

HB0136_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
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TESTIMONY ON HB#0136 - FAVORABLE
Maryland Public Ethics Law - Officials of the Legislative Branch - Gifts of Food and Beverages

TO: Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor and Elections Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard K. Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#0136, **Maryland Public Ethics Law - Officials of the Legislative Branch - Gifts of Food and Beverages**

The BayNet.com has reported on the problem with how lobbying is being conducted in Maryland, a practice that skirts the law as currently written. *Lobbying And Ethics In Annapolis: Million-Dollar Committee Dinners Under Scrutiny*¹

In Annapolis, state politics focus not only on which bills pass the General Assembly — but also on influence behind closed doors, especially over meals. In the past year, lobbyists and interest groups spent hundreds of thousands of dollars hosting “committee dinners” for standing committees of lawmakers, fueling a debate about ethics, access and transparency in Maryland government.

Industry groups collectively spent more than half a million dollars on more than 200 committee dinners between November 2024 and October 2025, with much of that spending concentrated during the legislative session. High-spending hosts included energy companies, trade associations and nonprofits, and committees with broad jurisdiction — like the House Economic Matters Committee — received the most expensive invitations.

[This is] legislation to ban lobbyist-funded committee dinners, arguing they underscore the “financial advantage corporations and special interest groups have over the average Marylander” in gaining face time with lawmakers. Proponents of such reforms contend the practice erodes public trust in a system where constituents cannot match the access that comes with expensive meals and receptions.

This bill will re-establish trust by controlling how our legislators are wined and dined to deliver for the companies represented by lobbyists. It will accomplish this goal by altering an exemption that allows an official of the Legislative Branch to accept a gift of food or beverages as part of a meal or reception to which a legislative unit is invited to instead allow an official of the Legislative Branch to accept a gift of food or beverages at a meal or reception to which all members of the General Assembly are invited and that was open to the public; altering the written invitation and registration report requirements a regulated lobbyist must meet under certain circumstances; etc.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#0136.

¹ <https://thebaynet.com/lobbying-and-ethics-in-annapolis-million-dollar-committee-dinners-under-scrutiny/>