



## Community Censorship Legislation (aka “Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying”)

Going back to the 2019 legislative session, the Texas Senate has passed legislation that was debated on the House floor, but failed passage, to prohibit school districts and other political subdivisions from having lobbyists or from being members of associations that have lobbyists. Similar legislation was filed in the 2021 session in both the House and Senate. Passage of these bills would have resulted in the elimination of Governmental Relations for the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) members and for members of similar organizations, which represent school leaders during legislative sessions, the interims between sessions, and year-round with various regulatory entities such as the Texas Education Agency, Teacher Retirement System, State Board of Education, and State Board for Educator Certification throughout the year.

Thousands of bills are filed every session, and during those months, TASA Governmental Relations (GR) staff often tracks 1,500-plus bills that would impact Texas public school employees, districts, and students. It is critical that legislators hear from all interested parties on issues, as it is an essential part of creating good public policy. TASA members are Texans and should have a voice at the Capitol in discussing legislation and state policies when they cannot be there in person to closely monitor hundreds of bills in various stages of the process, or to sit through hundreds of hours of public testimony.

### Why Community Censorship is Bad Public Policy

- Legislators and staff regularly rely on education organizations to assist them in determining the impact of legislation on their school districts, taxpayers, and communities. Why would any legislator want to prohibit information that could inform their decisions?
- Superintendents and administrators can’t be expected to read all legislation, participate in hearings in Austin, and follow the complex legislative process while running their school districts. TASA GR staff often tracks 1,500-plus bills and keeps school leaders apprised of their status in the legislative process.
- Transparency in the direct lobbying portion of the advocacy efforts of organizations like TASA was established with the passage of HB 1495 in 2019.
  - Districts must include a line-item expenditure in their proposed budgets for “directly or indirectly influencing or attempting to influence the outcome of legislation or administration action.”
  - The percentage of TASA membership dues spent on lobbying is small (4.43% in 2024). For example, a district that spends \$250 on membership dues would calculate \$11.08 ( $\$250 \times 0.443 = \$11.08$ ) as its line-item expenditure for lobbying.
- Having representation in Austin is fiscally conservative for Texas’ school districts. Consider the expense of a fraction of their membership dues versus the cost of travel, lodging, meals, and time away from their jobs.
- Community censorship laws would disproportionately impact mid-size and small or rural districts that cannot afford staff of their own to monitor all the bills that would impact their districts.
- Texas is a large and geographically diverse state. The farther away from Austin a school district is located, the greater their need to have professional organization representatives in Austin to help them due to the challenges and expense of travel.
- The Legislature often drives costs from the state through unfunded mandates. TASA GR staff advocates for local control of local tax dollars and opposes unfunded mandates.
- Many anti-public education groups have full-time representatives at the Capitol; community censorship legislation would not prevent them from continuing to represent those groups.
- Local governments and communities shouldn’t be excluded from having professional representation at the Capitol. Locally elected officials and superintendents are closest to their constituents, taxpayers, and community members and are directly accountable to them.
- Lobbyists provide information on issues and legislation, but ultimately it is legislators who cast votes and are responsible for legislation that passes or fails – not lobbyists.
- If a legislator doesn’t want to hear from a particular group or their lobbyists, they can simply refuse to take a meeting with them. Legislators do it all the time.