



ETHICS REPORTER

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Kentucky Legislative Ethics Commission
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<https://klec.ky.gov>

[Come Check Out the Legislative Ethics Commission's Website!](https://klec.ky.gov)

Since we created and offered electronic filing in 2009, it has become a major success for the Kentucky Legislative Ethics Commission, providing more timely reporting for the public, and saving money and time for the individuals and organizations using the website filing system found at <https://apps.klec.ky.gov/lec/>.

For the May 1 to August 31, 2026 reporting period, reports were filed electronically by 920 employers, or about 95 percent of the 965 employers registered with the Commission. Likewise, 98 percent of Kentucky's 702 legislative agents (lobbyists) used the system, filing 3,760 reports online. If a password or Log On ID is lost or forgotten, replacements may be requested from Lori.Smith@kylegislature.gov.

In addition to the filing option, the Commission website offers a variety of useful information. During each legislative election year, the website provides access to financial disclosure forms filed by all candidates running for the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The current year disclosure forms, filed by sitting members of the General Assembly, are always available on the website. All sitting legislator's financial disclosure statements are found under "Reports" on the Commission home page located at <https://klec.ky.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.

The website also offers a variety of reports associated with lobbying in Kentucky, including lists of active employers and legislative agents and the compensation paid to them by the employers they represent. Additionally, there are reports showing what bills were lobbied, and how much money was spent on lobbying by lobbyists and employers of lobbyists. These reports cover amounts spent on lobbying during the current year (up to August 31) and previous year. If anyone needs a prior year report not listed, please contact the Commission office.

We also have a searchable register located on our homepage. It includes historical information, since 1993, on who was registered, contact information for each employer or lobbyist, amounts spent on lobbying by each employer or legislative agent if they have ever been registered with our office.

Our office prides itself on transparency in state government. We have included features on the website that allow users to view the Ethics Commission's budget, recommended changes to the Code of Legislative Ethics and annual reports submitted to the Legislative Research Commission for review, minutes from Ethics Commission meetings, past newsletters, and official opinions approved by the Commission. Our training video for legislative agents and employers is located on the homepage under the "file forms online" box or you can simply click this link to watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrqWW7sJDK4>.

Come check us out!

Newly-Registered and Terminated Lobbying Employers

Since the end of the 2026 General Assembly, several businesses have registered to lobby, while others have terminated registration and are no longer lobbying in Kentucky.

The following organization recently registered to lobby in Kentucky:

Affinity Care management
Anthropic
Blink Health, Inc. (BlinkRx)
Gray Industrial Realty I, Inc.

Kentuckians for Legal Reform
National Fire Sprinkler Assn., Inc.
Shelby County Public Schools

The following organizations recently terminated their status in Kentucky:

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
Kairos Power LLC

Tri-Arrows Aluminum Inc.

Ethics & Lobbying News from around the U.S.

NC lobbyists agree to civil fine in deal to drop charge over bourbon tour

By: Dan Kane – **MSN.com** – September 17, 2026

Three lobbyists whose clients helped cover expenses for state lawmakers attending a bourbon tour each agreed to pay a \$1,000 civil fine on Thursday and avoid the possibility of a criminal trial.

Attorneys for lobbyists David Ferrell, Douglas Bowen Heath and Douglas Miskew each said in state Superior Court that their clients agreed to a deferral of prosecution on the charge of solicitation to commit violations of the offense of giving gifts by lobbyists and lobbying principals. The lobbyists also agreed to undergo education on the lobbying law, and to cooperate with the continuing investigation.

Greater Carolina, a Mooresville-based nonprofit promoting conservative economic development policies, held the 2024 tour in the Louisville, Kentucky area, and an earlier one in 2022.

Ferrell, Heath, Miskew and a fourth lobbyist, Kevin Wilkinson, were indicted in April by a Wake County grand jury. According to the indictments:

- Heath encouraged Diageo North America to make a contribution to Greater Carolina, knowing that the money would be used to fund transportation to and from, and a tour and tasting at, its Stitzel-Weller Distillery in Shively, Kentucky. He also encouraged Diageo to pay for a dinner at Morton's The Steakhouse in Louisville, where Diageo was recognized as the sponsor for the group.
- Miskew encouraged Churchill Downs to host and pay for the group at its Opening Race Night, which included a buffet with food and beverages. Churchill Downs is home to the Kentucky Derby, and the company runs sports wagering.

- Ferrell encouraged the North Carolina Spirits Association to make a contribution to Greater Carolina, knowing the money would be used to pay for the group to attend a lunch at Heaven Hill Distillery in Bardstown, Kentucky, that included a select barrel of bourbon. The money was also used to pay for a reception at the Thoroughbred Society, where the Spirits Association was identified as a sponsor.
- Wilkinson “requested and encouraged” Sazerac Company to host a tasting and dinner at the company’s Buffalo Trace Distillery in Frankfort, Kentucky. Sazerac paid for a tasting and dinner for the group. None of the lobbyists nor their clients reported the expenses on their quarterly lobbying reports submitted to the N.C. Secretary of State’s Office, which regulates lobbying. No charges arose out of the 2022 trip because the statute of limitations for misdemeanors is two years, Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman has said.

Neither Wilkinson nor his attorney were in court for the disposition. Freeman told The News & Observer after the hearing that she was not able at this point to determine that his involvement was at the same level as or greater than the other three.

Charge Carried \$200 Fine

Freeman said the civil fine, required education and further cooperation with the probe made sense given the misdemeanor charge only carries a \$200 fine.

“We could have gone through a whole trial, brought a bunch of witnesses from Kentucky, a jury could have convicted them, and at the end, a judge would have given them a \$200 fine,” Freeman said. “That was part of what we had to weigh out in reaching our resolution.”

In court, she said the state’s lobbying and ethics laws contained “exceptions” that might have made a conviction difficult. None of the three lobbyists had paid for the expenses, she noted.

Ryan Willis, a Raleigh attorney for Heath, also noted what he called a “very complicated, murky area of the law” at the heart of the charge.

“The outcome that was negotiated here reflects an appropriate resolution of this case based on the state’s own investigation,” Willis said in a short interview after the hearing.

The leader of Maynard Nexsen, the firm Ferrell works for, said in a statement he was pleased with the outcome.

“By the terms of the agreement, David does not admit guilt, and there is an acknowledgement that there is no evidence that David personally gave a gift, directly or indirectly, and an acknowledgement that David is not the subject of an ongoing investigation” said Jeff Grantham, the firm’s managing shareholder.

Miskew also said in a statement that he admitted no wrongdoing and he is moving to have the charge expunged.

“As the dismissal acknowledges, I voluntarily cooperated with the investigation, I’m not the subject of any ongoing investigation, and the investigation found that I did not give a gift, directly or indirectly, to any state lawmaker,” Miskew said.

He added: “Based on media reports, this investigation continues. If allegations reported in the media are true, then I feel duped, as I expect do others who were led to believe the organization was acting in good faith in pursuit of its stated mission.”

Outside of court, Freeman said the case ought to persuade lawmakers to tighten the lobbying and ethics laws. They took effect in 2008, and did not anticipate the forming of social welfare nonprofits such as Greater Carolina that are now being used for political purposes. They are known as 501(c)(4)s, which is how they are characterized under the federal tax code.

“I think, unfortunately, with the advent of 501(c)(4)s, there is a sense that there are not rules that restrain them,” she said.

Which lawmakers went on Greater Carolina trip?

Eleven lawmakers went on the 2022 trip, and nine attended the 2024 trip, search warrants say.

Only one lawmaker, state Sen. Tim Moffitt, a Henderson County Republican, reported the trip on his annual statement of economic interest, investigators said. One other, state Sen. David Craven, updated his economic interest statement to show the trip after an earlier statement showed he was an officer with Greater Carolina.

State Sen. Todd Johnson, a Union County Republican, and Rep. Ray Pickett, a Watauga County Republican, were identified as 2022 tour attendees in a search warrant, while Reps. Kyle Hall of Stokes County and David Willis of Union County, also Republicans, were identified in receipts from the 2024 tour. The receipts were obtained by Carolina Forward, a Carrboro-based, left-leaning think tank whose complaint prompted the state investigation.

“We look forward to seeing the men behind the Greater Carolina scheme held liable for their actions, as well as the lawmakers who were happy to collude with them,” said Blair Reeves, Carolina Forward’s executive director.

Then-Rep. Jason Saine, a Lincolnton Republican who was the top budget writer in the House, helped organize the bourbon tours. He is closely connected to Greater Carolina. It was formed by one of his former legislative aides, and its director, David Coble, occasionally co-hosted a radio show with Saine.

Saine, who attended both tours, resigned from the House shortly after the 2024 tour became public when a distillery worker at one of the stops complained in a Reddit post about the group’s behavior. Saine is now a lobbyist.

Freeman has said that none of the “current” lawmakers who went on the tours are facing potential charges. She wouldn’t comment on Saine.

The clients who underwrote the bourbon tour expenses could face civil penalties under the lobbying laws, Freeman said. That would be handled by the N.C. Secretary of State and the State Ethics Commission.

She said she hopes to wrap up the investigation within a few months, and plans at the case’s end to identify all the lawmakers who went on the tours.

Probe Goes Beyond Bourbon Tours

She has also said that the investigation into Greater Carolina goes beyond the bourbon tours. Search warrants have identified expenses that investigators say appear to be improper, including payments to two businesses that operate adult entertainment clubs and a payment to a medical business that helps men with sexual performance issues.

A search warrant made public this week reported that Coble acknowledged in May to Greater Carolina's tax preparer roughly \$30,000 in personal expenses he inadvertently made on the nonprofit's credit cards. He has repaid those expenses, the search warrant said.

In July, Freeman said the investigation was expanding to look into Greater Carolina's connections with the M Group Companies, a Florida developer that won a big assist from state lawmakers in the final version of the 2023 state budget. An M Group subsidiary - Mooresville BTR - received \$15 million in the budget, which largely covered its commitment to the Mooresville Town Council to build a connector road through a residential community it sought to build in the fast-growing town.

Coble was a local representative for Mooresville BTR working with town officials. Wilkinson was the subsidiary's lobbyist.

In June, The News & Observer reported that the M Group won behind-the-scenes help from House Majority Leader Brenden Jones in its efforts to win a contract to build a 600,000-square-foot liquor warehouse for the state Alcohol Beverage Control Commission. Jones, a Columbus County Republican, has said through a spokeswoman that he broke no law in pushing for a path the M Group needed to build the warehouse.

The controversy over Jones' actions, which were publicly opposed by ABC Commission Chairman Hank Bauer, helped cause lawmakers last session to hold off passing wide-ranging legislation that included building the warehouse.

Freeman has not provided specifics as to why the Greater Carolina case is also focusing on the M Group. The company's CEO, Patrick Marino, has acknowledged making a contribution to the nonprofit but did not say how much and why.

Influential state senator facing ethics complaint over sons' business says he followed state-issued guidance

By: Dan Boyd - [Albuquerque Journal, N.M.](#) - September 10, 2026

SANTA FE — An influential Democratic state senator is facing an ethics complaint over records that suggest he lobbied a New Mexico Department of Transportation engineer in 2024 about his sons' paving company.

But Sen. George Muñoz, D-Gallup, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said Thursday he was following guidance he'd sought from the State Ethics Commission and did not cross any ethical bright lines. "I don't get paid in any way from that company," Muñoz said in a Thursday interview.

The complaint against him and the NMDOT — along with three individual DOT employees — was filed with the Ethics Commission last week by former state Sen. Jacob Candelaria, who is an attorney in Albuquerque.

It hinges on DOT emails discussing work done by Prestigious Paving, a Gallup-based company established in 2019 by Muñoz's two sons that has been paid more than \$18.8 million by the state over the last four-plus years.

One particular email referenced in the complaint was sent in November 2022 by DOT district engineer Lisa Boyd Vega to a state DOT official. It references a phone call Boyd Vega said she received from Sen. Muñoz about "striping." The email goes on to say that Prestigious Paving was requesting approval for a change of plans regarding road painting projects it was doing under contract for DOT.

Separate emails appear to show that approval was granted, along with an additional \$175,000 to pay for road striping work on U.S. 550.

While Candelaria did not specifically allege any criminal wrongdoing in his ethics complaint, he did question whether Muñoz — and the state DOT — had violated provisions dealing with nepotism in the state Governmental Conduct Act.

Specifically, those provisions deal with state contracts with companies owned by a legislator or a legislator's family, and when legislators are allowed to represent others before a state agency.

In requesting advice from the state Ethics Commission in 2022, Muñoz said he had rented storage space to his sons' company. But he said he removed himself from any other involvement with Prestigious Paving before the company began receiving state contracts.

He also said Thursday he does not remember making the phone call referenced in the 2024 email. But Candelaria questioned that assertion, saying the denial "strains common sense." He also cited the rapid rise of Prestigious Paving as a state contractor.

As for DOT, an agency spokeswoman said Thursday the department does not maintain an information database about the family members of private contractors or legislators. But some DOT employees might be aware of such family connections, she acknowledged.

"As a general matter, NMDOT does not provide preferential treatment to any contractor and adheres to the Governmental Conduct Act and all procurement procedures," agency spokeswoman Kristine Mihelcic added.

Muñoz is a five-term state senator who took over the reins of the Senate Finance Committee in 2021. In that position, he has significant sway when it comes to crafting the state's annual budget bill, which is set at \$11.1 billion for the current fiscal year.

During recent legislative sessions, Muñoz has worked closely with Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's office to codify a universal childcare initiative in state law and overhaul New Mexico's behavioral health system. For his part, Candelaria has verbally sparred with the governor's administration and some former legislative colleagues since leaving the state Senate in 2022.

In addition to filing the ethics complaint against Muñoz, Candelaria also referred the matter to New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez and First Assistant U.S. Attorney for New Mexico Ryan Ellison for further investigation, according to records provided to the Journal.

Candelaria's law firm has also filed a lawsuit against the state General Services Department for allegedly not complying with an open records request for records dealing with Prestigious Paving, including the company's bids for state road projects.

Meanwhile, the ethics complaint against Muñoz was cited by Senate Republican floor leader William Sharer of Farmington in a statement this week accusing Democrats of having a "corruption problem" in New Mexico.

Specifically, Sharer said Muñoz was entitled to have the allegations against him "fully and fairly investigated," but claimed they fit into a pattern of self-dealing among Democratic legislators.