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Predictably, lawmakers' weak ethics package lacks key reforms to restore government trust

CHICAGO--After years of ethical lapses resulting in lawmaker and political insider indictment-after-indictment, elected officials yet again fell short on delivering meaningful reforms to Illinoisans that would begin to restore their trust in government.

New House Speaker Chris Welch repeatedly promised a new day in Springfield and a meaningful ethics package and Gov. J.B. Pritzker also had called for reforms, but what was approved this session is a far cry from what's needed and only serves to diminish voters' hopes for stronger laws to guide officials' actions.

After nearly two years of talk and work on ethics reforms, we've seen a do-nothing commission that did not even bother to publish a final report and an attempt to rush through ethics proposals in the middle of the night in a previous session. CHANGE Illinois, the Better Government Association, Common Cause Illinois and Reform Illinois have been unified in saying we need this [serious package of reforms](#) as a starting point:

- Banning state lawmakers from lobbying local governments
- Implementing a two-year revolving-door ban preventing former lawmakers from immediately lobbying colleagues
- Strengthening the conflict of interest disclosure and recusal requirements
- Fully empowering the Legislative Inspector General to operate independently

The ethics bill that will be sent to Pritzker falls short on all four issues. Only lawmakers lobbying local governments was addressed in a substantial way. Overall, this package is yet another example of the weak approaches we've seen in previous years that have done nothing to curb the continued cycle of corruption scandals that Illinois is infamous for across the nation. It reminds us of the campaign finance reform approved years ago after former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's impeachment that was supposed to have been a "first step" toward more substantive improvements. Those subsequent steps never materialized and we cannot allow that to happen again with this effort.

The revolving-door ban on lawmakers becoming lobbyists included in the package falls severely short. The six-month ban is the lowest in the nation, putting Illinois at the bottom of the list.

The proposal does include needed improvements to annual financial disclosures officials must file. However, it lacks teeth without a recusal requirement. Any lawmaker still can have a conflict of interest and continue to vote in favor or against legislation that affects them personally without any repercussions.

The bare minimum also was done to give the Legislative Inspector General's (LIG) office more independence to truly act as a watchdog. The proposal only allows for the LIG to start investigations without lawmaker approval for incidents that happened within the previous year. And it still requires the LIG to seek permission from the very elected officials it is supposed to investigate to collect necessary information for its probes. The LIG also still must seek lawmaker approval to publish reports when the office finds wrongdoing has occurred, yet another example of lawmakers trying to protect themselves.

Given the state we're in, this is not nearly enough. This ethics bill must not be the last attempt to curb bad actors from further damaging the people's trust in our government. As federal prosecutors continue to probe corruption in state government and new indictments come to light, Illinoisans must renew their call for stronger reforms. The people know we need stronger improvements that truly will signal lawmakers are serious about charting a new path forward, rather than relying on the same old playbook from the past that allows too many bad actors to tarnish the reputation of all of Illinois' elected officeholders.