

Talking Points on Community Advocacy

- **Taxpayers and City residents benefit from community advocates.**
 - These advocates are an important tool for local governments that help them to **amplify local values on local issues considered by the legislature, reflected in their respective legislative agendas.**
 - The development of the City of Austin’s legislative agenda is a lengthy and open process that incorporates Council resolutions, the input of departments and Boards and Commissions, and the feedback of community groups, organizations, and associations.
 - The City of Austin’s legislative agendas are approved by City Council in an open meeting, each year. No resident has ever testified or spoken against the proposed agenda in these meetings.
 - The City’s lobby team is also approved by City Council in an open meeting, each year. Again, no resident has ever testified or spoken against the proposed agenda in these meetings.
 - The City’s community advocacy team only advocates or opposes measures included in the approved agenda.
 - Specifically, for the City of Austin, **noted legislative achievements by our GR staff and lobbyists that benefit the Austin community include:**
 - Protecting the City’s tree ordinance,
 - Fighting off attempts to preempt the City’s short-term rental ordinance, and
 - Preserving municipal ownership of Austin Water and Austin Energy.
- **Community advocates are a great return on investment.¹**
 - **The costs associated with hiring community advocates represents .00028% of the total City budget.**
 - **This equates to \$1.24 per Austin resident per year; 10 cents per month; .0003 cents per day.**
- **The City of Austin’s \$4.2 billion budget is not unlike a \$4.2 billion enterprise.**
 - No enterprise with that large of a budget operates without a lobby team, or government relations team dedicated to ensuring their customer’s interests are represented before the legislature.
- **Prohibiting local governments from retaining community advocates will have a chilling effect on open State government.**
 - Such a proposal will stifle the flow of local views to the State as it considers policies with local implications.
 - Encourage censorship of communities and discourage a representative process of listening to issues that impact millions of City residents.
 - For example, in 2015, Austin residents voted to regulate rideshares. In 2017 the legislature ultimately preempted local regulations of rideshares *but*

¹ The City of Austin’s budget for community advocacy for 2021 will be \$1.2 million. The City of Austin’s total budget for 2020-21 is \$4.2 billion.

community advocates still had the opportunity to advocate for the resident's views.

- The result of this prohibition will only be to silence voices; leaving a silo where only corporate agendas matter.
- **A community advocacy prohibition sends a clear message that the playing field will never be level between public and corporate advocacy.** Shutting down a tool that effectively amplifies constituents' views is antithetical to a representative democracy, where every voice has a right to be heard.
- **The claim that community advocacy is detrimental to the taxpayer is unfounded and subjective at best. Oppressive at worst.**
 - To what standard, and who decides what issues are "bad" for the taxpayer?
 - Where does it stop? Proponents of this bill also support preemption of local government authority over tree, STR, and affordable housing regulations as well as non-discriminatory ordinances.
- **The unintended consequences of prohibiting community advocacy are unending.** Banning community advocacy doesn't protect the taxpayer, it censors the taxpayers' voice.
- **It is hypocritical for the Legislature to strip an advocacy tool away from cities and other local governments that they knowingly keep for themselves in the Office of State-Federal Relations.**

Quick Facts

- Between 2009 and 2019, Texas saw an increase of 182% city-related bills filed in the Legislature. During the 86th Legislative session alone, over 2,300 bills were introduced that impacted cities.
 - The challenge to analyze and represent the resident's interests on these bills becomes more difficult each session, and without the ability to hire community advocates, it would become almost impossible for our resident's voices to be heard.
- Many lobbyists are not only hired for advocacy during session. To the benefit of the community, they help identify funding opportunities that would be difficult to identify without a dedicated team of professionals. Oftentimes, they:
 - Assist the City with managing federal grants
 - Advocate for increased funding for local governments at the Federal and State level
 - Assist with state and federal agency relations.
- The Texas Public Policy Foundation has said this issue impacts every major issue before the legislature but can only reference Senate Bill 2 from the 86th Legislative Session.
 - There are many examples of advocating in ways that amplify our resident's voices and benefit the taxpayer.

1. For example, many residents in Austin had issues in their neighborhoods with short term rentals. Our community advocacy team supported measures in the legislature that would enhance their private property rights and benefit their overall experience in Austin.
 2. For example, in 2017, the Governor and Legislature wanted to preempt the City's tree ordinance. GR staff and lobby worked with interested parties and legislative members to craft bill language that would achieve State goals while preserving Austin's tree ordinance; effectively codifying the City's tree ordinance.
- Opponents of community advocacy often say “as much as \$41 million was spent **statewide**” on “taxpayer funded lobbying” in 2017, but that number is a mischaracterization compared to total budgets and per capita spending.
 - In 2017, the population of Texas was ~28.3 million. This would equate to \$.68 cents per Texan for an entire year.
 - For a state with a yearly budget of approximately \$125 billion, this number equates to .0003% of the entire state budget.
 - Over the past 10 years, the City of Austin has spent approximately \$400,000 on Texas Municipal League membership dues.
 - State associations such as TML are not only a necessary tool to help advocate for the interests of our community. They also are a place for information sharing, collective feedback on proposals each member may be considering. Prohibiting these memberships will set our communities back because they'll be unable to easily learn and share important information with counterparts in other communities.
 - Not only will a prohibition on community advocacy prevent dues for TML, it will prevent:
 - Police Chiefs from joining the Texas Police Chiefs Association,
 - Fire Chiefs from joining various fire organizations,
 - Public Convention Centers from joining any Convention and Visitor Bureau association or trade association,
 - ...and the negative impact goes on.