



JOINT LEGISLATIVE ETHICS COMMITTEE 129th OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Tony Bledsoe
Executive Director

BUDGET TESTIMONY

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Joint Legislative Ethics Committee

May 05, 2011

Good morning, Chairman Widener and members of the Committee. My name is Tony Bledsoe. I am the Executive Director of the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee and the Office of the Legislative Inspector General. The Office of the Legislative Inspector General (“OLIG”) serves as the support staff of the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee (“JLEC”).

The majority of OLIG resources are dedicated to the regulation of lobbying activity at the state level. The OLIG is responsible for lobbying compliance relative to attempts to influence legislation, executive agency decisions, and the investment decisions of the five state retirement systems.

Currently, there are over 1,500 lobbyists representing nearly 1,600 interests registered with the OLIG. It is the ongoing policy of the OLIG to work with the lobbying community to achieve a fair, accurate and transparent process. With the introduction and utilization of the Ohio Lobbying Activity Center in 2009, the lobbying community frequently maintains a filing compliance rate above 99%. Lobbyists and their clients, file Activity & Expenditure Reports with our office 3 times per year. In 2010, the OLIG made publicly available, via the Internet, over 14,500 filings including: lobbying registrations, lobbying activity and expenditure reports, post employment disclosure statements as well as financial disclosure statements. While this information was once little more than a data dump, today it is categorized, sorted and searchable.

These reports are not only used by the public but can now be used by policy makers. And not just to see who bought someone a dinner. With a click of a mouse and a few key

strokes it is possible to determine who the likely stakeholders are on a new issue. Or to find out who previously lobbied on an issue that is still working its way through the legislature. This information provides policy makers with an easy way to learn who may have valuable information in a particular area as an issue is being considered.

On the legislative side, we are responsible for providing legal guidance on a daily basis. We not only provide legal advice on various ethics issues; we also distribute and review financial disclosure statements for the General Assembly. All financial disclosure statements are made available for public viewing at our website. As many filers know, we work directly with those who file statements with JLEC prior to the filing of reports. This increases the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to the public. The information on the reports filed by legislators is an invaluable tool in our efforts to increase the accuracy of the lobbying reports I mentioned earlier in my testimony. I am grateful to those legislators who partner with us in this effort.

Recognizing the importance of our role as educators and advisors, we frequently conduct training sessions. In calendar year 2010 we conducted forty-five (45) training sessions, answered over 6,000 ethics and lobbying questions, issued nine (9) general guidance memorandums and distributed updates to the legislative resource binder. In addition, we created the OLIG blog providing legislative staff, lobbyists and other interested parties with answers to frequently asked questions.

I believe the proactive approach to advising and educating, and the standards set by caucus leadership and individual members, are reflected in the high level of ethics compliance we see today in the legislative branch of government.

The OLIG continues to strive to provide increased services without seeking increased general revenue funds or staff. As I have since the 126th General Assembly, I am here today to ask that our funding remain the same in the next fiscal year as it is in the current. I want to highlight the fact that the JLEC meets its growing mission on less funding than it did a decade ago. In our budget request for fiscal years 2012 and 2013, we respectfully request General Revenue Funds of \$550,000 annually and spending authority of up to \$100,000 annually from the JLEC 4G7 account of lobbying fees.

House Bill 1 from the 128th General Assembly created the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee Investigative Fund consisting of payment of financial disclosure statement filing fees. This fund is to be used solely for the operations of JLEC in conducting investigations and requires Controlling Board approval. It is not used for office operating costs. As of May 02, 2011, the Investigative Fund amount was \$34,535.49.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions.