

## Audits

Ethics Commission staff audit the political committees of City and LAUSD candidates and their disclosure statements. All committees controlled by City and LAUSD candidates who either receive public matching funds or raise or spend at least \$100,000 must be audited. Staff also audit disclosure statements filed by others subject to the campaign finance, governmental ethics, and lobbying laws.

## Enforcement

The Ethics Commission is required to investigate and enforce against violations of the ethics laws. Many cases begin as complaints to the whistleblower hotline, mentioned below. If a violation has occurred, administrative penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation or three times the amount of money at issue may be levied.

## Whistleblower Hotline

The Ethics Commission is required to 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 Ethics Commission staff. Complaints may be made 24 hours a day by phone or online.

## **Learn More**

The Ethics Commission's web site provides helpful information, such as meeting agendas and materials, publications, formal advice letters, searchable disclosure reports, audit reports, enforcement orders, and legislative and other policy materials. The laws discussed in this brochure are also available on the web site.

## **References**

Los Angeles City Charter §§ 470, 700 *et seq.*  
Los Angeles Municipal Code §§ 49.5.1 *et seq.*  
Los Angeles Municipal Code §§ 49.7.1 *et seq.*  
Los Angeles Municipal Code §§ 48.01 *et seq.*



## los angeles city ETHICS COMMISSION

The Ethics Commission helps to preserve the public trust by promoting elections and government decisions that are fair, transparent, and accountable. The Ethics Commission acts through its voter mandate to shape, administer, and enforce laws regarding governmental ethics, conflicts of interests, campaign financing, and lobbying.

This is a brief overview. Please contact us for more information about our programs and laws.

### **Address**

200 North Spring Street  
City Hall 24th Floor  
Los Angeles CA 90012

### **Web**

[ethics.lacity.org](http://ethics.lacity.org)

### **Phone**

(213) 978-1960

### **Whistleblower Hotline**

(800) 824-4825

### **Fax**

(213) 978-1988

# Ethics Commission

*...preserving the public trust.*



## Introduction

In June 1990, the voters of the City of Los Angeles enacted a comprehensive set of ethics laws to help promote public trust in government and the electoral process. At the same time, the voters established the Ethics Commission to administer and enforce those laws.

## Governance

Five commissioners serve staggered, five-year terms. The Mayor, City Attorney, Controller, City Council President, and City Council President Pro Tem each appoint one commissioner. Appointments are subject to confirmation by the City Council.

The commissioners conduct public meetings to consider policy issues, make legislative recommendations, and make determinations regarding alleged violations of the campaign finance, governmental ethics, and lobbying laws. Meetings are typically held in City Hall.

The Ethics Commission is staffed by an executive director and a team of professionals.

## Laws

Los Angeles voters adopted ethics laws to help ensure that government decisions are made in the public interest, to protect the quality and integrity of City and Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education (LAUSD) elections, and to promote government transparency and accountability. The laws fall into three main categories:

### Campaign Finance

Contributions to candidates for elective City and LAUSD offices may not exceed specific amounts per contributor. Qualified City candidates may participate in a public financing system that provides limited public funds to match private contributions. Candidates, City officeholders, and those who spend independently to influence elections must disclose their political fundraising and spending activities.



### Governmental Ethics

City officials and employees may not disclose confidential City information, misuse their City positions, engage in political activity in certain circumstances, lobby the City regarding matters in which they personally participated during City service, or engage in outside employment during hours they are paid to conduct City business. City officials are employees who, under state law, must disclose personal financial interests. City officials must recuse themselves from City decisions in which they have a conflict of interests. In addition to the limitations above, City officials may not accept gifts that exceed specific cumulative dollar values from certain sources, negotiate future employment with someone who has business before them, or lobby the City for certain periods of time after leaving City service.

### Lobbying

Individuals and organizations that attempt to influence City decisions must register as lobbying entities if they meet certain qualification criteria. Lobbying entities must file quarterly disclosure reports about their City activities, including the City decisions that they have attempted to influence and their contributions to and fundraising for City candidates.

## Duties

City law establishes a number of duties for the Ethics Commission, including the following.

### Outreach

Education and compliance assistance are essential to an effective ethics program. The Ethics Commission's web site provides extensive information about the ethics laws. Training is required for City officials, lobbyists, candidates for elective office, and political treasurers. The Ethics Commission also creates educational materials and provides briefings for City agencies, departmental ethics liaisons, and lobbying entities.

### Advice

The Ethics Commission provides both informal and formal advice to help people understand and comply with the laws. Informal advice 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 facts. A person who receives formal advice and follows it is immune from Ethics Commission enforcement actions.

### Policy and Legislation

The Ethics Commission must regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the ethics laws and recommend improvements to the Mayor and the City Council. The Ethics Commission staff collect data, identify trends, and analyze issues to help the commissioners assess existing laws and policies. The commissioners may adopt policies and recommend legislation to the City Council.

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