

Co-Sponsor Lobbying and Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2015

June 2, 2015

Dear Senator,

Our organizations support the Lobbying and Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2015, sponsored by Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO), which would limit the ability of lobbyists to use bundled contributions to buy influence with members of Congress. We strongly urge you to co-sponsor the Bennet bill.

Our organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Democracy 21, League of Women Voters, Public Citizen, Sunlight Foundation and U.S. PIRG.

Unlike most citizens, registered lobbyists are in the business of influencing members of Congress. They are paid to influence government decisions and the contributions they give and raise for members of Congress play a key role in pursuing their lobbying interests.

One of the principal ways in which Washington lobbyists gain improper influence is by soliciting and providing, or bundling, large amounts of campaign funds for members of Congress.

A lobbyist who bundles \$50,000 or \$100,000 for a Member is in the same position as an individual who contributes \$50,000 or \$100,000 to the Member – in terms of the potential opportunity to exercise undue influence over the Member at the expense of the American people. Such large contributions are illegal if made directly, but lobbyists bypass the contribution limit by bundling contributions.

The Bennet bill would curb the ability of lobbyists to obtain influence by bundling contributions for members of Congress and federal candidates.

Under the legislation, the total combined amount that a registered lobbyist would be allowed to directly contribute and to bundle is \$2,700 per election, the current individual contribution limit for federal candidates. Thus, under this reform, a lobbyist could not bundle a total amount of contributions greater than the individual contribution limit.

Bundling is defined in the bill as raising contributions for a Member or candidate and providing these contributions in a manner in which the bundler gets credit from the Member or candidate for providing the contributions.

The Bennet bill also prohibits members and candidates from soliciting contributions from registered lobbyists while Congress is in session. Fourteen states prohibit lobbyists from making contributions while the state legislature is in session.

The solicitation restriction in the Bennet bill complements and strengthens the bill's curb on bundling by lobbyists. By prohibiting Members from soliciting lobbyists while Congress is in session, the bill further limits the ability of lobbyists to use political money to obtain undue influence over government decisions.

The Bennet bill also closes loopholes in the lobbying disclosure laws to ensure that all individuals who are paid to lobby Congress register as lobbyists.

We strongly urge you to support and co-sponsor the Lobbying and Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2015.

Campaign Legal Center
Common Cause
Democracy 21
League of Women Voters
Public Citizen
Sunlight Foundation
U.S. PIRG