources to pay any membership dues on behalf of an agency, political subdivision, officer, or employee of the agency or political subdivision to any organization or association if the dues directly or indirectly pay all or part of the salary of any person required to register as a lobbyist in an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of any matter pending before a legislative committee in either chamber of the General Assembly or before the General Assembly;

(3) Specifies that a person who accepts public funds as compensation for lobbying in violation of these provisions may be prohibited from registering as a legislative lobbyist for a period of up to two years;

(4) Specifies that these provisions cannot be construed to prohibit any elected governing body from meeting with one or more members of the General Assembly during an open meeting of the elected governing body; limit, preclude, or deprive any state agency or individual, including public officers and employees, from exercising the agency's individual right to communicate with public officials; or prohibit the hiring of a lobbyist for the purpose of monitoring activities of the General Assembly or providing information, including testimony, solely for informational purposes; and

(5) Specifies that a violation of these provisions by a state agency, political subdivision, or private entity that receives state funds must result in a fine of not less than \$1,000 but not more than \$5,000. The director or similar chief executive of the state agency, political subdivision, or private entity must be personally liable for the fine.