



Office of the Mayor

March 24, 2021

Representative Chris Paddie, Chairman
Texas House State Affairs Committee
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768

Dear Chairman Paddie and Honorable Members of the Texas House State Affairs Committee:

I'd like to offer the following comments to the House State Affairs Committee regarding H.B.749 (Middleton), which will be before your committee on Thursday, March 25th, 2021.

House Bill 749 would prohibit political subdivisions from spending public funds to hire experienced, professional, registered lobbyists to advocate before the Texas Legislature on behalf of the local elected officials and constituents they represent. This legislation would also prohibit local officials and respected community partners from joining associations that employ lobbyists, or employing in-house, salaried professionals to monitor legislation and advocate for community interests.

At the Capitol, local government and community leaders advocate for policies that advance economic development, provide reliable public services, and protect their unique quality of life. And, they bring an important nonpartisan perspective to public policy discussions in Austin. But if this or any similar legislation become law, it would: 1) silence local leaders' ability to represent their constituents and taxpayers in legislative policy discussions that impact their communities, 2) set a dangerous precedent by allowing every other stakeholder in the legislative process to hire professional lobbyists while denying that right to local officials and community leaders; and 3) prohibit associations that support and represent cities, counties and school districts from effectively advocating on behalf of their members at the Capitol, which would be especially harmful to smaller communities who cannot afford to hire full time advocates

As you know, if local officials' constituents disagree with the decision to employ a lobbyist to advocate for important community priorities before the Legislature, they can and will take the appropriate action at the ballot box. That's how accountability really works – not by imposing state dictates that stifle local participation of legislative policy considerations. Additionally, strong state and local provisions already provide transparency regarding the expenditure of public funds used to hire professional advocates.

We urge you to vote against H.B. 749 and any legislation that would restrict local leaders' and local taxpayers' ability to have their voices heard in the legislative process. If you wish to discuss this topic in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully,

Laura K. Hill
Mayor

cc: Representative Giovanni Capriglione
Representative Tan Parker