

Giannoulas Calls For Stronger State Ethics Laws

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SPRINGFIELD - Days following the sentencing of Mike Madigan's former chief of staff, Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulas announced a series of ethics reforms that would strengthen enforcement and require more transparency and disclosure regarding the financial dealings of lobbyists.

The measures – contained in House Bill 4591 – come amid the ongoing federal corruption probe of state government that has led to the criminal indictments and convictions of several Illinois politicians and insiders. As Secretary of State, Giannoulas' office maintains lobbyist registrations and statements of economic interest filed by public officials.

“Given the recent headlines of public corruption in Illinois, it’s incumbent upon the state to enact ethical safeguards that demand accountability among those who serve the public and operate within our government,” Giannoulas said. "Illinoisans are sick and tired of scandals and ethics abuses that unfortunately have become all too common in state government. These reforms will go a long way toward making government more transparent and holding political insiders and influencers more accountable to fight corruption more effectively.”

“The BGA long ago identified unchecked lobbying activity as a contributor to corruption in Springfield. We are pleased to see Secretary Giannoulas commit to strengthen the oversight of lobbying by requiring details on lobbyist pay and granting the Secretary of State the power to enforce registration requirements," said David Greising, President of the Better Government Association (BGA). "More must be done to eliminate corruption in state government, and these tools would be important steps toward reform that is long overdue."

Aside from a nominal fine, no enforcement mechanism currently exists for the Secretary of State if lobbyists fail to comply with current reporting requirements. HB 4591 would enable the Secretary of State’s office to investigate allegations of wrongdoing and the authority to suspend or revoke a lobbyist’s registration.

The bill also requires lobbyists to provide more client information by way of compensation and would give the Secretary of State’s office the authority to suspend or revoke a lobbyist’s registration for violating the act or if convicted of certain crimes.

For example: Tim Mapes, former House Speaker Madigan’s longtime chief of staff, was sentenced Monday to 2 ½ years in prison; John Hooker, a lobbyist for ComEd before he was indicted and convicted in a scheme to bribe Madigan; and Mike McClain, a top Madigan confidant and lobbyist found guilty on nine counts as part ComEd scheme to help advance the utility’s legislative agenda in Springfield each are currently eligible to register as a lobbyist and maintain that registration in good standing.

However, under the proposal, the Secretary of State’s office could bar or revoke the registrations of those individuals who have been convicted of felonies in relation to the Lobbyist Registration Act or the Illinois State Government Ethics Act, or a felony that causes a loss of a state pension.

In terms of compensation, a lobbyist would have to reveal the amount of compensation and the source in bi-monthly reports under the proposal. In contrast to federal requirements and ethics laws pertaining to the City of Chicago, lobbyists at the state level currently do not have to disclose how much clients pay them.