



# CITY OF HOUSTON

**Sylvester Turner**

Mayor

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March 14, 2019

The Honorable Paul Bettencourt  
Texas Senate  
P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Senator Bettencourt:

The City of Houston supported Rep. Matt Shaheen's House Bill 433 and supports many of the aspects of Senate Bill 702. Unfortunately, some of the provisions listed towards the end of the bill present a potential cost to the City. Because of that, we oppose SB 702 but offer this testimony supporting governmental transparency.

Senate Bill 702 calls for three disclosures for political subdivisions:

1. The total amount spent on lobbying contracts,
2. The names of the members of the lobby team,
3. Copy of the contracts for those lobby teams.

The City of Houston already complies with all three of these provisions.

First, Mayor Sylvester Turner looked to make the federal and state lobby details easily accessible for those searching for them. On the Government Relations website for Houston, the "Lobbying Contracts" is featured as a link on the department's website. A brief summary of when City Council voted, a financial figure of the total amount of the contract, and a link to the actual contracts themselves are all listed on the "Lobby Contracts" page.

For reference, the website is here: <https://www.houstontx.gov/govrelations/lobbying-contracts.html>

Secondly, the Government Relations team produced a website detailing the 2017 Legislative Session. As part of that report on the City of Houston's Legislative Priorities, Major Legislative Battles, and Behavioral Health Advocacy, the site lists a link for "Acknowledgements" for "individuals who made these achievements possible."

The link goes on to show the full time members of the City's Government Relations Team, the City's combined Lobby Team, and the Legislative Liaisons working in various city departments.

For reference, the link to that page is as follows: <http://www.houstontx.gov/txlege/thanks>

In order for the general public to more easily see this information, Mayor Turner has linked them to our Government Relations site where they can be easily updated and found via search engines. Currently, for reporting purposes, the City completes Form 1295 and sends to the Texas Ethics Commission.

Senate Bill 702 goes further and asks for the website to report the amounts of membership dues for statewide non-profits that seek to influence the Legislature. The City of Houston has no problem updating this provision.

The final provision of the bill is problematic. The language of the bill is ambiguous regarding an interested party's entitlement to "appropriate injunctive relief to prevent further activity" by the political subdivision or entity. The cost to defend a case or comply with a court order presents a potential exposed liability for the City.

Again, the City of Houston under Mayor Sylvester Turner has made finding the amounts, the contracts, and the names of lobbyists very easy for the general public to find. We look forward to discussions to see how we can better inform the public.

Sincerely,

Bill Kelly  
Director of Government Relations