

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 136 (Delegate Vogel)

Government, Labor, and Elections

Maryland Public Ethics Law - Officials of the Legislative Branch - Gifts of Food and Beverages

This bill allows officials of the Legislative Branch to accept gifts of food and beverages from donors or sponsoring entities as part of a meal or reception *only if* (1) all members of the General Assembly are invited to the meal or reception, and (2) the event is open to the public. At least 14 days before holding a meal or reception for members of the General Assembly, a registered lobbyist must (1) provide *all* members with a written invitation to the meal or reception and (2) register the event with the Department of Legislative Services (DLS). Within one business day of receiving an event registration, DLS must post information — including the date, time, and location — about all upcoming meals or receptions on the General Assembly website. Finally, the bill makes conforming changes to (1) financial disclosure requirements for officials of the Legislative Branch and registered lobbyists and (2) other provisions of the Maryland Public Ethics Law.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General and special fund expenditures by the State Ethics Commission (SEC) increase by a total of \$50,000 only in FY 2027 for contractual information technology (IT) services, with expenditures divided equally between general and special funds. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	25,000	0	0	0	0
SF Expenditure	25,000	0	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$50,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Definitions

A “legislative unit” means the General Assembly, either house of the General Assembly, a standing committee of the General Assembly, as specified, or a county or regional delegation of members of the General Assembly that is recognized by a presiding officer of the General Assembly.

With respect to the Legislative Branch, a “public official” is an individual who (1) receives compensation at a rate equivalent to at least Grade 16 and (2) is designated a public official by order of the presiding officers of the General Assembly. A “State official,” as it relates to the Legislative Branch, includes a member or member-elect of the General Assembly. An “official” is either a public official or a State official. An “employee,” as it relates to the Legislative Branch, is an employee of the Legislative Branch who is not an official.

Gifts for State Officials and Employees

With specified exceptions, an official or employee may not knowingly accept a gift if the official or employee knows or has reason to know that the gift is from an entity that:

- does or seeks to do business of any kind with the official’s or employee’s governmental unit;
- engages in an activity that is regulated or controlled by the official’s or employee’s governmental unit;
- has a specific financial interest that may be affected, in a manner distinguishable from the general public, by the performance or nonperformance of the official’s or employee’s duties;
- is a regulated lobbyist; or
- is an association, or an entity acting on behalf of an association, that is engaged only in representing counties or municipal corporations.

Among other exceptions, officials of the Legislative Branch may accept food or beverages received and consumed in the presence of a donor or sponsoring entity as part of a meal or reception to which all members of a legislative unit have been invited. A legislator need not disclose such gifts in annual financial disclosure statements, and the sponsor of the event need not name individual attendees in lobbying activity reports.

Financial Disclosure Provisions

The Maryland Public Ethics Law regulating financial disclosures generally requires elected officials, candidates for State-elected offices, and officials to identify real estate interests, equity interests, and other relationships such as employment, debts, and gifts as specified by statute. Financial disclosures are available to the public and maintained by SEC. A State official or employee may not participate in a matter if the official or employee has specified conflicts of interest, including if the official or employee or a qualifying relative has an interest in the matter and the official or employee knows of the interest.

Regulation of Lobbying Activity

SEC administers a lobbying regulatory program including registration, disclosure, reporting and standards of conduct for executive, legislative and grassroots lobbying. The lobbyist standards are comprehensive and address a multitude of issues including contingent fees, campaign finance activity, improper encouragement of legislation, improper gifts, prohibitions against loans, concealment of clients, referrals by officials or employees to obtain lobbying clients, intentional misstatement of fact, and other fraudulent or illegal activities. More than 3,000 lobbying registrations are filed each year identifying the name of the lobbyist, the employer, and the topics of the activity to be lobbied.

Registration and Reporting: Legislative Unit Meals and Receptions

A regulated lobbyist must, within 5 days of any meal or reception to which the lobbyist has invited an entire legislative unit, file a registration with DLS. The registration must include the date and location (but not the time) of the meal or reception and the legislative unit invited. DLS must publish this information in a weekly list of upcoming meals and receptions and must allow public inspection of each registration report during regular business hours. Within 14 days after the registered meal or reception, the regulated lobbyist must submit a report to SEC listing the total cost of the event and the name and contribution of each sponsor.

Lobbyist Registration Fund

The Lobbyist Registration Fund is a special, nonlapsing fund administered by the State Treasurer. The fund consists of lobbyist registration fees collected by SEC. The fund may

be used to defray the expenses of administering the Maryland Public Ethics Law as it relates to lobbyist activity. Any balance remaining in the Fund at the end of any fiscal year is reverted to the general fund of the State.

State Expenditures: To implement the bill, SEC must update/reprogram its electronic lobbying reporting system and its lobbyist training system to reflect the bill's changes. The total cost to reprogram both systems is \$50,000, which SEC advises is evenly divided between general funds and the Lobbyist Registration Fund. Therefore, general and special fund expenditures by SEC each increase by \$25,000 only in fiscal 2027 for contractual IT services to update the agency's website and lobbying registration systems.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Ethics Commission; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 12, 2026
jg/mcr

Analysis by: Kayvon Samadani

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510