

HB 659 -- PUBLIC FUNDS AND LOBBYING

SPONSOR: Ross

This bill creates the "Fair Influence in Government Act." Any executive, quasi-executive, judicial, or quasi-judicial department or state agency must not use any public resources to pay the costs of employing or contracting for the services of any individual who lobbies on behalf of the executive, quasi-executive, judicial, quasi-judicial department or state agency in an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of any legislative measure. These entities will also refrain from using public resources to pay any membership dues on behalf of the department or agency or any officer or employee of the department or agency to any organization or association if the dues directly or indirectly pay all or part of the salary of any individual required to register as a lobbyist in an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of any matter pending before a legislative committee in either chamber of the General Assembly or before the General Assembly.

A violation must result in a fine of not less than \$1000 but not more than \$5000. The director or similar chief executive of the state agency must be personally liable for the fine. Any individual who accepts public funds as compensation for lobbying in violation of this section may be prohibited from registering as a legislative lobbyist for a period not to exceed two years.

The bill does not limit the right to communicate with members of the General Assembly through proper official channels at the request of a member, or to request legislative action or appropriations which are deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of public business or actually made in the proper performance of his or her official duties, including testifying before the General Assembly or any committee thereof for informational purposes.