



BILL: HB0292

BILL TITLE: Public Ethics - Gifts and Lobbyist Registration (Public Integrity Act of 2021)

BILL SPONSOR: Delegate Stewart

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

COMMITTEE: Environment and Transportation

HEARING DATE: 1/21/21

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF WITH AMENDMENTS OF HB0292

Cristi Demnowicz
Represent Maryland

Maryland has a corporate lobbyist problem. During session, one can take a short trip over from our seat of government to some of the nicest (and most expensive) restaurants in Annapolis, and find legislators dining with any number of corporate and other high priced lobbyists. The lack of a cap on these meals enables these lobbyists to get a level of access with policymakers that 99.9% of Marylanders, including grassroots activists could not dream of. This is one of most egregious cases of big money having outsized influence on how the rest of us are governed,

Represent Maryland is a grassroots group of volunteer activists who are pro-democracy and anti-corruption. One of our primary areas of interest is getting this kind of big money out of politics so everyone has access to democracy and policymaking. We support HB0292 because it is a major step in this direction by setting a cap of \$50 for such meals. This would bring such meals more in step with other lobbyist gift rules, which are set at \$20.

The second part of HB0292 raises the registration fee from \$100 to \$300 dollars for those from for-profit companies. Represent Maryland would like to see that amended to \$500 as these costs are trivial to most of these entities. Furthermore, this would increase funding for the State Ethics Commission, which aligns with another primary area of interest for us ("Making government transparent, fair, and ethical").

In closing, HB0292, particularly with our proposed amendment, would mark significant progress in reducing the impact of big money in politics and enhancing state ethics enforcement. Thus, we implore committee members to find this piece of legislation favorable.

Sincerely,
Cristi Demnowicz
Chair
Represent Maryland

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