

December 7, 2020

Dear Chairman Hughes and the Honorable Members of the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee:

We, the undersigned, respectfully submit comments to the Senate State Affairs Committee on the interim charge below in preparation for the committee hearing on December 8, 2020:

*“Study how governmental entities use public funds for political lobbying purposes. Examine what types of governmental entities use public funds for lobbying purposes. Make recommendations to protect taxpayers from paying for lobbyists who may not represent the taxpayers’ interests.”*

Each of our organizations is comprised of a broad range of members from throughout the state, including county and city officials, school boards, school employees and others. Our members decide legislative agendas and legislative advocacy activities through an established process that is open and transparent to citizens and taxpayers at the local and state levels. That process values and encourages citizen participation, and the ensuing policy positions reflect the will of the membership as determined within a democratic model.

Each legislative session, thousands of bills are filed that could affect our members. While some would have a positive effect for our members and their communities, others would have a negative impact. It is imperative that the Texans in our organization have a voice in discussions on the merits of legislation and state policies, and their diverse voices amplified through the actions of associations and professional advocates is an essential part of producing good public policy.

Our recommendation to the committee is that the right of citizens and taxpayers to participate in legislative discussions should be protected, and any efforts to marginalize or silence their right to do so should be defeated. Furthermore, our efforts on behalf of local members should be determined at the local level, as “one size fits all” approaches don’t work for Texans.

It is important to note that expenditures for affirmative advocacy efforts at the Capitol are driven by a transparent hiring and budgetary process open to the public. If local taxpayers believe local leadership make the wrong decisions in paying dues to an association or hiring a lobbyist, those voters can act on that at the ballot box. Local taxpayers know best what meets the needs and characteristics of their communities of interest.

In summary, local government and community leaders advocate in Austin for policies that bolster local efforts to provide services, meet the needs of their communities, and protect their unique quality of life. And they provide services from a perspective that is free from partisan political agendas. We urge you to recommend the rejection of any proposal that would restrict local leaders’ and local taxpayers’ ability to have their voices heard in the legislative process.

We appreciate you and the committee members for taking the time to read our comments on this topic. If you wish to discuss this topic in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully,

