

My name is Paige Rohman, district 50B. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I recently completed two terms as planning commissioner in Bloomington, serving for six years including two years as chair. I also grew up in small town Minnesota with a parent who managed that city for almost 40 years, and so I have an appreciation for the issue of lobbying local officials in multiple types of Minnesota communities.

I am here today to express my support for expanded lobbying registration standards, especially standards that are common sense, are not onerous, and preserve our right to free speech. There are many important decisions that are made that do not happen at the elected official level. In my experience as a planning commissioner, we have significant authority as a quasi-judicial body. And while we commissioners are often the closest to and reflect the sense of the people in the community, our role is sometimes less visible to and less scrutinized by most because we are appointed.

Let me provide an example of why expanded standards are good. This past spring, toward the end of my term, we made recommendations to the council on additional areas that should be considered for final decision making at the commission level. We did this in the interest of making government more efficient, reducing administrative burden, and speeding up the bureaucratic process. These are the right things to do. But with expanded authority comes expanded opportunity for influence. When that influence happens, it needs to be done in a structured, transparent manner. Lobbying of decision makers like us should certainly fall within the scope of lobbying standards anywhere across the state. I mentioned that I grew up in small town Minnesota, and the same level of transparency is just as good of an idea there as it is in a city like Bloomington.

I find the standards being considered to be reasonable. They do not impede free speech, they do not impede the ability of lobbyists to do what they do. What they do, however, is provide good information to the public. If this is the right thing at the state level and a handful of metro-area cities, it's the right thing for government lobbying across the state. I know some have suggested quasi-judicial bodies should not be subject to these standards, and I disagree. Anybody who can make a final decision on behalf of the people should be governed by these standards. Carve outs only invite suspicion and create potential division. And I think everyone can agree that we don't need more of that in our society today.

Thank you for your consideration.