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IN BRIEF

Governor Murphy signs controversial campaign finance overhaul into law

BY: NIKITA BIRYUKOV - APRIL 3, 2023 4:04 PM



📷 The new law sharply raises limits on political donations while weakening New Jersey's campaign finance watchdog. (Fran Baltzer for New Jersey Monitor)

Gov. Phil Murphy signed a [controversial overhaul of New Jersey's campaign finance system](#) Monday that drastically raises limits on political giving, curbs investigations of campaign finance violations, and loosens the state's pay-to-play law.

The measure, which was met with broad opposition from good government groups, will [at least double limits on donations](#) to candidates to \$5,200, while raising limits on donations to county and state party committees, among some others, to \$75,000. The new limits go into effect immediately.

It will preempt local laws meant to prevent officials from driving contracts to donors and instead require all governments to abide by the state pay-to-play law, which the bill weakens.

At the same time, the bill cuts the statute of limitations on campaign finance violation cases to two years, down from 10. The state Election Law Enforcement Commission has said the change would invalidate 80% of its active cases, including a few filed in January against two legislative leadership committees and the Democratic State Committee alleging the groups had failed to properly report hundreds of thousands of dollars in fundraising and spending.

The bill will require independent expenditure groups – PACs and certain 501 nonprofits – to report donations worth more than \$7,500, down from \$10,000, but only if those donations were made to further independent expenditures. That means money donated for mailers and ads must be disclosed, but not funds set aside for lobbying. Independent spending groups will also be required to disclose all spending related to an independent expenditure instead of only those worth more than \$3,000.

And now that the bill is law, Murphy can appoint members to the Election Law Enforcement Commission without seeking statutorily required approval from the Senate.

That provision is intended to give Murphy more power to get rid of the commission's executive director, Jeff Brindle. The [Murphy administration has sought to oust Brindle](#) over an email he sent to a staffer last year that was deemed homophobic.

The agency's commissioners declined to discipline Brindle during [a special hearing convened last week](#),

and all three of the watchdog's commissioners resigned in protest after the Legislature approved the legislation on Thursday.

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NIKITA BIRYUKOV



Nikita Biryukov most recently covered state government and politics for the New Jersey Globe. His tenure there included revelatory stories on marijuana legalization, voting reform and Rep. Jeff Van Drew's decamp to the Republican Party. Earlier, he worked as a freelancer for The Home News Tribune and The Press of Atlantic City.

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