



December 19, 2016

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Robin Dropkin
Executive Director

29 Elk Street
Albany, NY 12207
P 518.434.1583
F 518.427.0067
www.ptny.org
ptny@ptny.org

Martin Levine, Director of Lobbying
Joint Commission on Public Ethics
540 Broadway
Albany NY 12207

Dear Mr. Levine:

Please accept the following comments on the Staff Proposal for Comprehensive Lobbying Regulations. We recognize that the official comment period has passed, but we submit these comments in the strong hope that you will consider them as part of your deliberations as the proposed regulations will have a significant impact on our organization and others like us.

As a small nonprofit organization that is a client and lobbyist, we welcome and appreciate efforts to compile lobbying rules in one place and to improve the clarity of these rules. However, we do have some concerns with specific proposals that we believe would make compliance unnecessarily burdensome with no added benefit to the public. These concerns are detailed below.

Proposed § 942.3(f) would define the term “designated lobbyist” to include volunteers. Including volunteers within the definition of a lobbyist would require such volunteers to be listed on a Lobbyist Statement of Registration. Like many organizations, we hold annual “lobby days” in Albany in which members and volunteers participate in meetings with state legislators and staff. Having to designate these volunteers on a statement of registration would pose a significant administrative burden, and would not provide any additional useful information to the public as to who is engaging in lobbying activity. We believe registration should be limited to persons who are compensated.

Proposed § 942.9(h)(iii) would define coalitions broadly as “a group of otherwise-unaffiliated entities or members [that] agree to engage in common activities,” and would provide that “[a] coalition shall file a Lobbying report with the Commission identifying itself as a Lobbyist and/or Client....” Non-profit organizations with limited resources often form coalitions to collaborate, share information and amplify their messages. It is our experience that in most cases these coalitions are informal, sometimes temporary, change membership frequently, and do not share bank accounts. The work done as part of a coalition—if it is considered a lobbying activity—is already reported by the individual organizations as part of their own filings. Requiring these informal associations that may come up from time-to-time to file lobby reports would be a significant deterrent to working in partnership on issues of mutual interest or concern.

Taken together, these two proposed regulations would significantly hinder the ability of organizations such as ours to engage and involve members of the public in the legislative process.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Dropkin".

Robin Dropkin
Executive Director