

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2025 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2753

By Delegates Ridenour, Ward, Butler, Hillenbrand,
Mallow, Roop, Jennings, Jeffries, Kimble, Martin, and
Mazzocchi

[Introduced February 21, 2025; referred to the
Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §6B-2-5 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to
2 extending the one-year prohibition on lobbying by former public officials to five years.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

**ARTICLE 2. WEST VIRGINIA ETHICS COMMISSION; POWERS AND DUTIES;
DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL INTEREST BY PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND
EMPLOYEES; APPEARANCES BEFORE PUBLIC AGENCIES; CODE OF
CONDUCT FOR ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES.**

§6B-2-5. Ethical standards for elected and appointed officials and public employees.

1 (a) Persons subject to section. — The provisions of this section apply to all public officials
2 and public employees, whether full or part-time and whether compensated or not, in state, county,
3 municipal governments and their respective boards, agencies, departments, and commissions
4 and in any other regional or local governmental agency, including county school boards.

5 (b) Use of public office for private gain. — (1) A public official or public employee may not
6 knowingly and intentionally use his or her office or the prestige of his or her office for his or her own
7 private gain or that of another person. Incidental use of equipment or resources available to a
8 public official or public employee by virtue of his or her position for personal or business purposes
9 resulting in de minimis private gain does not constitute use of public office for private gain under
10 this subsection. The performance of usual and customary duties associated with the office or
11 position or the advancement of public policy goals or constituent services, without compensation,
12 does not constitute the use of prestige of office for private gain.

13 (2) Notwithstanding the general prohibition against use of office for private gain, public
14 officials and public employees may use bonus points acquired through participation in frequent
15 traveler programs while traveling on official government business: *Provided*, That the official's or
16 employee's participation in such program, or acquisition of such points, does not result in
17 additional costs to the government.

(3) The Legislature, in enacting this subsection, recognizes that there may be certain public officials or public employees who bring to their respective offices or employment their own unique personal prestige which is based upon their intelligence, education, experience, skills and abilities, or other personal gifts or traits. In many cases, these persons bring a personal prestige to their office or employment which inures to the benefit of the state and its citizens. Those persons may, in fact, be sought by the state to serve in their office or employment because, through their unusual gifts or traits, they bring stature and recognition to their office or employment and to the state itself. While the office or employment held or to be held by those persons may have its own inherent prestige, it would be unfair to those individuals and against the best interests of the citizens of this state to deny those persons the right to hold public office or to be publicly employed on the grounds that they would, in addition to the emoluments of their office or employment, be in a position to benefit financially from the personal prestige which otherwise inheres to them. Accordingly, the commission is directed, by legislative rule, to establish categories of public officials and public employees, identifying them generally by the office or employment held, and offering persons who fit within those categories the opportunity to apply for an exemption from the application of the provisions of this subsection. Exemptions may be granted by the commission, on a case-by-case basis, when it is shown that: (A) The public office held or the public employment engaged in is not such that it would ordinarily be available or offered to a substantial number of the citizens of this state; (B) the office held or the employment engaged in is such that it normally or specifically requires a person who possesses personal prestige; and (C) the person's employment contract or letter of appointment provides or anticipates that the person will gain financially from activities which are not a part of his or her office or employment.

(4) A public official or public employee may not show favoritism or grant patronage in the employment or working conditions of his or her relative or a person with whom he or she resides: *Provided*, That as used in this subdivision, "employment or working conditions" shall only apply to

government employment: *Provided, however,* That government employment includes only those governmental entities specified in subsection (a) of this section.

(c) Gifts. — (1) A public official or public employee may not solicit any gift unless the solicitation is for a charitable purpose with no resulting direct pecuniary benefit conferred upon the official or employee or his or her immediate family: *Provided,* That no public official or public employee may solicit for a charitable purpose any gift from any person who is also an official or employee of the state and whose position is subordinate to the soliciting official or employee: *Provided, however,* That nothing herein shall prohibit a candidate for public office from soliciting a lawful political contribution. No official or employee may knowingly accept any gift, directly or indirectly, from a lobbyist or from any person whom the official or employee knows or has reason to know:

(A) Is doing or seeking to do business of any kind with his or her agency;

(B) Is engaged in activities which are regulated or controlled by his or her agency; or

(C) Has financial interests which may be substantially and materially affected, in a manner distinguishable from the public generally, by the performance or nonperformance of his or her official duties.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection, a person who is a public official or public employee may accept a gift described in this subdivision, and there shall be a presumption that the receipt of such gift does not impair the impartiality and independent judgment of the person. This presumption may be rebutted only by direct objective evidence that the gift did impair the impartiality and independent judgment of the person or that the person knew or had reason to know that the gift was offered with the intent to impair his or her impartiality and independent judgment. The provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection do not apply to:

(A) Meals and beverages;

(B) Ceremonial gifts or awards which have insignificant monetary value;

(C) Unsolicited gifts of nominal value or trivial items of informational value;

(D) Reasonable expenses for food, travel, and lodging of the official or employee for a meeting at which the official or employee participates in a panel or has a speaking engagement;

(E) Gifts of tickets or free admission extended to a public official or public employee to attend charitable, cultural, or political events, if the purpose of such gift or admission is a courtesy or ceremony customarily extended to the office;

(F) Gifts that are purely private and personal in nature; or

(G) Gifts from relatives by blood or marriage, or a member of the same household.

(3) The commission shall, through legislative rule promulgated pursuant to chapter 29A of this code, establish guidelines for the acceptance of a reasonable honorarium by public officials and elected officials. The rule promulgated shall be consistent with this section. Any elected public official may accept an honorarium only when:

(A) That official is a part-time elected public official;

(B) The fee is not related to the official's public position or duties;

(C) The fee is for services provided by the public official that are related to the public official's regular, nonpublic trade, profession, occupation, hobby, or avocation; and

(D) The honorarium is not provided in exchange for any promise or action on the part of the public official.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed so as to prohibit the giving of a lawful political contribution as defined by law.

(5) The Governor or his designee may, in the name of the State of West Virginia, accept and receive gifts from any public or private source. Any gift so obtained shall become the property of the state and shall, within 30 days of the receipt thereof, be registered with the commission and the Division of Culture and History.

(6) Upon prior approval of the Joint Committee on Government and Finance, any member of the Legislature may solicit donations for a regional or national legislative organization conference or other legislative organization function to be held in the state for the purpose of

95 deferring costs to the state for hosting of the conference or function. Legislative organizations are
96 bipartisan regional or national organizations in which the Joint Committee on Government and
97 Finance authorizes payment of dues or other membership fees for the Legislature's participation
98 and which assist this and other State Legislatures and their staff through any of the following:

99 (A) Advancing the effectiveness, independence, and integrity of Legislatures in the states
100 of the United States;

101 (B) Fostering interstate cooperation and facilitating information exchange among State
102 Legislatures;

103 (C) Representing the states and their Legislatures in the American federal system of
104 government;

105 (D) Improving the operations and management of State Legislatures and the effectiveness
106 of legislators and legislative staff, and to encourage the practice of high standards of conduct by
107 legislators and legislative staff;

108 (E) Promoting cooperation between State Legislatures in the United States and
109 Legislatures in other countries.

110 The solicitations may only be made in writing. The legislative organization may act as fiscal
111 agent for the conference and receive all donations. In the alternative, a bona fide banking
112 institution may act as the fiscal agent. The official letterhead of the Legislature may not be used by
113 the legislative member in conjunction with the fund raising or solicitation effort. The legislative
114 organization for which solicitations are being made shall file with the Joint Committee on
115 Government and Finance and with the Secretary of State for publication in the State Register as
116 provided in §29A-2-1 *et seq.* of this code, copies of letters, brochures, and other solicitation
117 documents, along with a complete list of the names and last known addresses of all donors and
118 the amount of donations received. Any solicitation by a legislative member shall contain the
119 following disclaimer:

120 "This solicitation is endorsed by [name of member]. This endorsement does not imply
121 support of the soliciting organization, nor of the sponsors who may respond to the solicitation. A
122 copy of all solicitations are on file with the West Virginia Legislature's Joint Committee on
123 Government and Finance, and with the Secretary of State and are available for public review."

124 (7) Upon written notice to the commission, any member of the board of Public Works may
125 solicit donations for a regional or national organization conference or other function related to the
126 office of the member to be held in the state for the purpose of deferring costs to the state for
127 hosting of the conference or function. The solicitations may only be made in writing. The
128 organization may act as fiscal agent for the conference and receive all donations. In the
129 alternative, a bona fide banking institution may act as the fiscal agent. The official letterhead of the
130 office of the Board of Public Works member may not be used in conjunction with the fund raising or
131 solicitation effort. The organization for which solicitations are being made shall file with the Joint
132 Committee on Government and Finance, with the Secretary of State for publication in the State
133 Register as provided in §29A-2-1 *et seq.* of this code and with the commission, copies of letters,
134 brochures, and other solicitation documents, along with a complete list of the names and last
135 known addresses of all donors and the amount of donations received. Any solicitation by a
136 member of the board of Public Works shall contain the following disclaimer: "This solicitation is
137 endorsed by (name of member of Board of Public Works.) This endorsement does not imply
138 support of the soliciting organization, nor of the sponsors who may respond to the solicitation.
139 Copies of all solicitations are on file with the West Virginia Legislature's Joint Committee on
140 Government and Finance, with the West Virginia Secretary of State and with the West Virginia
141 Ethics Commission and are available for public review." Any moneys in excess of those donations
142 needed for the conference or function shall be deposited in the Capitol Dome and Capitol
143 Improvement Fund established in §5A-4-2 *et seq.* of this code.

144 (d) Interests in public contracts. — (1) In addition to the provisions of §61-10-15 of this
145 code, no elected or appointed public official or public employee or member of his or her immediate

146 family or business with which he or she is associated may be a party to or have an interest in the
147 profits or benefits of a contract which the official or employee may have direct authority to enter
148 into, or over which he or she may have control: *Provided*, That nothing herein shall be construed to
149 prevent or make unlawful the employment of any person with any governmental body: *Provided*,
150 *however*, That nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit a member of the Legislature from
151 entering into a contract with any governmental body, or prohibit a part-time appointed public official
152 from entering into a contract which the part-time appointed public official may have direct authority
153 to enter into or over which he or she may have control when the official has not participated in the
154 review or evaluation thereof, has been recused from deciding or evaluating and has been excused
155 from voting on the contract and has fully disclosed the extent of his or her interest in the contract.

156 (2) In the absence of bribery or a purpose to defraud, an elected or appointed public official
157 or public employee or a member of his or her immediate family or a business with which he or she
158 is associated shall not be considered as having a prohibited financial interest in a public contract
159 when such a person has a limited interest as an owner, shareholder, or creditor of the business
160 which is awarded a public contract. A limited interest for the purposes of this subsection is:

161 (A) An interest which does not exceed \$1,000 in the profits or benefits of the public contract
162 or contracts in a calendar year;

163 (B) An interest as a creditor of a public employee or official who exercises control over the
164 contract, or a member of his or her immediate family, if the amount is less than \$5,000.

165 (3) If a public official or employee has an interest in the profits or benefits of a contract, then
166 he or she may not make, participate in making, or in any way attempt to use his office or
167 employment to influence a government decision affecting his or her financial or limited financial
168 interest. Public officials shall also comply with the voting rules prescribed in subsection (j) of this
169 section.

170 (4) Where the provisions of subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection would result in the
171 loss of a quorum in a public body or agency, in excessive cost, undue hardship, or other

172 substantial interference with the operation of a state, county, municipality, county school board, or
173 other governmental agency, the affected governmental body or agency may make written
174 application to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from subdivisions (1) and (2) of this
175 subsection.

176 (e) Confidential information. — No present or former public official or employee may
177 knowingly and improperly disclose any confidential information acquired by him or her in the
178 course of his or her official duties nor use such information to further his or her personal interests
179 or the interests of another person.

180 (f) Prohibited representation. — No present or former elected or appointed public official or
181 public employee shall, during or after his or her public employment or service, represent a client or
182 act in a representative capacity with or without compensation on behalf of any person in a
183 contested case, rate-making proceeding, license or permit application, regulation filing or other
184 particular matter involving a specific party or parties which arose during his or her period of public
185 service or employment and in which he or she personally and substantially participated in a
186 decision-making, advisory or staff support capacity, unless the appropriate government agency,
187 after consultation, consents to such representation. A staff attorney, accountant or other
188 professional employee who has represented a government agency in a particular matter shall not
189 thereafter represent another client in the same or substantially related matter in which that client's
190 interests are materially adverse to the interests of the government agency, without the consent of
191 the government agency: *Provided*, That this prohibition on representation shall not apply when the
192 client was not directly involved in the particular matter in which the professional employee
193 represented the government agency, but was involved only as a member of a class. The
194 provisions of this subsection shall not apply to legislators who were in office and legislative staff
195 who were employed at the time it originally became effective on July 1, 1989, and those who have
196 since become legislators or legislative staff and those who shall serve hereafter as legislators or
197 legislative staff.

(g) Limitation on practice before a board, agency, commission or department. — Except as otherwise provided in §8A-2-3, §8A-2-4, or §8A-2-5 of this code: (1) No elected or appointed public official and no full-time staff attorney or accountant shall, during his or her public service or public employment or for a period of ~~one year~~ five years after the termination of his or her public service or public employment with a governmental entity authorized to hear contested cases or promulgate or propose rules, appear in a representative capacity before the governmental entity in which he or she serves or served or is or was employed in the following matters:

(A) A contested case involving an administrative sanction, action or refusal to act;

(B) To support or oppose a proposed rule;

(C) To support or contest the issuance or denial of a license or permit;

(D) A rate-making proceeding; and

(E) To influence the expenditure of public funds.

(2) As used in this subsection, "represent" includes any formal or informal appearance before, or any written or oral communication with, any public agency on behalf of any person: *Provided*, That nothing contained in this subsection shall prohibit, during any period, a former public official or employee from being retained by or employed to represent, assist or act in a representative capacity on behalf of the public agency by which he or she was employed or in which he or she served. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prevent a former public official or employee from representing another state, county, municipal, or other governmental entity before the governmental entity in which he or she served or was employed within one year after the termination of his or her employment or service in the entity.

(3) A present or former public official or employee may appear at any time in a representative capacity before the Legislature, a county commission, city or town council, or county school board in relation to the consideration of a statute, budget, ordinance, rule, resolution, or enactment.

(4) Members and former members of the Legislature and professional employees and former professional employees of the Legislature shall be permitted to appear in a representative capacity on behalf of clients before any governmental agency of the state or of county or municipal governments, including county school boards.

(5) An elected or appointed public official, full-time staff attorney or accountant who would be adversely affected by the provisions of this subsection may apply to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from the ~~one~~ five year prohibition against appearing in a representative capacity, when the person's education and experience is such that the prohibition would, for all practical purposes, deprive the person of the ability to earn a livelihood in this state outside of the governmental agency. The Ethics Commission shall, by legislative rule, establish general guidelines or standards for granting an exemption or reducing the time period, but shall decide each application on a case-by-case basis.

(h) Employment by regulated persons and vendors. — (1) No full-time official or full-time public employee may seek employment with, be employed by, or seek to purchase, sell or lease real or personal property to or from any person who:

(A) Had a matter on which he or she took, or a subordinate is known to have taken, regulatory action within the preceding 12 months; or

(B) Has a matter before the agency on which he or she is working or a subordinate is known by him or her to be working.

(C) Is a vendor to the agency where the official serves or public employee is employed and the official or public employee, or a subordinate of the official or public employee, exercises authority or control over a public contract with such vendor, including, but not limited to:

(i) Drafting bid specifications or requests for proposals;

(ii) Recommending selection of the vendor;

(iii) Conducting inspections or investigations;

(iv) Approving the method or manner of payment to the vendor;

(v) Providing legal or technical guidance on the formation, implementation or execution of the contract; or

(vi) Taking other nonministerial action which may affect the financial interests of the vendor.

(2) Within the meaning of this section, the term "employment" includes professional services and other services rendered by the public official or public employee, whether rendered as employee or as an independent contractor; "seek employment" includes responding to unsolicited offers of employment as well as any direct or indirect contact with a potential employer relating to the availability or conditions of employment in furtherance of obtaining employment; and "subordinate" includes only those agency personnel over whom the public official or public employee has supervisory responsibility.

(3) A full-time public official or full-time public employee who would be adversely affected by the provisions of this subsection may apply to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from the prohibition contained in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(A) The Ethics Commission shall, by legislative rule, establish general guidelines or standards for granting an exemption, but shall decide each application on a case-by-case basis;

(B) A person adversely affected by the restriction on the purchase of personal property may make such purchase after seeking and obtaining approval from the commission or in good faith reliance upon an official guideline promulgated by the commission, written advisory opinions issued by the commission, or a legislative rule.

(C) The commission may establish exceptions to the personal property purchase restrictions through the adoption of guidelines, advisory opinions or legislative rule.

(4) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not take personal regulatory action on a matter affecting a person by whom he or she is employed or with whom he or she is seeking employment or has an agreement concerning future employment.

(5) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not personally participate in a decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, rendering advice, investigation, inspection, or

other substantial exercise of nonministerial administrative discretion involving a vendor with whom he or she is seeking employment or has an agreement concerning future employment.

(6) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not receive private compensation for providing information or services that he or she is required to provide in carrying out his or her public job responsibilities.

(i) Members of the Legislature required to vote. — Members of the Legislature who have asked to be excused from voting or who have made inquiry as to whether they should be excused from voting on a particular matter and who are required by the presiding officer of the House of Delegates or Senate of West Virginia to vote under the rules of the particular house shall not be guilty of any violation of ethics under the provisions of this section for a vote so cast.

(j) Limitations on voting. — (1) Public officials, excluding members of the Legislature who are governed by subsection (i) of this section, may not vote on a matter:

(A) In which they, an immediate family member, or a business with which they or an immediate family member is associated have a financial interest. Business with which they are associated means a business of which the person or an immediate family member is a director, officer, owner, employee, compensated agent, or holder of stock which constitutes five percent or more of the total outstanding stocks of any class.

(B) If a public official is employed by a financial institution and his or her primary responsibilities include consumer and commercial lending, the public official may not vote on a matter which directly affects the financial interests of a customer of the financial institution if the public official is directly involved in approving a loan request from the person or business appearing before the governmental body or if the public official has been directly involved in approving a loan for that person or business within the past 12 months: *Provided*, That this limitation only applies if the total amount of the loan or loans exceeds \$15,000.

(C) The employment or working conditions of the public official's relative or person with whom the public official resides.

(D) The appropriations of public moneys or the awarding of a contract to a nonprofit corporation if the public official or an immediate family member is employed by, or a compensated officer or board member of, the nonprofit: *Provided*, That if the public official or immediate family member is an uncompensated officer or board member of the nonprofit, then the public official shall publicly disclose such relationship prior to a vote on the appropriations of public moneys or award of contract to the nonprofit: *Provided, however*, That for purposes of this paragraph, public disclosure shall mean disclosure of the public official's, or his or her immediate family member's, relationship to the nonprofit (i) on the agenda item relating to the appropriation or award contract, if known at time of agenda, (ii) by the public official at the meeting prior to the vote, and (iii) in the minutes of the meeting.

(2) A public official may vote:

(A) If the public official, his or her spouse, immediate family members or relatives or business with which they are associated are affected as a member of, and to no greater extent than any other member of a profession, occupation, class of persons or class of businesses. A class shall consist of not fewer than five similarly situated persons or businesses; or

(B) If the matter affects a publicly traded company when:

(i) The public official, or dependent family members individually or jointly own less than five percent of the issued stock in the publicly traded company and the value of the stocks individually or jointly owned is less than \$10,000; and

(ii) Prior to casting a vote the public official discloses his or her interest in the publicly traded company.

(3) For a public official's recusal to be effective, it is necessary to excuse him or herself from participating in the discussion and decision-making process by physically removing him or herself from the room during the period, fully disclosing his or her interests, and recusing him or herself from voting on the issue. The recusal shall also be reflected in the meeting minutes.

(k) Limitations on participation in licensing and rate-making proceedings. — No public official or employee may participate within the scope of his or her duties as a public official or employee, except through ministerial functions as defined in §6B-1-3 of this code, in any license or rate-making proceeding that directly affects the license or rates of any person, partnership, trust, business trust, corporation, or association in which the public official or employee or his or her immediate family owns or controls more than 10 percent. No public official or public employee may participate within the scope of his or her duties as a public official or public employee, except through ministerial functions as defined §6B-1-3 of this code, in any license or rate-making proceeding that directly affects the license or rates of any person to whom the public official or public employee or his or her immediate family, or a partnership, trust, business trust, corporation or association of which the public official or employee, or his or her immediate family, owns or controls more than 10 percent, has sold goods or services totaling more than \$1,000 during the preceding year, unless the public official or public employee has filed a written statement acknowledging such sale with the public agency and the statement is entered in any public record of the agency's proceedings. This subsection shall not be construed to require the disclosure of clients of attorneys or of patients or clients of persons licensed pursuant to §30-3-1 et seq., §30-8-1 et seq., §30-14-1 et seq., §30-14A-1 et seq., §30-15-1 et seq., §30-16-1 et seq., §30-20-1 et seq., §30-21-1 et seq., or §30-31-1 et seq. of this code.

(l) Certain compensation prohibited. — (1) A public employee may not receive additional compensation from another publicly-funded state, county, or municipal office or employment for working the same hours, unless:

(A) The public employee's compensation from one public employer is reduced by the amount of compensation received from the other public employer;

(B) The public employee's compensation from one public employer is reduced on a pro rata basis for any work time missed to perform duties for the other public employer;

(C) The public employee uses earned paid vacation, personal or compensatory time or takes unpaid leave from his or her public employment to perform the duties of another public office or employment; or

(D) A part-time public employee who does not have regularly scheduled work hours or a public employee who is authorized by one public employer to make up, outside of regularly scheduled work hours, time missed to perform the duties of another public office or employment maintains time records, verified by the public employee and his or her immediate supervisor at least once every pay period, showing the hours that the public employee did, in fact, work for each public employer. The public employer shall submit these time records to the Ethics Commission on a quarterly basis.

(2) This section does not prohibit a retired public official or public employee from receiving compensation from a publicly-funded office or employment in addition to any retirement benefits to which the retired public official or public employee is entitled.

(m) Certain expenses prohibited. — No public official or public employee shall knowingly request or accept from any governmental entity compensation or reimbursement for any expenses actually paid by a lobbyist and required by the provisions of this chapter to be reported, or actually paid by any other person.

(n) Any person who is employed as a member of the faculty or staff of a public institution of higher education and who is engaged in teaching, research, consulting, or publication activities in his or her field of expertise with public or private entities and thereby derives private benefits from such activities shall be exempt from the prohibitions contained in subsections (b), (c) and (d) of this section when the activity is approved as a part of an employment contract with the governing board of the institution or has been approved by the employee's department supervisor or the president of the institution by which the faculty or staff member is employed.

(o) Except as provided in this section, a person who is a public official or public employee may not solicit private business from a subordinate public official or public employee whom he or

377 she has the authority to direct, supervise or control. A person who is a public official or public
378 employee may solicit private business from a subordinate public official or public employee whom
379 he or she has the authority to direct, supervise or control when:

380 (A) The solicitation is a general solicitation directed to the public at large through the
381 mailing or other means of distribution of a letter, pamphlet, handbill, circular, or other written or
382 printed media; or

383 (B) The solicitation is limited to the posting of a notice in a communal work area; or

384 (C) The solicitation is for the sale of property of a kind that the person is not regularly
385 engaged in selling; or

386 (D) The solicitation is made at the location of a private business owned or operated by the
387 person to which the subordinate public official or public employee has come on his or her own
388 initiative.

389 (p) The commission may, by legislative rule promulgated in accordance with chapter 29A
390 of this code, define further exemptions from this section as necessary or appropriate.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to extend the one-year prohibition on lobbying by former public officials to five years.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.