



M U L T I S T A T E

Redistricting will reshape Colorado politics. But only 12 lobbyists have disclosed their work to influence the process. (Colorado)

A dozen people are [registered to lobby](#) the two commissions redrawing Colorado's [congressional](#) and [state legislative](#) districts this year. But that meager number doesn't reflect the extensive attempts to influence the Colorado Independent Congressional Redistricting Commission and the Colorado Independent Legislative Redistricting Commission.

The commissions were created by voter approval of constitutional [Amendments Y and Z](#) in 2018 to try to take the partisan politics out of redrawing political maps. The once-in-a-decade process is hugely influential on the state's political future.

But that hasn't stopped various interest groups, from the Western Slope's Club 20 to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, from weighing in, especially on how Colorado's soon-to-be-eight congressional districts should be drawn.

Many of the people representing those interest groups haven't registered to lobby the commissions, despite [rules issued](#) by the Secretary of State's Office last month requiring anyone who communicates with the commissions on behalf of an organization to register.

Curtis Hubbard, a political consultant who worked on Amendments Y and Z, registered to lobby the commissions even though he isn't yet being paid to represent clients before them.

"Paid or unpaid, you should register," Hubbard said. "You want sunshine on this process."

Even volunteer lobbyists seeking to influence the commissions must register, [according to the Secretary of State's Office](#). The redistricting lobbying rules are different from those governing legislative lobbyists.

“That definition of lobbyists is a fairly broad one,” said Ben Schler, a consultant who worked in the Secretary of State’s Office for 10 years and is registered as a redistricting lobbyist. “I think the secretary’s office was just trying to give credence to what’s in the constitution.”

Still, representatives from some groups recommending how the maps should be drawn to the commissions haven’t registered.

For instance, Club 20 from the Western Slope, Action 22 from the San Luis Valley and Pro 15 in northeastern Colorado submitted a [suggested congressional map](#) in late April. But none of the group’s representatives are registered to lobby.

Nor is anyone from the Colorado Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, which [suggested a congressional map](#) earlier this month.

“I wasn’t aware that that was something we needed to do,” said Mike Ferruffino, president and CEO of the Hispanic Chamber. “My idea and interpretation of a lobbyist is that it’s a third party to advocate for another’s interest.”

The Secretary of State’s Office enforcement team may take action if it suspects someone should be registered or if a complaint is filed. Such [complaints against legislative lobbyists](#) are rare.

Amanda Gonzalez, executive director of Colorado Common Cause, a nonpartisan nonprofit that advocates for good government, agreed the rules may be confusing, especially to those at nonprofit groups.

National and state-level nonprofits among groups seeking influence

Gonzalez reports receiving \$1,003 so far for her lobbying on redistricting, with a second Common Cause employee registered but not reporting income.

Schler created the nonprofit Reasonable Districts Colorado, and reports being paid \$200 thus far for his work trying to influence the commissions. Reasonable Districts is funded by Ready Colorado, Colorado Concern and Colorado Association of Realtors, which have all helped fund super PACs in recent Colorado election cycles that primarily support Republican legislative candidates.

“I’ve reached out to both sides to get funding,” Schler said. “I would still like to get some support from the other side of the aisle.”

The redistricting commissions must consider equal population, preserving voting rights, preserving communities of interest and geographic division, and creating competitive districts.

Reasonable Districts Colorado is focused on encouraging competitive districts, Schler said. The group hired [Inside Elections](#) to analyze past Colorado election results. “I asked our data analyst to register as a lobbyist,” Schler said.

Other nonprofits, both local and national, are also represented in the redistricting lobbying ranks thus far.

Lawyer Mark Grueskin, who often works for the Colorado Democratic Party and helped write the amendments creating the commissions, reported receiving \$2,500 to lobby on behalf of nonprofit Fair Lines Colorado.

Alan Philp, who worked on redistricting in 2001 and 2011 for Republican interests, received \$2,000 from the nonprofit Colorado Neighborhood Coalition to lobby the redistricting commissions. “Our focus is on making sure that (Amendments) Y & Z are successful, and that we get constitutional and competitive maps.”

At the national level, Marco Dorado is registered to represent the National Redistricting Action Fund in Colorado. That nonprofit represents Democratic interests.

While Schler disclosed his financial backing in a recent meeting, most of the other nonprofits seeking to influence the commission aren't. So despite lobbying disclosures, the funding behind the [groups that employ them is opaque](#). Philp and Grueskin, for example, wouldn't say who is funding their groups.

Gonzalez said that's a concern.

“In a redistricting process, we only have the opportunity every 10 years,” she said. “It seems even more important that we're understanding who's trying to influence the public and who's trying to influence the commissioners.”

Thus far, much of the lobbying appears to be conducted through [public comments](#) at committee meetings and digitally. Carly Hare, chair of the congressional redistricting commission, and Carlos Perez, chair of the legislative commission, said they haven't been contacted individually by lobbyists.

“There hasn’t really been any really in-person interaction,” Hare said, “which I’m really relieved about.”

But Perez said it’s clear there’s plenty of interest in the process of redrawing congressional and legislative districts.

“There’s lots of groups out there that are actually proposing what we should be doing here. I don’t know who the registered lobbyists are,” he said. “I want to hear from everyone, whether you’re a lobbyist or an organized group or a regular citizen.”