

# Briefing



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## Transparency, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill

### House of Lords report stage debate

### Monday 13 January 2014

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#### Part 2 : Non-party campaigning etc

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This week the much talked about “Lobbying Bill” will have its report stage debate in the House of Lords. Part 2 of this Bill includes measures to change the legal requirements for campaigning at elections by third party organisations.

Existing legislation already makes very clear that charities must not seek to influence the outcome of an election. At Citizens Advice we are very proud of our independence, political impartiality and evidence based approach to policy and campaigning. The Financial Conduct Authority recently announced plans to take tough action to curb the use of aggressive and misleading marketing and continuous payment authorities by payday lenders following a Citizens Advice campaign. This is an issue on which Citizens Advice has worked with politicians across the political spectrum. We believe it is important to ensure that the existing regulations which apply to charities engaging in campaigning work do not become a greater burden.

#### **We welcome the Government’s amendments to the Bill at this stage which:**

- ✚ Raise the registration thresholds for expenditure by non-party campaigners to £20,000 for England and £10,000 in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland effectively exempting small groups from the need to register as a third party, and the reporting requirements that entails.
- ✚ Reduce the length of the 2014/2015 regulated period for non-party campaigning.
- ✚ Exempt the costs of translating material from English into Welsh from the definition of controlled expenditure.
- ✚ Allow one lead campaigner to report on behalf of smaller campaigners within any coalition reducing the bureaucratic burden on small campaigners and removing the requirement to to account for the coalition’s spending against their own expenditure limits.
- ✚ Commit the Government to reviewing the impact of the new legislation following the General Election in 2015.

We also recognise that the definition of “controlled expenditure” in Clause 26 as previously amended by the Government helpfully clarified the distinction between political and non-party campaigners.

Following the amendments the Government has already made the Bill now provides a much more sensible balance than it did to begin with between creating accountability and transparency in elections while still allowing for charities and others to speak up on issues of concern.

We remain concerned that the low expenditure thresholds for third parties in each constituency could mean small organisations hit these thresholds accidentally and be required to register with the Electoral Commission. We do not believe the case has been made for reducing the spending thresholds. However, we welcome the removal of the even lower constituency spending limits previously proposed for purdah.

We call for more clarity from the Government regarding the rules on coalition campaigning. We remain concerned that the new rules on coalition campaigning introduced by the Bill mean smaller groups in a coalition will have to record their spending so that the lead organisation can report it on their behalf, and this will be an administrative burden.

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## Contact

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## About the Citizens Advice service

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- ✚ Citizens Advice's charitable aim is to make society fairer by providing the advice people need for the problems they face; and improving the policies and practices that affect people's lives.
- ✚ 340 Citizens Advice Bureaux provide advice from 3500 locations across England and Wales.
- ✚ In the last year Citizens Advice Bureaux helped over 2.1 million clients to solve over 6.6 million problems face to face and on the phone.
- ✚ Last year 14.5 million people received advice and information from our advice website Adviceguide.
- ✚ Our policy, campaigning and influencing work is a hugely important part of the work we do for our clients. This year alone we estimate that our campaigning work positively impacted on 8.3 million people.