

Plan Targets L.A. Councils, Lobbying

Under proposed laws, people paid to pressure neighborhood groups would have to register.

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Los Angeles Councilman Greig Smith proposed new laws for neighborhood councils Friday in a bid to control the lobbying that he said had popped up at that new level of government.

Smith wants to require people who are hired to lobby the councils to register with the city and to prohibit these registered lobbyists from sitting on neighborhood councils.

He was compelled to propose the laws, Smith said in a statement, because he learned that Browning Ferris Industries was "currently paying neighborhood council board members to lobby" councils to continue dumping city trash in the Sunshine Canyon Landfill, which the company operates.

Smith represents the northwestern San Fernando Valley, where many are opposed to the Granada Hills landfill.

"This is necessary to prevent outside interests from covertly influencing neighborhood councils," he said.

But one woman, who sent e-mails to dozens of neighborhood councils on behalf of Browning Ferris, said she was "not a lobbyist."

"I haven't been paid," said Wendy Bruget, adding that she had not yet submitted an invoice and had not decided whether she would. She added that she did not believe she did anything covert or unethical.

Bruget, a member of a downtown neighborhood council, sent e-mails urging neighborhood council members to "understand more about a basic city service that affects us each and every day."

She said she sent them on behalf of a project director for Browning Ferris. She hooked up with the company, she said, because she is a friend of one of its lobbyists, Arnie Berghoff.

But Bruget said she did not attempt to lobby her own neighborhood council. And when she met with a neighborhood council in Bel-Air last month, she said, she stated that she was representing Browning Ferris.

"Are we hiding anything? Of course not," said Berghoff, adding that Browning Ferris only wanted to educate neighborhood councils about Sunshine Canyon issues.