

EXCLUSIVE BGA/SUN-TIMES INVESTIGATION: MILLIONS OF TAX DOLLARS PAID TO GOVERNMENT LOBBYISTS

CHICAGO- In the latest of a series of exclusive lobbying investigations, the Better Government Association and the Chicago Sun-Times found that 36 Chicago area governments spent more than \$7.3 million on lobbyists last year. Taxpayers face rising fares and service cuts, but that hasn't stopped the CTA and other local governmental bodies from paying big bucks to politically connected "hired guns" to try to secure state and federal money. These lobbyists are often former elected officials or retired government workers, collecting government pensions along with their lucrative lobbying fees. In many cases, they also add another layer to our expensive bureaucracy by doing work that existing fulltime staff was hired for—government relations. What is perhaps most troubling is that government-hired lobbyists aren't required to file reports to show what they've done for taxpayers, so taxpayers have no proof of their value.

The BGA/Sun-Times analysis uncovered that:

- The CTA has paid former U.S. Rep. William Lipinski more than \$418,000 in lobbying fees since 2008. Lipinski is the highest-paid elected-official-turned-lobbyist, according to our joint survey. Metra paid him \$165,000 last year to lobby Congress and the Illinois General Assembly. As a congressman, Lipinski was the powerful longtime chairman of the House Transportation Committee, and since being out of elected office, most of his clients have been transportation agencies and businesses. He received more than \$850,000 in lobbying fees last year, according to government records and the Open Secrets website run by the Center for Responsive Politics. Lipinski doesn't file reports to show what he has done for the CTA or Metra.
- The City of Chicago has lobbyists on its payroll, but also hires outside lobbyists under contract. Last year, Mayor Daley paid more than \$325,000 to two lobbying firms -- McCann Capitol Advocates in Washington and William Filan Limited in Springfield. At the same time, City Hall paid a

total of \$660,000 to seven city employees working as lobbyists. While the Filan firm got the same flat fee as the year before, \$85,000, McCann's payments went up 30 percent last year, to \$241,541, for lobbying federal officials to support the mayor's O'Hare Airport modernization.

- The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago -- Cook County's sewage-treatment agency -- pays the Carmen Group as much as \$645 an hour, under a \$657,000 no-bid contract, to help it obtain continued federal funding for the ongoing Deep Tunnel flood-control project. And Metra, the city and suburban commuter rail agency, paid the Carmen Group \$712,500 last year. That was under a contract that was renegotiated three months ago, cutting the lobbying tab to \$500,000 this year. Metra's annual payments to the Carmen Group have more than doubled since 2002, when the firm hired John Ladd, the son of Metra's then-board chairman, Jeff Ladd. Both the firm and Metra say Ladd's son isn't involved in lobbying for Metra.

“It’s bad enough to be paying millions of dollars to politically connected outside lobbyists in the midst of layoffs and service cuts, but the lack of performance standards or written records is even more appalling,” says BGA Executive Director Andy Shaw. “Agencies that employ public relations or governmental relations staff have no business shelling out more of our hard-earned tax dollars on another layer of patronage and bureaucratic waste.”

The Better Government Association demands proof of lobbyist value, a mandatory period of separation between government jobs and outside lobbying contracts and a ban on agencies employing both fulltime staff members for government relations and outside lobbyists: pick one or the other, not both.

If you have any tips on government waste, fraud or corruption, write to the BGA at: info@bettergov.org

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