



Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force

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TO: Members of the L.A. County Ethics Commission (Initial Appointees)
FROM: Ethics Commission Ad Hoc Subcommittee
DATE: October 9, 2026
RE: A Vision for the Commission and Guidance for Selecting the Remaining Four Commissioners

Congratulations on your appointment as one of the founding members of the Los Angeles County Ethics Commission. You are being asked to do something no one in this county's history has done before: Build, from its first principles, an institution charged with holding the largest county government in the nation to the highest standards of honesty, fairness, and accountability. We write to share the vision that guided our work under Measure G, and to offer our support as you undertake your first and most consequential task – selecting the four colleagues who will complete the Commission.

I. OUR VISION FOR THE COMMISSION

Los Angeles County voters spoke clearly when they passed Measure G on November 5, 2024: County government must be held to the highest standards of ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability. The Governance Reform Task Force (GRTF) was created under Measure G to translate that mandate into working institutions, and the Ethics Ad Hoc Subcommittee was charged with designing the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance that Sections 11.68 and 11.70 of the Charter require.

We took on this work at a moment when public confidence in government is fragile. Polling conducted by Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles found that 65% of registered County voters believe the County is headed in the wrong direction, and 71% believe the County needs major reform. That same research found 95% of voters support the creation of an independent ethics commission. Angelenos do not merely tolerate this Commission; they are counting on it.

An ethics commission is only as strong as its independence. Independence allows a commission to hold powerful officials accountable without fear of retaliation, to be trusted by the public it serves, and to outlast the political moment in which it was created.

While setting a vision, Measure G lacked sufficient protections to assure an independent commission. To remove obstacles to independence, we developed revisions to the county charter that will go before voters this fall. Independence was the organizing principle of everything we recommended: A Commission and Office structured as their own department, free of the influence by the Board of Supervisors or the County Executive; a Compliance Officer hired and removable only by the Commission itself, not by the officials the Office may need to investigate; dedicated legal counsel; and a protected, inflation-adjusted budget floor. If permitted by State law, starting in 2030 the Commission may submit directly to voters at the next general election any ordinance which the Supervisors are empowered to pass relating to campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, but not more than once per decade.

We recommended these protections be amended into the County Charter itself and not left to an ordinance any future Board could unwind. The Board adopted these protections, which will appear as Measure E on the upcoming November 2026 ballot.

But no structural safeguard matters more than who sits on the Commission. The seven of you – the three initial appointees and the four you are about to select – are this Commission’s first and most important guarantee of independence and integrity. The composition, judgment, and credibility of this founding Commission will shape how Los Angeles County residents experience ethics oversight for a generation.

II. THE VALUES BEHIND OUR SELECTION PROVISIONS

The Subcommittee spent nearly a year in conversation with ethics experts and practitioners, including commissioners and directors from the FPPC and the Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Diego ethics commissions, and in dialogue with the public, including a dedicated community forum organized with UC Berkeley’s Possibility Lab. That process shaped the values we built into the Commission’s design, and that we ask you to carry forward as you complete it:

Lived experience alongside technical expertise

- The Charter language directs that Commission-nominated members be selected for “relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial, and appreciation for the County’s diverse demographics,” and in the nomination process itself, that nominators “value lived experience, community leadership, traditional and non-traditional expertise, and working class accessibility.” A Commission built only from lawyers and auditors will not command the public’s trust the way one that also reflects the lived experience of the communities it serves can. The applicant pool includes Angelenos with a diversity of skills, talents, and

perspectives that can serve the Commission as it develops ordinances, procedures, tracking systems, education protocols, and outreach to serve the public and those it regulates.

Diversity of the County

- Los Angeles County is vast and varied. We wrote diversity into the process and recruited the applicant pool for all seven commissioners through targeted outreach within communities historically underrepresented in the County's political process. At least one of your four selections must be a resident of an unincorporated area. We designed the four Commission-selected seats, modeled on the public-application approach used successfully in Oakland and in redistricting commissions here and elsewhere, specifically so the Commission could reach further into the county than a slate of elected-official appointees alone would.

Independence and impartiality as a quasi-judicial body

- Because the Commission will adjudicate allegations against sitting officials functioning, in effect, like a jury, we built in eligibility restrictions excluding, among others, recent County elected officials and their immediate family, campaign staff, registered lobbyists, and major donors from the two years preceding appointment, along with during- and post-service restrictions on political activity. We ask that these disqualifying criteria guide your review of every candidate, not merely the minimum bar for eligibility.

Protection from concentrated influence

- No single elected official appoints more than one member of this Commission, and a majority of the seven seats are filled by the Commission's own public process rather than by elected officials at all. As you select your four colleagues, you are exercising exactly the independent judgment this structure was built to protect – Free of influence from any County elected official, who may comment on candidates only in a public Commission meeting, never in private.

Trust built through transparency

- We recommended that your selection process itself be conducted at public meetings, consistent with the Ralph M. Brown Act, so the community that will be served by this Commission can see how it was built.

III. SELECTING THE REMAINING FOUR COMMISSIONERS

As you know, the Task Force conducted a public recruitment and application process and, together with the Subcommittee, reviewed a pool of 376 candidates who applied to serve. That pool represents an extraordinary cross-section of County residents who stepped forward because they believe in this work. It is now yours to draw from in selecting the four Commission-nominated members, including the one seat that must be filled by a resident of an unincorporated area.

In practical terms, we would encourage you to:

- Apply the same eligibility and disqualification criteria that govern the Commission-nominated seats to every candidate under consideration, and document that review.
- Weigh lived experience, community leadership, and non-traditional expertise as seriously as formal credentials in law, accounting, or compliance as the Commission needs both.
- Confirm that your final four, together with the three of you, reflect the geographic, demographic, and experiential diversity of the County as a whole, including its unincorporated areas.
- Conduct your deliberations and selection at a noticed, public Commission meeting, consistent with the Brown Act and with the transparency this process was designed to model from its first day.
- Reach out to members of the Task Force or Subcommittee at any point – we are glad to share what we heard from the 376 applicants, from our expert consultants, and from the community, as it may be useful to your deliberations.

IV. IN CLOSING

This Commission is, in the truest sense, a founding institution. What you build in these first months through who you select, how you select them, and the culture you establish will determine whether Los Angeles County finally has the independent ethics watchdog its voters demanded, or merely the appearance of one. We are confident it will be the former, because of the seriousness with which the three of you have already approached this responsibility.

On behalf of the Governance Reform Task Force and the Ethics Ad Hoc Subcommittee, thank you for your service. The County is placing its trust in you. We look forward to seeing this Commission take its full shape.

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Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Sadhwani', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sara Sadhwani, Chair

Ethics Commission Ad Hoc Subcommittee

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