

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS
Gail Pellerin, Chair
SB 1175 (Rubio) – As Amended March 24, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 36-0

SUBJECT: Lobbyist registration and termination.

SUMMARY: Requires a lobbyist to file an amended lobbyist certification or a notice of lobbying termination directly with the Secretary of State (SOS), instead of with their lobbying firm or lobbyist employer. Contains an urgency clause, allowing this bill to take effect immediately upon enactment.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Creates the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), and makes it responsible for the impartial, effective administration and implementation of the Political Reform Act (PRA). (Government Code §§83100, 83111)
- 2) Requires lobbying firms and lobbyist employers to register with the SOS. (Government Code §86100(a))
- 3) Requires each individual lobbyist to submit a lobbyist certification for filing with the SOS as part of the registration of the lobbying firm in which the lobbyist is a partner, owner, officer, or employee, or as part of the registration of the lobbyist employer that employs the lobbyist. Requires the lobbyist certification to include all the following:
 - a) A recent photograph of the lobbyist.
 - b) The full name, business address, and telephone number of the lobbyist.
 - c) A statement that the lobbyist has read and understands specified legal prohibitions on the conduct of lobbyists.
 - d) A statement regarding the lobbyist's completion, or planned completion, of required lobbyist ethics training.
 - e) Other information required by the FPPC consistent with the PRA. (Government Code §§86100(b), 86103)
- 4) Requires a lobbyist to submit an amended certification or notice of termination to the lobbyist's firm or employer if any information in the lobbyist certification changes or if the lobbyist terminates all activity that required the certification. Requires the firm or employer to submit that updated information to the SOS within 20 days after the change. (Government Code §86107)

- 5) Requires the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to develop and certify a new online filing and disclosure system for public use that provides public disclosure of campaign finance and lobbying information in a user-friendly, easily understandable format, as specified. This system commonly is referred to as the Cal-Access Replacement System (CARS). (Government Code §84602(b))

FISCAL EFFECT: None. This bill is keyed non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of the Bill:** According to the author:

As an elected official, I know that transparency and accountability are foundational to public trust, and this is especially true for our lobbyist registration system. Current law requires lobbyists to submit registration amendments or termination notices to their lobbying employer or firm if there are any changes in their certification information. The lobbyist's employer or firm then files directly with the Secretary of State. However, the current lobbyist registration system creates significant delays and transparency issues when lobbyists change employers or need to update their registration. Because employers have 20 days to file certification changes with the state, and because lobbyists can only be registered with one employer or firm at a time, lobbyists may have to wait weeks for their former employer to file termination paperwork before they can register with a new employer. This delay can result in lobbyists filing late disclosure reports through no fault of their own, and the lobbyist's relationship with their new employer remaining undisclosed to the public.

SB 1175 modernizes our lobbying disclosure system by requiring lobbyists to file terminations, employment changes, and registration amendments directly with the Secretary of State's office, instead of going through their employer or firm. The bill eliminates unnecessary delays, and ensures Californians have clear and timely information about who is advocating before their government. Good governance requires systems that are efficient, transparent, and responsive.

- 2) **Cal-Access and CARS:** In 1997, the Legislature passed and Governor Pete Wilson signed SB 49 (Karnette), Chapter 866, Statutes of 1997, which amended the PRA and established the Online Disclosure Act of 1997. SB 49 required the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to develop and implement, by the year 2000, an online filing and disclosure system for reports and statements required to be filed under the PRA, as specified. As a result, the SOS created and deployed a system called the California Automated Lobby Activity and Campaign Contribution and Expenditure Search System, commonly referred to as Cal-Access.

Cal-Access is now 27 years old, and the SOS reports that components of the system are no longer supported by their vendor. As a result the system has periodically crashed and denied public access. Additionally, the SOS has indicated that the ability to make modifications to the existing Cal-Access system is very limited. The Legislature has taken steps to replace the

Cal-Access system with a new disclosure system commonly referred to as CARS. CARS is scheduled to be deployed toward the end of this year.

- 3) **Political Reform Act Regulation of Lobbying:** In the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, California was the first state to adopt a comprehensive political reform package through the enactment of the PRA. Voters approved the measure as Proposition 9 at the June 1974 statewide primary election. One of the PRA's stated purposes is that "[t]he activities of lobbyists should be regulated and their finances disclosed in order that improper influences will not be directed at public officials."

The PRA regulates lobbying activities related to legislative bills and state agency regulations. It does not apply to lobbying of the federal government or of city, county, or other local government agencies.

As originally enacted, the PRA required lobbyists to register directly with the SOS. To improve disclosure and streamline reporting, the FPPC sponsored SB 659 (Bergeson), Chapter 1183, Statutes of 1985. Among other provisions, that bill defined the terms "lobbying firm" and "lobbyist employer," and established a legal framework for regulating those entities. According to legislative analyses, SB 659 was the product of an advisory panel sponsored by the FPPC, and the bill's regulation of lobbying firms and lobbyist employers as entities was intended to reflect that most lobbying at the time was done by lobbying firms or full-time employees of businesses or associations.

Among other changes, SB 659 eliminated direct lobbyist registration with the SOS. Instead lobbyists complete certifications that their firm or employer submits as part of the firm's or employer's own registration. Amendments or terminations of a lobbyist's certification likewise must be submitted through the firm or employer, which is responsible for updating its registration to reflect the change.

According to this bill's author and sponsor, this indirect filing process has created challenges when lobbyists change employers. Because a lobbyist can be registered with only one employer or firm at a time, a lobbyist who changes jobs must wait for their former employer to file termination paperwork with the SOS before the lobbyist can register with their new employer.

This bill instead requires a lobbyist to file any amendment to their lobbyist certification—or the termination of such a certification—directly with the SOS. According to the SOS, the functionality to allow lobbyists to file these certifications directly is being incorporated into the design of CARS. SOS staff indicates that when the CARS system has launched, a newly hired lobbyist will be able to create an account with CARS to submit the required information as part of the lobbyist's certification. That certification will be held in a pending state until the lobbyist's firm or employer updates its registration to reflect the lobbyist's affiliation with that firm or employer. When a lobbyist leaves the employment of that employer or firm, the lobbyist will be able to log-in to the CARS system and submit an updated certification to reflect that change. While the lobbying firm or lobbyist employer will also need to update its registration to reflect that they no longer employ that lobbyist, the lobbyist will not need to wait for that action before they can register with a new firm or

employer.

- 4) **Seeing Double:** The PRA includes various sections that exist in two different versions with the same code section number. The existence of multiple versions of the code with the same code section number reflects a technical mechanism to allow certain changes to state law to go into effect when CARS is deployed.

Specifically, for those sections of the PRA that exist in two different versions, one version is operative now, and the second version will become operative when the SOS certifies that the CARS system meets specified requirements of state law (at which point, the currently operative version of the section becomes inoperative). Accordingly, this bill amends both versions of Government Code Section 86107.

- 5) **Proposed Technical Amendments:** SB 459 (Allen), Chapter 873, Statutes of 2022, requires lobbying disclosure reports to include additional information about items that were lobbied. Because implementation of those provisions required modifications to the state's lobbying disclosure database, SB 459 provided that its provisions become operative one year after the SOS certifies CARS. This delayed operative date allowed the SOS to incorporate the bill's requirements when designing CARS.

Last year, AB 808 (Addis), Chapter 278, Statutes of 2025, made various minor and technical changes to prepare for CARS and becomes operative upon SOS certification of the system. However, AB 808 inadvertently amended a code section that had been added by SB 459. Because AB 808 takes effect upon SOS certification of CARS, this drafting error had the unintended effect of accelerating the operative date of one SB 459 provision by one year.

As discussed above, the SOS is expected to certify CARS later this year. If the drafting error in AB 808 is not corrected before certification, one provision of SB 459 will become operative one year earlier than intended. Accordingly, committee staff recommends amendments to this bill to correct the technical drafting error in AB 808.

- 6) **Arguments in Support:** The sponsor of this bill, Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., writes in support:

SB 1175 modernizes California's lobbying registration system by allowing individual lobbyists to file registration amendments and termination notices directly with the Secretary of State, rather than requiring their lobbying firm or employer to file on their behalf.

The current lobbyist registration system lacks transparency and creates significant delays when lobbyists change employers or need to update their registration information. Under existing law, lobbyists cannot file their own termination or amendment paperwork directly with the Secretary of State. Instead, they must submit documents to their lobbying firm or employer, who then file with the state...

By making this change, greater responsibility is placed directly on lobbyists for

maintaining accurate registration status, allowing government efficiency and transparency to be upheld in the process for the public.

- 7) **Political Reform Act of 1974:** California voters passed an initiative, Proposition 9, in 1974 that created the FPPC and codified significant restrictions and prohibitions on candidates, officeholders, and lobbyists. That initiative is commonly known as the PRA. Amendments to the PRA that are not submitted to the voters, such as those contained in this bill, must further the purposes of the initiative and require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D. (Sponsor)
California Political Treasurers Association
Fair Political Practices Commission

Opposition

None on file.

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