



M U L T I S T A T E

**Illinois House GOP want ethics bill talks restarted** (Illinois)

The House sponsor of a long-debated ethics bill that failed in the House this week said she will bring it up for another vote if lawmakers come back to the Capitol within a 15-day constitutional window in which such an action would be allowed.

House Republicans, however, have pulled their support and say it's time to go back to the drawing board.

Senate Bill 539 came up for vote after 1 a.m. June 1, with House Republicans stating a number of concerns and calling it “watered down” before the legislation passed the House 113-5 and the Senate 59-0.

The bill would have prohibited legislators and constitutional officers from engaging in “compensated lobbying” of a municipality, county or township “on behalf of any lobbyist or lobbying entity that is registered to lobby” the General Assembly or the executive branch. The same would have applied to elected and appointed executive or legislative officials of county, municipal or township governments.

It also would have made a number of changes to financial disclosure requirements and limited the ability of lawmakers to leave office and immediately go to work as lobbyists.

In August, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed an amendatory veto of the bill, changing language about the executive inspector general. The bill returned to lawmakers for another round of approval, now requiring three-fifths majorities in each chamber.

The Senate unanimously accepted Pritzker’s change Tuesday. But House Republicans pulled their support and 14 Democrats were recorded as “not voting,” with several lawmakers already heading back to their districts. The vote failed 59-35 — 12 votes shy.

The bill's House sponsor, Rep. Kelly Burke, D-Evergreen Park, said she wasn't expecting Republicans to pull support for the bill.

Per the constitution, lawmakers have 15 days from the first session day following the governor's veto to accept the change or pass a complete override. That clock started Tuesday and when it expires the bill will be officially dead.

Burke said she was unsure of when the House would return. But House Republicans — such as state Rep. Avery Bourne, R-Morrisonville — say the vote's failure shows lawmakers from both parties want stricter ethics reform.

The GOP lack of support was spurred in large part by the resignation and public comments of Legislative Inspector General Carol Pope who, in July, called the LIG position a "paper tiger" and said she plans to resign as soon as a replacement is found or by Dec. 15 at the latest.

The bill would have given the legislative inspector general independent authority to launch investigations, but only after a formal complaint is filed. It would have restricted those investigations to matters that arise out of government service or employment, not to outside employment.

Pope said that language would tie her hands and cited it as a reason for her resignation.

Bourne, who voted for the bill on its initial passage, has raised concerns about its effect of "disempowering" the legislative inspector general. On Thursday she said Pope's resignation proved her concerns valid. She and state Reps. Ryan Spain, R-Peoria, and Mike Marron, R-Fithian, sent a letter to Burke this week seeking a more forceful bill.

"Us voting for it — it wasn't saying, 'This is all we have to do,'" Bourne said. "But in the legislative inspector general resigning, it proves that this bill actually made the laws on ethics in Illinois worse rather than making incremental steps forward. And so I think ultimately we realized we needed a much, much stronger package; this is moving us backwards."

Bourne said the House GOP wants public hearings and a process that doesn't end in the late-night introduction of a privately negotiated bill at the end of a long legislative session. The letter to Burke called for "expanding the jurisdiction of the LIG, allowing subpoena power for the office of the LIG, pairing the jurisdiction of the LIG and Legislative Ethics Commission, and increasing the vote threshold to a supermajority to block the publication of a report."

Bourne said, the eight-member commission currently needs only four votes to block publication of a report, meaning one party alone could do so.

She also said she's ready to pass SB 539 and continue to work on further changes to ethics laws.

"I think this bill is an excellent bill. And it's a good start. But it's not the end of the conversation," she said. "So let's get this done and then continue working."

### **Lawyers for ex-state senator Gilbert Baker ask to delay retrial on federal bribery, wire-fraud charges** (Arkansas)

Defense attorneys for Gilbert Baker, the Republican Party operative and former state senator who was acquitted of conspiracy to bribe a judge last month, requested a delay of their client's retrial, which had been scheduled to start Oct. 4.

Baker was set to stand trial on one count of bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds and seven counts of honest-services wire fraud after a jury deadlocked on those charges last month.

The former political fundraiser and past chairman of the state Republican party was accused of acting as a middleman in an effort to bribe former Faulkner County Circuit Judge Mike Maggio to reduce a \$5.2 million jury award against Greenbrier Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in 2013 in a lawsuit filed by the family of Martha Bull.

Bull died two weeks after being admitted for a one-month rehabilitation stint at the center.

Baker's attorneys, Blake Hendrix and Annie Depper, said in their Wednesday motion to continue that "counsel will not have adequate time and opportunity to prepare for the retrial" due to a backlog of cases both lawyers are set to try this month and next. There hasn't yet been a ruling on the motion.

"Baker asserts that a continuance best serves the ends of justice," the motion said. "That interest can only be served by allowing reasonable time to prepare for trial. The ends of justice, Baker contends, outweigh his and the public's interests in a speedy trial."

The pleading said federal prosecutors do not object to the request.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Arkansas did not respond to requests for comment on Friday.

Meanwhile, after more than two years of inactivity in Maggio's criminal case, there were two recent filings -- one, a sealed motion on Aug. 25, and the other, a sealed order on Sept. 1.

Maggio, the former Faulkner County judge, pleaded guilty to bribery in 2015 and was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison.

According to online records from Federal Bureau of Prisons, Maggio's release date has been moved up to Oct. 20, 2021, rather than his initial release date of April 3, 2026.

The Bureau of Prisons' records also said Maggio is no longer in its custody. Requests to the Bureau of Prisons' Washington D.C. office about Maggio's whereabouts were not answered Friday.

Attorneys for Maggio also couldn't confirm his whereabouts Friday. One attorney couldn't be reached for comment; another declined to comment on the nature of the sealed court filings.

Maggio testified in Baker's two-week trial, which began on July 23 and during which Baker was tried for the nine-count indictment handed up in January 2019.

On Aug. 12, after eight days of testimony and four days of deliberations, the jury returned with an acquittal on the conspiracy count and informed Chief U.S. District Judge D. Price Marshall Jr. that it could not reach a verdict in the remaining eight counts.

Baker, of Conway, was accused of bribing Maggio in the wrongful death suit against Greenbrier Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, owned by Michael Morton of Fort Smith, by funneling \$30,000 in campaign contributions from Morton to Maggio through a series of political action committees.

Morton has not been charged with any crimes and has denied any wrongdoing.

At the time of the Bull lawsuit, Baker worked as a lobbyist and fundraiser for the University of Central Arkansas in addition to his outside fundraising and lobbying activities for conservative candidates and causes.

On Aug. 13, Marshall declared a mistrial in the case and gave government prosecutors until Aug. 30 to file their intentions to retry the remaining counts or to move for dismissal.

They submitted notice of their intentions to retry Baker on Aug. 26.

Information for this article was contributed by Dale Ellis of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.