GOVT + POLITICS INVESTIGATIONS LEGISLATIVE

Law firm has charged Louisiana Legislature $78,000 for 'redistricting advice' so far

Released records provide few details on how money was spent with law firm

BY: **JULIE O'DONOGHUE** - MARCH 31, 2022 4:24 PM

EXHIBIT
GX-34

The Louisiana Capitol Building, April 8, 2021. (Wes Muller/Louisiana Illuminator).

An out-of-state law firm has charged the Louisiana Legislature $78,081 for providing "redistricting advice," according to an invoice released Thursday after a public records request. It's unclear when the law firm performed the work and what type of services it provided.

The Legislature released an invoice that only provides the lump sum of money the law firm is charging the state for assistance on new political maps. There is no itemized list of expenses on the invoice made public, such as individual attorneys' billable hours or a breakdown of what portion of the bill might have been spent on the lawyers' travel.

The publicly released invoice also doesn't detail any range of months or specific dates during which the law firm performed its work. The Legislature received the bill March 14 and it must be paid by April 14. Money Louisiana makes from taxpayers and state fees will be used to cover the cost.

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"This doesn't make much sense to me," Sen. Jay Luneau, D-Alexandria, said upon hearing a description of the BakerHostetler invoice legislative staff has released. "I would hope anything like this that we would do in the Senate would have an itemized list attached to it."

Senate President Page Cortez, R-Lafayette, and House Speaker Clay Schexnayder, R-Gonzales, hired the law firm on behalf of the Legislature in December to help the state's new political maps withstand lawsuits from civil rights organizations. The leadership has been secretive about the firm's work.

Most of the state's 103 legislators weren't aware that a law firm had been hired until weeks after its contract went into effect. Only four Republican lawmakers – those working on maps preferred by Cortez and Schexnayder – had access to the attorneys during the redistricting process.

BakerHostetler

Senate President Patrick Page Cortez
Speaker of the House Clay Schexnayder
Louisiana State Capitol
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Invoice Date: 03/14/22
Invoice Number: 50987701
B&H File Number: [redacted]
Taxpayer ID Number:

Regarding: Redistricting advice

For professional services rendered.

BALANCE FOR THIS INVOICE DUE BY 04/13/22 $ 78,081.21

Remittance Copy

Please include this page with payment

Invoice No: 50987701

Firm Contact Information

Gary Pyne
(202) [redacted]

Please Remit To:	FOR WIRE REMITTANCES:
Baker & Hostetler LLP P.O. Box 70189 Cleveland, OH 44190-0189	Baker & Hostetler LLP KeyBank, N.A., Cleveland, OH [redacted]
Reference Invoice No: 50987701	

The Republican-controlled Legislature approved maps that don't increase the number of majority-Black districts in Louisiana at either the congressional or state level, even though the percentage of Louisiana residents who identify as a minority is growing.

Civil rights groups have filed multiple lawsuits over Louisiana's congressional and legislative maps on the basis that they violate the federal Voting Rights Act by intentionally weakening Black voter influence.

BakerHostetler is expected to defend the Legislature in those lawsuits. The firm has represented GOP interests in redistricting and election litigation across the country.

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One of BakerHostetler's lawyers assigned to Louisiana's case is Mark Braden, former general counsel for the Republican National Committee for a decade and a board member of the National Republican Lawyers Association.

The law firm's December contract with the Legislature was specific about the type of expenses that could be expected, even if the released invoice included little detail about the actual charges.

BakerHostetler planned to bill the Legislature at least $10,000 per month for three months, and the fee would escalate to $60,000 per month once the state was sued over the maps, which happened for the first time in February. The six BakerHostetler attorneys working on Louisiana's redistricting case would charge rates ranging from $355 to $915 per hour, according to the law firm's contract.

The firm was also expected to bill above and beyond their $10,000 or $60,000 monthly fee for ancillary expenses. These include court filing fees, travel, expert witnesses and online services such as LexisNexis and Westlaw.

It's unclear what attorney rates and ancillary expenses have been included in the $78,000 billed by the law firm because the released invoice does not include an itemized list of charges.

Cortez said last month that the law firm had hired at least one outside expert to look at racially polarized voting in Louisiana, though it is not clear how much that expert cost the state. This expense also wasn't broken out on BakerHostetler's invoice released publicly. Legislative leaders have also refused to share the name of the person or people who worked on the analysis publicly, so it's not clear what type of rates might have been on the table.

Racially polarized voting analyses help determine to what extent voters of different races prefer different candidates. It is instrumental in court cases over federal Voting Rights Act compliance, like those that have been filed in Louisiana.

Democratic legislators said the public should have more details about what specific expenses from the law firm are being covered with public funds.

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"Most invoices aren't shared with the Senate members as a matter of course," Sen. Karen Carter Peterson, D-New Orleans, said in a text message Thursday. "However, in this situation involving this controversial legislation and the circumstances surrounding their hiring process, it's probably in the best interest of all involved for there to be transparency and details provided to members."

BakerHostetler may also be renegotiating its contract with the Legislature. The law firm's initial agreement with Schexnayder and Cortez was signed in December and only lasts three months. It allowed the law firm and lawmakers to revisit the terms of the arrangement by the end of March.

Cortez and Schexnayder could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Louisiana Illuminator has chosen to redact information regarding an individual's personal contact information, the law firm's tax ID number and its wire payment login that were included in an invoice obtained through a public records request.

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JULIE O'DONOGHUE

Julie O'Donoghue is a senior reporter for the Louisiana Illuminator and producer of the Louisiana Illuminator podcast. She's received awards from the Virginia Press Association and Louisiana-Mississippi Associated Press. Julie covered state government and politics for NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune for six years. She's also covered government and politics in Missouri, Virginia and Washington D.C. Julie is a proud D.C. native and Washington Capitals hockey fan. She and her partner, Jed, live in Baton Rouge. She has two stepchildren, Quinn and Steven.

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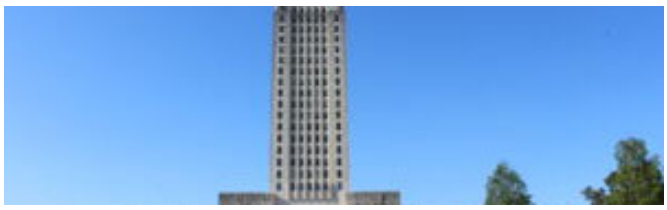

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