



Submission on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Statutory review of the Lobbying Act

March 20, 2026

Review of the Lobbying Act

On September 17, 2025, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics (ETHI) adopted a motion to study the effectiveness of the Lobbying Act (LA).

We are writing to provide feedback on the review, as many nonprofits seek to contribute their expertise to public decision-making for the benefit of all Ontarians.

The Ontario nonprofit sector contributes \$65 billion to the province's GDP, employing 844,000 people.¹ As a sector, nonprofits receive less than half of their revenues from government, which we leverage with private grants and donations, the sale of goods and services, and volunteer efforts to create additional value for the communities we serve.

Summary: Avoid cluttering the Registry with false positives

In order for the LA to provide Canadians with an accurate picture of lobbying activities, and avoid cluttering it with incidental and non-lobbying activities, the Act must be amended:

1. Return the minimum threshold of lobbying activities to the more meaningful 32 hours in a four-week period rather than the incidental 8 hours a month.
2. We strongly endorse recommendation 4 of the Commissioner of Lobbying to carve-out routine communications with government to apply for grants and contributions by stating that it is not mischaracterized as lobbying for the award of a grant or contribution under s.5(1)(a)(v).
3. Exempt public benefit nonprofit corporations from any requirement to register volunteer corporate directors as lobbyists.
4. Do not add costly compliance measures such as the requirement to register each separate grassroots lobbying effort in detail.
5. Clarify the treatment of coalition and sector-wide advocacy.

Context: Sector is highly engaged but overburdened

We all benefit from a strengthened voice for nonprofits in our democracy. Unlike other Canadian industries, nonprofit organizations typically engage in public policy discussions to share frontline knowledge about community needs and program impacts. Through consultations, policy dialogue, and participation in advisory

¹ Imagine Canada and Ontario Nonprofit Network, [Ontario Nonprofit Sector Infographic \(English\)](#), March 21, 2022.

processes, nonprofit organizations provide government with practical insights drawn from their work in communities across the country.

In ONN's 2025 [State of the Sector survey](#), 59 per cent of respondents reported that it's important for their nonprofit organization to increase its level of participation in public policy dialogue.² In the same survey, 93 per cent of respondents identified engaging in activities that could constitute lobbying, such as meeting with government officials.³ While our data cannot determine whether the number of hours, level of government, or forms of meeting qualified for registration under the Lobbyist Registration Act, it is clear the nonprofit sector wants to contribute its insights to public decisions.

However, the nonprofit sector, like other key Canadian industries, faces major budgetary and human resources barriers in doing so.⁴ While the vast majority of nonprofits want to comply, compliance is only attainable if nonprofits are only required to register when doing so paints a meaningful picture of their actual activities.

Detailed recommendations

1. Restore the threshold for lobbying from 8 hours to 32 hours in a 4-week period by defining "significant part of duties" in regulation.

On January 19, 2026, [a new interpretation](#) of the "significant part of duties" minimum threshold for registering, effectively reducing it from 32 hours in a 4-week period to 8 hours.⁵

Dozens of organizations in the sector have responded to us with alarm and anxiety. This threshold threatens to deter organizations who are only able to spend minimal time and resources on advocacy activities from engaging at all, for fear that they will either be non-compliant or incur a significant regulatory burden they have never engaged with before.

While registration may not appear like a significant barrier to experienced and professional lobbyists, for small to medium sized nonprofits in which there is

² Ontario Nonprofit Network, [2025 Ontario State of the Sector - 2025 Data Tables](#), October 15, 2025. Ontario State of the Sector.

³ Ontario Nonprofit Network, [2025 Ontario State of the Sector - 2025 Data Tables](#), October 15, 2025. Ontario State of the Sector.

⁴ Ontario Nonprofit Network, [Shining a Light on this Critical Moment: 2025 State of the Ontario Nonprofit Sector](#), October 15, 2025.

⁵ Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, [Interpretation Bulletin: Significant Part of Duties](#), July 16, 2025.

high turnover and limited resources, even the limited steps involved with registration may be enough to keep them from getting involved at all.

Most nonprofits do not employ dedicated government relations staff. Policy engagement is typically carried out by executive directors, program staff, or senior leaders whose primary responsibilities lie elsewhere.

Nonprofit organizations frequently engage with government through activities such as:

- Participating in consultations
- Contributing to policy roundtables
- Collaborating in sector coalitions
- Sharing research or community expertise with public officials.

These challenges are particularly significant for grassroots organizations representing equity-denied communities. Reduced participation risks narrowing the diversity of perspectives informing federal policy development.

We therefore recommend that in order to create consistency going forward, “significant part of duties” be defined in regulation as 32 hours within a 4-week period.

2. Carve out funding applications from the definition of lobbying.

Every day nonprofits across the country answer calls by Ministries and Agencies of the Government of Canada to apply for grants and contribution streams. Funding applications are often time-intensive tasks that usually far exceed the 8-hour threshold currently maintained by the Commissioner of Lobbying as the registrable threshold, and often exceeding even the prior 32 hour threshold. Significant parts of the contents of these applications are most often accessible through Access to Information (ATIP) requests in far greater detail than is required under the LA. Furthermore, as these are public processes available to any organization that qualifies, participation in them confers no special access or privilege on the applicant.

In short, simply applying for a federal grant, although the application may ultimately, in theory, be destined for a public office holder, in no way constitutes lobbying as the term is popularly understood.

Nevertheless, we have recently been made aware that the Commissioner of Lobbying takes the view that such communications could cause a nonprofit to require registration under s.5(1)(a)(v) of the LA. The Commissioner clearly recognizes that this is an unintended and impractical effect given recommendation 4 of her brief to this Committee.⁶ We strongly endorse her recommendation.

3. Exempt public benefit nonprofits from any requirement to register volunteer board directors as lobbyists.

In her submission, the Commissioner of Lobbying recommended (#2) that directors on a corporation's board ought to be deemed employees for the purpose of registration as in-house lobbyist. We appreciate the Commissioner's intent is likely to capture the directors of for-profit corporations who more likely have a direct financial interest in the lobbying activities of the corporation but are paid in forms other than as employees. We therefore would like to add to this recommendation a qualification that it does not apply to the volunteer directors of public benefit nonprofit corporations.

This qualification makes sense as a matter of principle since volunteer directors do not receive compensation. And furthermore, by definition, a [public benefit nonprofit](#) operates for the exclusive purpose of the public benefit, and not for the private benefit of its members or directors.

4. Do not add costly compliance measures such as the requirement to register each individual grassroots lobbying effort as is recommended by the Commissioner (#9).

As discussed above, one major barrier to lobbying activities in general, and registration under the LA in particular is administrative burden, especially for small to medium-sized organizations in which there are limited resources. If compliance with the LA becomes too demanding it risks discouraging participation or actually decreasing transparency by lowering the likelihood of registration. Both outcomes would be in direct contradiction to the purposes of the LA.

We therefore advise the Committee to weigh each proposal for new compliance requirements in terms of not only the monetary but also the time costs for the smallest and most disenfranchised of potential lobbyists. In particular, we

⁶ Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Canada, [Modernizing the Lobbying Act](#), March 2026.



caution against adopting the Commissioner's 9th recommendation of requiring registration for each individual grassroots lobbying effort.⁷ Those with least direct access to decision-makers are most likely to rely on these means. Consequently, special care must be taken when creating additional burden.

If the Committee deems it in the best interests of transparency to adopt recommendation #9, we recommend that a financial threshold be adopted of \$10,000 on each campaign to be registerable or another threshold designed to be aligned with election advertising legislation.

5. Clarify the treatment of coalition and sector-wide advocacy

Echoing ONN's partner [Imagine Canada's recommendation](#), guidance under the Act should clarify how registration obligations apply when organizations participate in coalitions, umbrella organizations, or joint advocacy initiatives.⁸ Clear guidance would help organizations understand when individual members must register, and reduce confusion around collective advocacy efforts.

About ONN

ONN is the independent nonprofit network for the over 58,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario. We are focused on policy, advocacy and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy.

Please let us know if you have any questions. We are available to clarify any part of our submission.

Sincerely,

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⁷ Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Canada, [Modernizing the Lobbying Act](#), March 2026.

⁸ Imagine Canada, [Submission to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics](#), March 16, 2026.