



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Capitol Confidential- Avella applauds JCOPE lobbying guidelines

TONY AVELLA May 28, 2015

Queens state Sen. Tony Avella, who has been pushing a bill to require more disclosure by political consultants, is heaping praise on new guidelines issued by the Joint Commission on Public Ethics that seek to achieve the same goal.

JCOPE this week clarified that political consultants who take certain actions related to lobbying efforts must register, even if they don't directly ask lawmakers or agencies to take actions on bills or regulations. In a statement, Avella said the changes are long overdue.

"As Chair of the Senate Ethics Committee, and author of the Consulting Act, I applaud the Joint Commission on Public Ethics for joining me in working to shed light on these 'lobbyists in consultants' clothing,'" Avella said. "For too long, consultants have taken advantage of their close relationships with legislators and policy makers, while simultaneously representing outside clients, all without being subject to the same scrutiny as their lobbyist counterparts."

The guidelines, for instance, would require consultants that set up lobbying meetings between lawmakers and lobbyists to themselves register as lobbyists, even if the consultants don't themselves ask for action on legislative or regulatory matters. JCOPE is planning on formalizing the guidelines as either an advisory opinion or regulations.

Avella, a Democrat who conferences with the Independent Democratic Conference, urged the panel to take the latter step.

“New York is long overdue in addressing this issue, and these proposed guidelines are a strong step in the right direction,” Avella said. “I urge JCOPE to adopt these new guidelines as regulation, so we can continue to build transparency between our legislators and the consultants who work with them.”

Avella’s recently introduced bill, the Consulting Act, would require lobbying disclosure for consulting firms with “substantial contact” with elected officials and other clients with business before government. An Avella spokeswoman said the senator was still planning on pushing his legislation in light of JCOPE’s actions, as it goes further in some areas than the clarified rules.

It also remains to be seen how vigorous JCOPE – which has endured heavy criticism during its existence – will be in enforcing the rules.

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