

Ban Legislators from Accepting All Expenses Paid Trips from Lobbying Interests

A measure to reduce the influence of money in state politics.

HD.xxx (Reps. Robinson & Uytterhoeven); SD.xxx

- This act would prohibit legislators from accepting any travel paid for by an organization which is registered as a lobbyist (called a “client” in state law) during the year in which the travel takes place.
- Legitimate travel for educational purposes paid for by non-profit foundations and organizations which are not registered as lobbyists during the year of travel would not be affected.
- Massachusetts has tough ethics rules for public officials, banning the acceptance of any gift of substantial value from lobbyists. But there is a glaring loophole. Legislators can accept lobbyist-paid travel of any amount simply by declaring, without any supporting explanation, that the travel is “in the public interest.” The value of these trips can amount to thousands of dollars.
- MAPA first became aware of this exception with respect to nearly annual trips to Israel, sponsored and organized by the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), but researching the issue has revealed a widespread practice of lobbyist-paid travel in many other spheres.
- This travel is by its nature a conflict of interest and bolsters the role of money in Massachusetts politics. For example, legislators have attended conferences on state gambling policy funded by gaming interests; they attended meetings on internet regulation paid for by Google and Facebook; they traveled to meetings on regulating cable TV funded by cable operators.
- First-class propaganda junkets to Israel were valued at upwards of \$6000 each, while the JCRC lobbied for legislation punishing critics of Israel. Last year, the JCRC lobbied for \$500,000 in state funds to promote Israeli businesses. \$250,000 was approved by the state legislature.

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