



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR RELEASE:
August 18, 2021

Most Lobbied Bills Included Two State Budgets, Abortion Rights, COVID-19 Issues

Two state budget bills loaded with COVID-19 spending, two bills directly spurred by the virus crisis plus a bill that would protect abortion rights in New Jersey rank among the most heavily lobbied bills in the current legislative session.

The ranking was based on quarterly lobbying reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) since the start of the 219th Legislative session in January 2020.

Jeff Brindle, ELEC's Executive Director, said state budgets have ranked at or near the top of three previous lobbying studies. "What makes the current session unusual is that billions of dollars in the two adopted budgets was targeted at the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

Table 1
Bills with Most Reporting Lobbying Activity
Based on Number of Official Contacts

Rank	Bill Numbers	Issue	Official Contacts	Status
1	S2021/A4720	Appropriates \$32.7 billion in state funds and \$13.9 billion in federal funds for fiscal year 2020-21 state budget	483	Enacted
2	A5870/S2022	Appropriates \$46.4 billion in state funds and \$21 billion in federal funds for fiscal year 2021-22 state budget	273	Enacted
3	A4848/S3030	A bill to protect and expand access to abortion in NJ	223	Introduced
4	S2559/A4179	Revises insurance coverage to cover services provided using telemedicine and telehealth	160	Passed Both Houses
5	S2380/A3999	Concerns employment benefits and coronavirus disease 2019 infections contracted by essential employees.	154	Enacted
6	A21/S21	Legalizes personal use cannabis (marijuana) for certain adults	141	Enacted
7	A4402/S2902	Imposes tax on all Wall Street financial transactions processed within New Jersey	130	Killed
8	S232/A2212	Empowers DEP to deny permits for power plants, landfills and other facilities in impoverished areas already facing substantial environmental risks	114	Enacted
9	S2515/A4676	Requires that plastic containers and packaging contain minimum amounts of recycled materials	112	Passed Senate
10	A1116/S2674	Provides for uniform regulation of small wireless facility deployment (5G) in this State.	97	Passed Assembly

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For instance, more than \$1.2 billion has been set aside just to provide rental assistance and eviction prevention.¹

“All budgets contain thousands of other programs as well that affect the lives of virtually every New Jersey resident,” Brindle said. “It is therefore not a surprise that budgets usually draw the most intense lobbying.”

The two budget bills generated at least 830 official contacts- 483 involving the fiscal year 2020-21 budget (S-2021/A-4720), 273 involving the fiscal year 2021-22 budget (A-5870/S-2022), and 74 where the fiscal year is unclear.

The next most lobbied bill has only been introduced. But it involves a perennially controversial issue- abortion.

The bill (A-4848/S-3030) would adopt a state statute legalizing abortion in New Jersey at a time when federal protection is facing a serious challenge in the U.S. Supreme Court. Even without any public hearings, the bill already has spurred 223 official contacts.

Two bills directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic round out the top five most lobbied bills.

One (S-2559/A-4179) expands health insurance to apply to health care services provided via the internet, either by doctors or others. It drew 160 official contacts and has passed both houses. It is awaiting the governor’s action.

A second bill (S-2380/A-3999) prompted by the pandemic extends workers compensation and other work-related benefits to essential employees who contract COVID-19. The bill, which has been signed into law, attracted 154 official contacts.

“While there is no exact way to gauge the impact of the virus outbreak on lobbying, reports filed with ELEC suggest the pandemic has been a major focus during the latest legislative session,” said Brindle.

For instance, of the 16,415 official contacts reported to the agency during this session, 2,033- more than 12 percent- involved the public health crisis.

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association reported the most activity among organizations lobbying on the COVID-19 related bills identified by ELEC. Thirteen groups ranked on the top ten list (includes ties) combined to make 555 contacts- almost a third of the total.

¹ Katherine Landergan, “Murphy Signs Bills to Prevent Evictions, Provide Utility Assistance”, Politico, August 4, 2021.

Table 2
Groups That Reported Most Activity Among
2,033 Pandemic-related Contacts Identified by ELEC

Group	Contacts	Rank
NJ Business and Industry Association	97	1
New Jersey Hospital Association	73	2
New Jersey Education Association	66	3
Chamber of Commerce of Southern NJ	59	4
New Jersey Bankers Association	57	5
CrossState Credit Union Association	50	6
AARP NJ	47	7
Make the Road NJ	39	8
New Jersey Apartment Association, Coach USA, Insurance Council of New Jersey	36	9
Professional Insurance Agents of New Jersey, NAIOP NJ*	31	10

*Commercial real estate

Rounding out the top ten ranked by official contacts are:

- a bill that legalized recreational use of marijuana (A-21/S-21).
- a bill (A-4402/S2902) that would have imposed a tax on Wall Street transactions occurring in New Jersey. It was blocked by heavy opposition.
- legislation (S-232/A2212) signed into law that allows state environmental officials to block permits for polluting facilities in neighborhoods already heavily exposed to such risks.
- a bill (S-2515/a-4676) approved by the state Senate that requires plastic containers and packaging include a minimum amount of recycled material.
- a bill (A-1116/S-2674) that cleared the state Assembly that standardizes local regulations for the construction of 5G telecommunications networks.

While ten bills generated the most official contacts, that didn't always mean a lot of groups were involved with each issue.

The most notable example is the abortion bill, which drew the third largest number of official contacts yet involved only 10 groups, the smallest among the top ten.

Likewise, a bill involving COVID-related insurance benefits involved more groups than the 2021-22 state budget.

Table 3
Number of Groups Lobbying
On Ten Most Lobbied Bills

Issue	Number of Groups Lobbying	Most Active Group
2020-21 State Budget	149	New Jersey Policy Perspective
COVID-19 Benefits	71	Insurance Council of New Jersey
2021-22 State Budget	68	Coach USA
Legalized Marijuana	60	ACLU NJ
Telehealth	57	Medical Society of New Jersey and NJ Association of Health Plans
Stricter Environmental Permitting	47	Chemistry Council of New Jersey
Recycled Packaging	33	American Chemistry Council
Wall Street tax	26	Coalition to Prevent the Taxation of Retirement Savings
5G Service	18	AT&T
Abortion	10	Planned Parenthood Action Fund of NJ

Explanatory notes about this analysis

While state law requires lobbyists to disclose their official contacts involving legislation and other regulated activities, the reader should be aware that such a contact can be limited or broad.

For example, a lobbyist might report that a client hospital's chief executive met with the legislative sponsor and an aide in an office. That would count as one contact.

Another lobbyist might report sending emails to all 120 members of the legislature urging them to support, oppose or modify the same bill. ELEC staff counts such an outreach effort as one official contact even though it may target more than one lawmaker.

Another caveat- while quarterly lobbying reports disclose direct attempts to influence legislation, they don't disclose more indirect efforts.

Lobbyists sometimes organize "grassroots" campaigns to mobilize the public for or against legislation using advertisements aired on television or other media. Efforts to harness legislative constituents in this way are disclosed in annual lobbying reports.

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