



TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE
Empowering Texas cities to serve their citizens

President **David Rutledge**, Mayor, Bridge City
Executive Director **Bennett Sandlin**

March 13, 2023

The Honorable Bryan Hughes
Chairman, State Affairs Committee
Texas State Senate
PO Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

Dear Chairman Hughes:

I am writing on behalf of the Texas Municipal League to express our opposition to **Senate Bill 175** by **Senator Middleton**. As filed, S.B. 175 would expressly prohibit a political subdivision from spending public funds to hire a lobbyist. It also would prohibit a political subdivision from paying a nonprofit state association or organization that primarily represents political subdivisions and employs or contracts with a person required to register as a lobbyist. In our view, the goal of S.B. 175 is to silence local officials by preventing them from effectively participating in the state policymaking process.

The City of Bridge City is one of the 1,178 Texas cities that are members of the Texas Municipal League. Membership in the League provides many benefits for my city, such as training for city officials and employees, legal assistance on matters of municipal law, and access to a wide array of experts and information – all of which helps us to better serve the citizens of our city. The TML Constitution states that the purpose of the League is “to render services which individual cities have neither time, money nor strength to do alone.”

It is in this spirit that the League provides legislative services to its diverse group of member cities all across the state of Texas. The League employs a legislative staff and attorneys to advocate for policy positions that have been adopted by the member cities. They provide us with legal analysis of thousands of bills each session that have a potential impact on cities, and they keep us informed of the status of those bills. City officials depend upon lobbyists who are experts in municipal law just like we depend upon engineers and contractors who are experts in designing and building water systems and roads. We don’t have the time, the knowledge and training to do it ourselves.

During the course of a legislative session, the League’s staff receives hundreds of requests from legislative offices to provide information, as well feedback and advice on bills and amendments. Because such communication requires League staff to register as lobbyists under Texas law, the

bill would prevent the League engaging in this type of communication with legislators and their staffs.

Nearly 85 percent of TML's membership have a population under 10,000 people. Those small cities and towns, individually, cannot afford to hire the legal and legislative expertise needed to analyze, track, and provide input on thousands of bills during a legislative session. They depend upon the League's staff to do that. Those small towns are the ones who would be hurt the most by S.B. 175, though all cities would be harmed.

The monumental issues the Texas Legislature will address this session—hardening of utility systems, economic development, closing the digital divide, public safety, and critical infrastructure needs, among others—are not uniquely state-level issues. They're also local issues. And local leaders have a valuable perspective on these vital topics that needs to be heard.

The prohibitions in S.B. 175 would deprive the legislature of valuable information from local governments on the most pressing issues impacting our state. Local elected officials, meanwhile, would lose the ability to meaningfully participate in the statewide discussions that keenly affect local governments and the diverse group of Texans they represent. In fact, it is the hardworking citizens of our state who lose should this proposal move forward. Please vote against S.B. 175.

I hope this information is helpful to you. Please contact me with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Rutledge".

David Rutledge
President, Texas Municipal League
Mayor, City of Bridge City