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## Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill – Second Reading

22 October 2013

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### Summary

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

We welcome the Government’s amendments to the Bill to clarify the distinction between political and non-party campaigners.

We remain concerned about some elements of the Bill, such as the reduced expenditure thresholds for third parties. We believe there is a risk that small organisations could 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.

#### For further information contact:

Helen McCarthy 020 7812 5482

[helen.mccarthy@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:helen.mccarthy@citizensadvice.org.uk)

Tamsin James 020 7833 7102

[tamsin.james@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:tamsin.james@citizensadvice.org.uk)

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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 million clients to solve over 7 million problems face to face and on the phone.
- Last year 14 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.

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

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

The twin aims of the Citizens Advice service are to provide advice for the problems people face and change the policies and practices that affect people’s lives. Our policy and campaigning work is a hugely important part of the work we do to fulfil our charitable purpose. We try to prevent the problems that bring people through the doors of Citizens Advice Bureaux before they happen

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 welcome the changes the Government has made to the [Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill](#) to clarify the distinction between political and non-party campaigners. 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.

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.

While the Government has undoubtedly improved the Bill, there continues to be room for improvement. One of the measures in the Bill is to reduce, from £10,000 to £5,000 (in England) the spending threshold above which an organisation would be required to register with the Electoral Commission. This registration brings with it a number of requirements in terms of record keeping and reporting.

Citizens Advice believes the controls in the Bill should be proportionate to the scale and impact of campaigning. There is a risk that some organisations, including charities, could accidentally stray into the type of campaigning which is deemed to be ‘controlled expenditure’ through, perhaps unwittingly, promoting the electoral success of particular candidates or parties. A spending threshold of £5,000 (or £2,000 in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) is extremely low and could result in an increasing number of small organisations being required to register. We have seen no justification for reducing the spending threshold and believe it should be maintained at its current level of £10,000 in England (£5,000 in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland).

Unfortunately there was very little consultation around the measures in this Bill. So it is vital that improvements are made to the Bill as it continues its passage through Parliament

**If you have any questions on this briefing, please contact :**

Helen McCarthy	020 78125482	<a href="mailto:helen.mccarthy@citizensadvice.org.uk">helen.mccarthy@citizensadvice.org.uk</a>
Tamsin James	020 7833 7102	<a href="mailto:tamsin.james@citizensadvice.org.uk">tamsin.james@citizensadvice.org.uk</a>

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