

Policy and Legislation

The voters made it mandatory for the Commission to evaluate the effectiveness of the City's governmental ethics, campaign finance, and lobbying laws on a regular basis and to make recommendations to the Mayor and the City Council about those laws. The Commission staff collects data, identifies trends, and analyzes issues to help the board assess existing policies. The Commission proposes legislation to the City Council and makes recommendations to help shape the laws and policies under its purview. Legislative updates and other materials regarding major policy issues can be found on the policy page of the Commission's website.

Whistleblower Hotline

Los Angeles voters mandated that the Ethics Commission maintain a whistleblower hotline, through which City officials, employees, and members of the public can report potential violations of the City's ethics laws. All complaints are independently investigated by the Commission staff. Complaints may be made by phone 24 hours per day, by calling 1-800-824-4825, or online through the "report a violation" link on the Commission's website.

Learn More

The Commission's website provides meeting agendas and materials, publications, searchable campaign disclosure and lobbying databases, audits, and information about enforcement actions and policy matters. It also provides links to the laws discussed in this brochure, and other information related to the Commission's work.

References

Los Angeles City Charter
§§ 470; 700 et seq.

Los Angeles Municipal Code
§ 49.5.1 et seq.



los angeles CITY ETHICS COMMISSION

Mission Statement

As an independent voice for more open and responsive City government, the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission acts through its voter-established mandate to preserve the public trust. Through meaningful public disclosure and effective education, the Commission is committed to supporting and equipping an informed citizenry. Dedicated to upholding the public interest, the Commission shapes, administers and enforces City ethics, campaign finance and lobbying laws that ensure Los Angeles elections and government decision making are fair, transparent and accountable.

For information about the City Ethics Commission, its programs, and/or the laws discussed on this brochure, please visit our website or contact our office.

Website

<http://ethics.lacity.org>

Address

200 N. Spring St. — CITY HALL
24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012

General Office

(213) 978-1960 Phone
(213) 978-1989 Fax

24 Hour Whistleblower Hotline

1-800-824-4825

TTY

(213) 978-2609



los angeles CITY ETHICS COMMISSION

...preserving the public trust.



Background

In June 1990, to help restore public trust in government and the electoral process, the voters of the City of Los Angeles approved the most comprehensive package of local governmental ethics and campaign finance laws in the country. The laws are designed to help ensure that government decisions are made in the public interest, untainted by any consideration of private gain, to improve the quality and integrity of the City's elective process, and to promote transparency in government. The City's ethics laws fall within three categories:

Governmental Ethics

City officials are prohibited from participating in government decisions when they have conflicts of interests. These conflicts may occur when City officials have personal financial interests in matters that are the subject of government decisions or receive gifts from persons who have matters pending before them. City officials must file regular public disclosure reports regarding certain personal financial interests to help identify possible conflicts. Other laws limit some activities by City officials, such as negotiating future employment with persons who have matters pending before them or attempting to influence City decisions for compensation for a certain period of time after leaving City service.

Campaign Finance and Disclosure

The voters placed limits on the size of contributions that candidates for elective City offices can receive. They also created a partial public financing system, which provides limited matching funds to qualified candidates who agree to participate in the program. In addition, City candidates and officeholders must file public disclosure reports about their political fundraising and spending activities at least quarterly.

Municipal Lobbying

Individuals and organizations who attempt to influence City decisions and meet other qualifications must register as lobbying entities. Once registered, lobbying entities must file quarterly disclosure reports about their City activities, including the City decisions that they are attempting to influence and contributions they gave to or fundraising they conducted on behalf of candidates for elective City office.



“Dedicated to upholding the public interest...”

The Ethics Commission

Along with establishing these ethics laws, Los Angeles voters also established the City Ethics Commission to administer and enforce the laws. The Commission consists of a five-member board, with each member serving a staggered, five-year term. The Mayor, City Attorney, Controller, President of the City Council, and the President Pro Tem of the City Council each make one appointment to the board; and each appointment is subject to confirmation by the full Council.

The board meets monthly in City Hall. All meetings are open to the public, unless specifically stated on the Commission's agenda. The Commission considers policy issues and makes legislative recommendations to the City Council to ensure that the City's ethics laws are strong and effective. In addition, the board acts as an adjudicatory body to determine whether the laws within its jurisdiction have been violated. If so, the board has the authority to levy administrative enforcement penalties.

The Commission is staffed by an executive director and a team of employees whose duties include the following:

Advice

To help people understand and comply with City laws, the Ethics Commission provides two types of advice, informal and formal. Informal advice can be provided in person or over the telephone, and it provides general guidance about the laws. Formal advice

is provided in writing in response to a written request, and it applies the law to a requestor's specific set of facts. A person who receives formal advice from the Commission and follows it in good faith is immune under the law from Commission enforcement actions. Formal advice letters that have been issued since 1999 can be viewed through the advice page of the Commission's website.

Education and Compliance Training

Education about the laws and compliance training are essential to an effective ethics program. In partnership with the Office of the City Attorney, the Commission has developed an online course for City officials who are required to participate in ethics training every two years. The Commission also provides general ethics briefings for City agencies, annual trainings for ethics liaisons in all City departments, and trainings for candidates for elective City office. The Commission also has a number of publications and other informational materials about its work that can be downloaded from the publications page of the Commission's website or obtained by request.

Audits

City law requires the Commission to audit the political committees of candidates for elective City office and the fundraising and expenditure statements filed by those candidates. The Commission must audit all committees controlled by City candidates who either raised or spent at least \$100,000 in an election or who received public matching funds in their campaigns. Audit reports are available for public view through the audit page of the Commission's website.

Enforcement

The Commission also investigates and brings enforcement actions against persons who violate the City's ethics, campaign finance, and lobbying laws. Many cases begin as complaints to the Commission's whistleblower hotline, mentioned below. If an ethics law has been violated, the Commission may levy administrative penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation or three times the amount of money that was unlawfully contributed, accepted, or concealed. Cases resolved by the board can be viewed through the enforcement page of the Commission's website.

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