

All Ethics Bills are Not Ethics Priorities

[By Donald Scarinci](#)

In a state where the media is obsessed with the relationship between government officials and campaign contributions, so many more obvious ethics issues with much easier fixes are ignored.

In New Jersey it remains OK for state legislators to make money from towns they represent, but it is not OK for a Mayor or Councilman to also serve in the Legislature. Dual public service is called, “double dipping,” but legislators can get multiple paychecks from taxpayers as long as only one paycheck is the fruit of elected office.

Unless campaign contributions are involved, bills that attempt to correct some of these obvious anomalies languish in Senate and Assembly committees without media comment or public outcry that they move forward.

Senate Bills 598 and 601 are classic examples. S-598 prohibits a local officer or employee from lobbying or advocating before any municipality where they serve. As detailed in the [statement](#) accompanying the bill, it would also amend New Jersey’s Local Government Ethics Law to prohibit a former officer or employee from representing, appearing for, or negotiating on behalf of any party before any local government agency in which the employee served for a period of one year subsequent to the termination of office or employment.

Another common sense bill waiting in the wings, S-601, also applies to public employees. It would suspend the pension of any retired public employee who resumes public employment with compensation more than \$15,000. As explained in the [bill statement](#), a discrepancy exists in the current law regarding reemployment after retirement. If a retiree becomes employed again in a position, which makes the retiree eligible to be a member of a public retirement system different from the one providing a retirement benefit, the retiree does not enroll in the other system and continues to receive a retirement benefit as well as the salary for the public employment.

It seems pretty obvious that “double dipping” by an elected official who has a private business, or by a former public official in pension funds for multiple public jobs is far more “unethical” and harmful to the public purse than holding two elected offices. At least the public can vote no to a second elected office if they think it is inappropriate.

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