

Alabama Amends Ethics, Lobbying, and Campaign Finance Laws

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In late December of last year, then-Governor Bob Riley signed several new ethics bills into law that make significant changes to Alabama's gift and lobbying laws. Many of the changes go into effect in mid-March of this year.

Most importantly, Alabama revised its gift prohibitions and exceptions. Now, under state law, no person may give to public officials, public employees or members of their households or families anything for the purpose of influencing official action. Moreover, lobbyists, their subordinates and principals may not give a "thing of value" to a public official, public employee or family member of such individuals. Persons who are associated with a business that is regulated by an agency, board or commission likewise are prohibited from providing a "thing of value" to a member or employee of such agency, board or commission. There are 18 separately enumerated exceptions to the restriction on things of value, including for certain educational functions, widely attended events, and economic development functions. Meals and beverages from lobbyists of up to \$25 per meal and \$150 per year, and a separate limit for principals of \$50 per meal and \$250 per year, also are exempt.

A number of other significant changes were made by the new collection of laws. Earlier this year, Alabama expanded its definition of lobbying to include "promoting or attempting to influence the awarding of a grant or contract with any department or agency of the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of state government." Lobbyists also must attend a training program within 90 days of registering as a lobbyist, and then again if subsequent changes are made to Alabama's lobbying and ethics laws. A separate bill also banned PAC-to-PAC transfers.

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