



Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force

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March 25, 2026

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell
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FROM: Los Angeles County Governance Reform Task Force

SUBJECT: GOVERNANCE REFORM TASK FORCE PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT ETHICS COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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), created under Measure G, is charged with developing recommendations for the implementation of the measure, conducting robust community and stakeholder engagement, and advising the Board on matters related to the governance transition.

A central mandate of Measure G is the creation of an **“independent Ethics Commission”** and **“Office of Ethics Compliance”** by 2026. While Sections 11.68 and 11.70 of the charter amendment establish the broad duties of these entities, the specification of their structures was not codified in the charter language. The GRTF established an Ethics Ad Hoc Subcommittee to review the best practices of ethics commissions and to devise a set of recommendations to craft an Ethics Commission (Commission) and Office of Ethics Compliance (Office) that will fit within the unique dynamics of Los Angeles County. The Subcommittee included Task Force members John Fasana, Gabriela Gironas, David Green, Julia Mockeridge, Sara Sadhwani (chair), and Rosa Soto (co-chair).

The Subcommittee conducted a series of conversations with ethics experts as well as reviewing reports on best practices and conducting benchmark analyses that examined other commissions throughout the state of California. Through the Consulting and Professional Services Master Agreement (CAPSMA) process, the Subcommittee contracted Nicolas Heidorn, a professor at the McGeorge School of Law and former executive director of the Oakland Ethics Commission, to assist us with this work.¹ On February 11, the Subcommittee presented its original proposal to the full GRTF and public; the GRTF subsequently held several meetings to solicit expert and public feedback on the proposal, including a dedicated community forum on the proposal organized with the assistance of UC Berkeley’s Possibility Labs.

Through a review of ethics best practices and in consideration of community feedback, the GRTF is recommending the establishment of an Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance as an independent department within the County, which should operate free of direct control by the County Executive or Board. Independence is critical for ethics commissions, which must operate outside the traditional departmental hierarchy to ensure that powerful elected and senior officials comply with ethics laws. Independence, as mandated under Measure G, protects commissions from manipulation or retaliation, ensures due process for respondents, and promotes public trust. Core attributes of this independence include provisions governing the autonomy of the commissioners, the staff, the legal counsel and representation, and the budget.

To ensure commissioners can fairly and impartially enforce the County’s ethics laws, the GRTF recommends that commissioners be selected through a diverse appointment process to avoid the Commission being dependent on any single branch of government or elected official. To provide greater independence, as well as to foster a more diverse and community-responsive commission, the GRTF recommends following the practices of some California ethics commissions that also appoint a subset of commissioners using a public application process, similar to the process used for establishing the GRTF and the Los Angeles County Independent Redistricting Commission. Best practices also include establishing commissioner eligibility criteria to minimize bias and robust during and post-service restrictions on current and former commissioners to avoid the risk or appearance of bias in the commissioners’ work. For staff, the Ethics Compliance Officer should serve as the executive director of the Office of Ethics Compliance and should be appointed and removable at will by the Commission – not by the elected officials whom the Officer may be required to investigate for violations of ethics laws. For similar reasons, the Compliance Officer must have authority to hire all staff and act on behalf of the Commission between meetings. Adequate, insulated funding of an independent ethics commission is essential as well, to protect the Commission’s work from political interference or retaliation.

¹ The Consulting and Professional Services Master Agreement (CAPSMA) process is a streamlined solicitation method that establishes a group of pre-approved contractors who can be hired for future work as it becomes available.

To reflect these broader principles, the GRTF has prepared draft language for a “gold standard” independent ethics commission for Los Angeles County, which is included in full as Appendix 1: “Draft Charter Amendment Language.” In Appendix 2, we also attach a detailed summary of the proposal and further discuss some of the major elements of the proposal in the body of this memo below. From the community outreach we have conducted, we believe this is the kind of ethics commission Los Angeles County voters wanted when they approved Measure G. In a [recent survey](#) by Loyola Marymount University’s Center for the Study of Los Angeles, they found that 95% of registered voters strongly or somewhat approved of the creation of an independent ethics commission for the county.

Originally, the Subcommittee had drafted a proposed ordinance accomplishing many of these reforms. However, there are substantial concerns that the County’s current charter language may not accommodate an independent ethics commission in several respects. Although Measure G directs the creation of an independent ethics commission for Los Angeles County in 2026, the present environment suggests that legal, political, and bureaucratic constraints will impede full independence. Moreover, any reforms created by the Board through ordinance can be undone by a later Board through ordinance; this means that the Commission would always be subject to undermining or retaliation, which can chill the effectiveness of the Commission as an anti-corruption watchdog agency.

For these reasons, the GRTF recommends as a **temporary** measure that the Board adopt an ordinance establishing an Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance, incorporating as many best practices with respect to Commission independence as feasible under the current Charter, to ensure that these bodies may be established in 2026, as required by Measure G. However, for the **permanent** establishment of the Ethics Commission and Office, the GRTF strongly recommends that the Board place a measure on a November 2026 ballot which would establish a fully independent Commission consistent with best practices in this field. **This dual approach includes a phased roll-out of the Commission and Office via supervisorial ordinance as a stepping-stone toward more comprehensive charter reform to be approved by voters, thereby codifying the gold standard.**

To that end, the GRTF recommends that the County take the actions identified below.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT ETHICS COMMISSION

- 1. PLACE A CHARTER AMENDMENT ON THE NOVEMBER 2026 BALLOT TO ESTABLISH THE INDEPENDENT ETHICS COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE.**

The GRTF recommends that the Board direct County Counsel in collaboration with the Executive Office to prepare and place on the November 2026 ballot the attached proposed charter amendment (Appendix 1) to establish, and permanently protect the independence of, the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance. The GRTF recommends that draft charter amendment language be brought back to the Board within 60 days, with an opportunity for the GRTF and public to comment on the final draft before it is presented to the Board.

2. PREPARE ORDINANCE LANGUAGE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INITIAL ETHICS COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE UNTIL A CHARTER AMENDMENT CAN BE ADOPTED.

The GRTF recommends that an ordinance be prepared establishing an Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance that is consistent with the best practices recommendations included in the GRTF's proposed charter language to the greatest extent possible, while remaining in compliance with the County Charter as currently written. The GRTF has included policy recommendations for how this may be done, below. While it may be administratively simpler to establish such a Commission within the typical structure of the county, the GRTF strongly encourages that this Commission and Office be established from its inception as an independent department, separate from the county structure as much as possible, similar to the county's Independent Redistricting Commission. The GRTF recommends that the draft ordinance language be brought back to the Board within 45 days.

3. ALLOCATE A YEAR 1 BUDGET TO ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT ETHICS COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE IN FY2026-27 AND PREPARE FOR A YEAR 2 FULL BUDGET IN FY 2027-28.

A more complete recommended budget for the Fiscal Year 2026-27 will be presented to the Board of Supervisors in April. The GRTF recommends that a phased-in budget be provided for the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance in this budget. The FY 2026-27 budget should be sufficient to support the hiring of an interim Compliance Officer, one or more consultants to assist in recruiting commission applicants and staff and setting up the Office, up to 26 Office staff members by the end of FY26-27 (half of the recommended number of staff for the Office once fully-staffed), and outside legal counsel. Consistent with best practices, such as the City of Los Angeles's Ethics Commission, the GRTF recommends that the Commission and Office be provided with a set budget amount and be given the discretion within that amount to make expenditures, such as which staff positions to hire, that best serve the needs of the Commission. We recommend that this budget should be a minimum of \$6.5 million dollars in FY2026-27, which is a little less than half of the full \$14.3 million budget that will be necessary to operate the Commission once fully staffed. Once fully established, the

GRTF recommends that the Commission and Office be given a baseline operational budget beginning in FY2027-28, to be adjusted in future years based on the greater of the percent increase in inflation or percent increase in per capita income over the prior year.

County Counsel and the Chief Executive Office (CEO) previously estimated that an Office of Ethics Compliance would require 73 to 93 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions at a cost of \$17 to \$22 million. To align with best practices and projected workload, the Task Force recommends a minimum of 54 FTE positions. The estimated cost for the new Office is approximately \$13.8 million; however, these figures may scale as operational requirements evolve. In addition to these baseline costs, the Task Force recommends that the Office receive a minimum of \$500,000 in additional ongoing funding to procure contracted services, along with one-time startup appropriations in FY 2026–27 and FY 2027–28.

4. DIRECT COUNTY DEPARTMENTS TO TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS TO ESTABLISH THE ETHICS COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE AS AN INDEPENDENT DEPARTMENT BY DECEMBER 31, 2026.

The GRTF recommends the Board direct the Chief Executive Office, Department of Human Resources, County Counsel, the Executive Office and any other appropriate county departments to take all necessary steps to establish the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance as an independent department by the end of 2026, in compliance with Measure G. This may include, for example, standing up the Office of Ethics Compliance, moving existing staff performing relevant ethics functions into the new Office, assisting in hiring new staff, locating office space, and setting up IT systems. The GRTF recommends that monthly updates be provided to the Board on the status of setting up the Commission and Office.

5. HIRE ONE OR MORE CONSULTANTS TO ASSIST WITH ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION AND OFFICE

To ensure compliance with Measure G, the GRTF recommends that the County immediately begin the process of hiring one or more consultants with substantial experience in government ethics or the administrative processes of the County to assist in establishing the Commission and Office. The GRTF recommends that the Executive Office lead this effort using the CAPSMA process which was used to hire the GRTF’s consultant as an expedient way of bringing on this consultant. Once the Interim Compliance Officer or permanent Compliance Officer is hired, the consultant(s) should report to that Officer, using funds appropriated for the Commission and Office.

6. RECRUIT AND SELECT AN INTERIM COMPLIANCE OFFICER

Prior to the establishment of the Commission, which may take several months, the GRTF recommends that the County immediately begin the process of recruiting and selecting an interim Compliance Officer, so this person can guide the process of setting up this new department, hiring key staff and consultants, and establishing necessary Commission policies and procedures. This person should serve as interim Compliance Officer until the Commission is established and selects its own Compliance Officer, or, if the Charter prohibits this, until the Commission recommends to the Board who it believes should be selected as the permanent Compliance Officer.

7. BEGIN RECRUITING APPLICANTS TO SERVE ON THE COMMISSION

To ensure compliance with Measure G, the GRTF recommends that the Executive Office (or other appropriate County agency with experience doing robust public recruitment, for example the Registrar-Recorder) prepare a public recruitment and application process for initial members of the Commission, which should begin shortly after the adoption of an ordinance establishing the Commission and Office. The recruitment process should include outreach to diverse communities and unincorporated areas and include an accessible online application. The success of this recruitment will be important for quickly standing up a qualified and diverse board. If the ordinance is approved as recommended, the GRTF would nominate an initial member to serve on the Commission from the qualified applicants from this application process. Other nominators could nominate someone from this pool as well.

8. SEEK AN AMENDMENT TO CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 3203.

As discussed further below, because ethics commissions adjudicate campaign finance violations, every major local ethics commission in the state includes prohibitions on commissioners engaging in political activity (like running for office or endorsing candidates subject to commission enforcement) while serving on the commission. This best practice is included in the GRTF's charter amendment recommendation to ensure that Commissioners can be, and are perceived to be, fair and impartial in performing this quasi-judicial role. However, Government Code Section 3203, which generally prohibits local governments from restricting the political activities of local officials and employees, may be in tension with this requirement. Rather than remove this necessary and standard protection, the GRTF recommends that the County, working with partners in the State Legislature, seek a narrow exemption to Section 3203 as to officers and employees of local ethics commissions.

The GRTF believes that the adoption of these recommendations will create the strong, independent Ethics Commission the voters of Los Angeles County deserve and asked for in enacting Measure G.

C. INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR REFORM

Trust in government and the legitimacy of democratic governance are closely linked to ethical conduct and transparent institutions. Foundational research in political science and public administration identifies ethics as a cornerstone of democracy, underpinning accountability, enhancing public legitimacy, and supporting informed civic participation. Recent polling consistently shows that public trust in government remains fragile, with notably lower trust at the federal level. Loyola Marymount University's Center for the Study of Los Angeles conducted a [survey](#) and found 65% of registered Los Angeles voters believe the county is headed in the wrong direction and 71% believe the county is in need of major reform to improve how it functions, even if that reform brings uncertainty or disruption. This dynamic presents both a challenge and an opportunity for local government. By strengthening ethics oversight at the county level, Los Angeles County can bolster legitimacy, improve governance, and foster greater public engagement.

The Governance Reform Task Force (GRTF) believes that a truly independent ethics commission is the kind of transformative reform that Los Angeles County voters intended when passing Measure G and is the core purpose of Sections 11.68 and 11.70 of the Measure G Charter Amendment. Approved by voters on November 5, 2024, Measure G requires significant changes to the County's governance structure, including the establishment of the GRTF. Following certification of the measure, the Board of Supervisors directed the Executive Office (EO), in consultation with County Counsel, to convene the GRTF to research and analyze the County's governance structure, engage the public, and develop recommendations for a reorganization consistent with the Charter amendment.

The 13-member GRTF comprised of five Board appointees, three labor appointees, and five at-large members selected by the Board appointees convened on May 30, 2025, within the required timeframe established in the amendment and will disband upon completion of implementation no later than December 3, 2028, unless otherwise directed by the Board. All implementation efforts must rely on existing County funding and generate no additional taxpayer costs. The GRTF strives for consensus and identifies any non-consensus items in its recommendations.

A key component of Measure G's mandate is the establishment of an independent ethics commission for Los Angeles County by 2026. Running parallel to Measure G, the Board also directed county counsel to develop ordinance proposals toward the establishment of an ethics commission should Measure G not be successful on the ballot. On November 26, 2024, the Board directed the Executive Office to establish the 13-member task force and manage its day-to-day operations.

With the approval of Measure G by voters in November 2024, the GRTF became charged with developing recommendations for the formation of an independent ethics commission. To fulfill this directive, the GRTF formed an Ethics Ad Hoc Subcommittee to research the best practices of ethics commissions, to draft recommendations, and facilitate discussion within the GRTF.

D. BACKGROUND & APPROACH

Our approach to informing the design of an independent ethics commission combined expert outreach, benchmarking, public engagement, and internal stakeholder analysis. Central to this effort was engagement with leading practitioners and scholars whose work underpins both the normative case for independent ethics oversight and its practical implementation. The expert roster included:

- Bob Stern, Commissioner on the LA City Ethics Commission and author of California's Political Reform Act;
- Galena West, Executive Director for the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC);
- Abby Wood, USC Law School professor specializing in campaign finance reform and former FPPC Commissioner;
- Kathay Feng, Senior Deputy for the LA County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk and former Executive Director of California Common Cause;
- Nicolas Heidorn, law professor at McGeorge School of Law and former Executive Director of the Oakland Public Ethics Commission;
- David Tristan, Los Angeles City Ethics Commission Executive Director;
- Kellie Johnson, Assistant Executive Officer with the Board of Supervisors Executive Office and former executive director and enforcement chief of the Oakland Public Ethics Commission;
- Don Garcia, Division Chief for conflicts and lobbyists in the Executive Office;
- Robert Campbell, Assistant Auditor-Controller for the Office of County Investigation;
- Sean McMorris, Transparency, Ethics, and Accountability Program Manager, Common Cause; and
- Stephen Kaufman, Founder and Principal of Kaufman Legal Group, a recognized authority on campaign finance and election law.

In addition to reviewing and incorporating elements of County Counsel's Oct. 24, 2024, "Moving Forward on Ethics Reform in Los Angeles County" ethics report, we studied best-practice reports produced by Sean McMorris of Common Cause and white papers authored by graduate students in the Cal State Northridge governance reform curriculum led by veteran governance reform expert Eric Schockman.

A pivotal outcome of this phase was the engagement of Nicolas Heidorn as our lead consultant and subject-matter expert. Heidorn conducted benchmarking across California jurisdictions, focusing on institutional structure, budget, appointment processes, and staffing of ethics commissions. The comparative scope included major California cities and agencies such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and San Diego, enabling a rigorous assessment of independence protections, operational practices, and governance efficacy. Concurrently, Kellie Johnson, Assistant Executive Officer and former Oakland Ethics Commission executive director (and former LA Metro Ethics Director), provided an internal

countywide survey to map existing ethics-related activity and identify gaps in current practice.

We released our first rough draft of the charter language (initially proposed as a *draft ordinance*) on February 11, 2026, to ensure ample time for public and legal review and engagement of the full GRTF. We discussed the language and its provisions in public meetings of the GRTF on February 11, February 25, and March 11, March 25, and during a dedicated public engagement meeting held by the GRTF’s Outreach Ad Hoc Subcommittee with the assistance of UC Berkeley’s Possibility Lab on March 7. About 25 individuals participated in the community listening session and GRTF members heard broad consensus that the Commission must have a protected, independent budget, ideally immune from political interference or cuts to maintain accountability and effectiveness.²

The draft received written comments from leading organizations including California Common Cause, League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County, Campaign Legal Center, and the OurLA Coalition. At our meeting on February 25, 2026, we invited expert review of the draft from Sean McMorris, Transparency, Ethics, and Accountability Program Manager with California Common Cause and Margo Reeg, President of the League of Women Voters of Los Angeles County. All of the testimony received was supportive of our draft and offered additional changes and enhancements which the Subcommittee reviewed in detail.

The GRTF wishes to express its appreciation to the Board of Supervisors for establishing and supporting the GRTF’s process; to the Executive Office staff including its GRTF Team, and consultants for their research and administrative support; and to the numerous stakeholders and members of the public who provided input into the GRTF’s process to strengthen these recommendations.

This research yielded a set of thematic conclusions about what it will take for Los Angeles County to enact a truly independent ethics commission. The report synthesizes these findings, maps them to the current charter language proposal, and outlines options that the subcommittee has considered. It also presents recommended charter amendment language given the current restrictions within the County Charter.

E. CORE ETHICS COMMISSION PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The full text of the GRTF’s proposed charter amendment is included in Appendix 1 and a summary of this proposal is attached in Appendix 2. Below, we discuss some of the major elements of this proposal.

² “Community Engagement Report on Ethics Commission Recommendations,” UC Berkeley Possibility Lab. March 2026. Available at: <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/3853bb46-e6a1-4b4d-bd38-2e927312dbd9/Possibility%20Lab%20Community%20Engagement%20Report%20-%20Feedback%20on%20Ethics%20Commission%20Recommendations.pdf#page=4.63>

1. Need for Charter Amendment

GRTF Recommendation: The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance should be permanently established in the County Charter to ensure its independence.

Measure G directs that, by 2026, “there shall be an independent Los Angeles County Ethics Commission ... [that] shall ... investigate allegations of misconduct by County officials [and] monitor and enforce laws in coordination with other agencies related to governmental ethics” (Los Angeles County Charter, Sec. 11.68). While Measure G establishes a clear mandate for an “independent” ethics body, the current Charter does not provide all of the structural tools necessary to ensure true independence and effective operation. For example, beginning in 2029, the Charter authorizes the elected County Executive to supervise, direct, and manage County departments (Sec. 11.10) and to hire and fire department heads (Secs. 11.18 and 11.20). If applied to the Office of Ethics Compliance, these provisions could compromise the Commission’s ability to investigate alleged ethical violations by the Executive and undermine public confidence in its ability to serve as an effective and impartial watchdog.

Even apart from the limitations in the current Charter, permanently establishing the Commission in the Charter – as opposed to an ordinance – would provide critical additional protections to ensure its independence and effectiveness. Unlike County charter provisions, ordinances can be amended or repealed at any time by the Board of Supervisors. If the Commission and Office are created only by ordinance, those laws could be changed to defund or substantially weaken the body. This creates a clear risk of political pressure or retaliation, particularly because the Commission is charged with overseeing and, when necessary, investigating the same County elected officials who would have the authority to alter its structure or funding³.

Without embedding protections for the Commission’s independence into the Charter, the Commission’s capacity to enforce ethics laws, withstand political pressure, and operate with credibility will be constrained. This approach would also align Los Angeles County with best practices across California. Every major local ethics commission – including those in the cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and Oakland – is established in charter to ensure independence, stability, and public trust.

2. Overall Structure and Responsibilities

GRTF Recommendation: The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance should be established as an independent department within the County, with the Commission providing overall oversight for the department and adjudicating

³ See, e.g., Barba, Michael, “[‘Completely inappropriate’: S.F. weighs proposal to weaken shield for ethics watchdogs.](#)” *San Francisco Chronicle*. October 30, 2025.

violations of the laws the Commission enforces, and with the Office carrying out the department’s day-to-day education, regulatory, and enforcement work.

The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance should be established as an independent department within County government to ensure that ethics enforcement is insulated from political influence and able to operate with credibility and professionalism. In this structure, which is modelled off of Options 1 and 3 from County Counsel’s recommended structure⁴, the Commission serves as the governing and oversight body: it sets overall policy for the Office, adopts regulations to implement the laws within its jurisdiction (i.e., relating to campaign finance, government ethics, lobbying, and conflict of interest), recommends policy changes to the Board to strengthen the County’s ethics framework, and adjudicates allegations of violations. In enforcement matters, the Commission functions as a neutral decisionmaker – similar to a jury – and has the power to impose administrative fines for violations.

In turn, the Office of Ethics Compliance, led by the Compliance Officer, serves as the professional staff arm that carries out the day-to-day work in support of the Commission. This includes receiving and publishing required lobbying and ethics disclosure filings; creating and administering disclosure data portals; providing training and guidance to candidates, lobbyists, elected officials, and employees; and conducting investigations into potential violations. The Office presents its findings to the Commission for adjudication, maintaining a clear separation between investigative and decision-making functions. Establishing both the Commission and the Office as a single independent department ensures that ethics administration is centralized, accountable, and protected from interference, while allowing each component to fulfill its distinct role effectively.

3. Ethics Commission Structure

GRTF Recommendation: The Ethics Commission should consist of seven members to promote independence, impartiality, and diversity. Three members would be appointed by the elected County Executive, Assessor, and Board Chair, while four would be selected by the Commission through a public application process with outreach to underrepresented communities. Commissioners would be subject to Board confirmation, meet eligibility requirements, comply with during- and post-service restrictions, and serve staggered, nonrenewable five-year terms to support independence and continuity.

An ethics commission is a public agency responsible for overseeing compliance with and enforcement of government ethics laws to promote integrity, transparency, and public

⁴ “Moving Forward on Ethics Reform in Los Angeles County.” County Counsel Report back on 9/24/24 Board Agenda Item No. 28. October 24, 2024. Available at: <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/c85c1eaa-a9bd-4e89-b57a-ca992991cb29/CoCo%20Ethics%20Reform%20Report.pdf>

trust. Such commissions are common in large jurisdictions, including Los Angeles, San Diego, New York, and Chicago, and play a critical watchdog role by ensuring that elected and senior officials comply with campaign finance, lobbying, and conflict-of-interest laws. Because these bodies may investigate and enforce the law against powerful officials, independence is essential to protect against political influence or retaliation, safeguard due process, and maintain public confidence.

This section outlines the framework for establishing the Los Angeles County Ethics Commission based on best practices and a review of peer jurisdictions. It addresses key structural considerations, including the number of Commissioners, Commissioner appointment and selection processes, qualifications and disqualifications, term lengths, and during and post-service restrictions.

Number of Commissioners

The vast majority of ethics commissions have between 5 and 7 members (see chart below). No major California local commission has an even number of members because of the risk of tie votes deadlocking the Commission (this occurs frequently with the 6-member federal FEC, which is widely viewed as ineffective).

Given the vast scale of Los Angeles County, the GRTF recommends a larger Commission to enhance diversity, minimize vacancies that could impede operations, and enable the formation of ad hoc committees to address early startup tasks. These committees would support essential activities such as adopting complaint procedures and establishing revolving-door restrictions in advance of July 2027. While the option of a larger body was considered, the task force ultimately settled on a seven-member Commission to facilitate thorough deliberation while reducing the risk of deadlock and avoiding undue burdens on the Commission's workload.

Commissioner Appointment

There are a range of methods for selecting ethics commissioners, but best practices aim to avoid concentration of appointment power and promote independence. Most California jurisdictions divide appointments among multiple elected officials, and some include legislative approval or veto. Others – such as Oakland and Long Beach – enhance independence by selecting some or a majority of commissioners through a public application process, with final selection made by the commission itself. Experts told the Subcommittee that this model had worked well in Oakland and helped to engage the community. This model is also widely used in redistricting to promote independence, including for California's State Redistricting Commission and local commissions in Los Angeles and San Diego Counties. Consistent with these best practices and community feedback, the GRTF recommends a hybrid model in which no single official appoints more than one member and a majority of commissioners are selected through a Commission-led public process.

Method of Appointing Commissioners

Jurisdiction	Members	Appointers
FPPC	5	Governor (2), Attorney General (1), Secretary of State (1), Controller (1)
Los Angeles	5	Mayor (1), City Attorney (1), Controller (1), Council President (1), Council President Pro Tem (1); <i>also requires Council confirmation</i>
San Francisco	5	Mayor (1), Board (1), City Attorney (1), District Attorney (1), Assessor (1)
Oakland	7	Mayor (1), City Attorney (1), Auditor (1), <i>with possible Council veto</i> ; Commission (4)
San Diego	7	City Attorney and Council nominate; Mayor appoints (7) <i>with Council confirmation</i>
GRTF Proposal	7	County Executive* (1), Board Chair (1), Assessor (1); Commission (4); <i>also requires Board confirmation</i> *GRTF until Executive is elected

Deciding on the proper authority to nominate commissioners was perhaps the single most contentious issue that the Subcommittee and GRTF took on. There was a split between GRTF members who believed all countywide elected officials should have nominating power. This would include the future Elected County Executive, County Assessor, Sheriff, and District Attorney, with three at large community members nominated by the Commission. However, some felt that all seven appointments should be at large community members, which reflected some community feedback, including written testimony from the OurLA Coalition. The recommendation we put forward reflects a compromise of the Task Force members: three members would be nominated by County elected officials (the County Executive, Board Chair, and Assessor) with the remainder selected by the Commission. For the initial Commission, the GRTF would temporarily fill the Executive’s role until that office is elected in 2029.

To promote transparency and public engagement, appointments would be finalized by the Board of Supervisors at a public meeting, but to avoid prolonged vacancies, the Board must act within 45 days, or the nominee is deemed appointed. The GRTF also recommends that the Commissioner selection process include a robust recruitment and public application process to ensure a diverse and qualified Commission. The draft language provides that Commissioners should be nominated and appointed based on their “relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial, and appreciation for the County’s diverse demographics.” In addition, the proposal requires that at least one member of the Commission be from an unincorporated area.

Commissioner Eligibility Criteria

Ethics commissions adjudicate allegations that candidates, elected officials, or senior government officials have violated campaign finance or ethics laws. Because they operate in a quasi-judicial role, similar to a judge or jury, it is essential that commissioners are fair and impartial. For this reason, most jurisdictions establish appointment criteria, including baseline qualifications such as residency or voter status, as well as disqualifying criteria designed to prevent real or perceived bias at the time of appointment.

In particular, many jurisdictions prohibit appointing individuals who have recently engaged in political or advocacy activities that could compromise their impartiality. For example, in San Diego, a commissioner may not have run for office against a current elected official; in Los Angeles, a commissioner may not have been a major donor or campaign consultant within the 12 months preceding appointment; and in Oakland, a commissioner may not, within the prior two years, have been an elected official (or their relative), a candidate for office, staff to an elected official, a registered lobbyist, or a political party officer. Even stricter requirements are typical in the local redistricting context, including the Los Angeles County Redistricting Commission, which prohibits a person from serving on the commission if they or have been a candidate, staff or consultant to an elected official, or a registered lobbyist, in the prior 10 years.

Expert and public feedback reinforced the importance of having disqualifying criteria to promote public confidence. On the other hand, overly strict rules can limit the pool of qualified applicants. The GRTF therefore recommends a balanced set of eligibility and disqualification standards that would require a person be a resident of the County to serve on the Commission and prohibit appointment of any person who, within the prior two years:

- Has held County elected office, or whose immediate family member has done so;
- Was a candidate for County elected office;
- Worked for a County elected official or their campaign;
- Was a registered County lobbyist;
- Was a major campaign donor (\$10,000+) or contributed more than \$1,000 to a candidate for County elected office; or
- Served as an officer or employee of a political party.

During & Post-Service Restrictions

Most Commissions prohibit commissioners from engaging in activity they as commissioners regulate to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest or potentially undermine the public's perception of the independence or impartiality of the commission. Common during-service prohibitions include running for office, contributing to campaigns, registering as a lobbyist, or receiving gifts from regulated parties. Most commissions also have some post-service restrictions, especially prohibiting commissioners from running for office for at least a year, to avoid the risk or appearance that a commissioner may adjudicate the case of a political ally/rival. Oakland and Sacramento also include restrictions on lobbying and receiving contracts for one year after their service.

During & Post-Service Restrictions

Jurisdiction	During & Post-Service Restrictions
FPPC	<i>Cannot, during their term:</i> hold or seek election to public office; serve as an officer of any political party or partisan organization; participate in or contribute to an election campaign; employ or be employed as a lobbyist; receive a gift over \$10/month
Los Angeles	<i>Cannot, during their term:</i> hold public office; participate or contribute to a City or School Board campaign; participate or contribute to a councilmember or school board member running for another office; employ or be employed as a lobbyist <i>Cannot, during and for 2 years after their term:</i> run for City or School Board office
San Francisco	<i>Cannot, during their term:</i> hold any other City or County office or be an officer of a political party; be a registered lobbyist, campaign consultant, or be employed by or receive gifts/compensation from same; hold employment with the City; participate in any campaign supporting or opposing a candidate for City elective office, a City ballot measure, or a City officer running for any elective office
Oakland	<i>Cannot, during their term:</i> seek election to public office in a jurisdiction intersecting with Oakland; be employed, have a contract with, or receive gifts from City elected officials; participate or contribute in an Oakland campaign; endorse or work on behalf of candidate/measure in Oakland election; serve as a political party officer or employee <i>Cannot, during and for 1 year after their term:</i> be employed or contract with the City; be a registered lobbyist or employed by/receive gifts from a registered lobbyists
San Diego	<i>Cannot, during their term:</i> contribute or support/oppose a city candidate; participate in a campaign supporting or opposing a City ballot measure; be a lobbyist <i>Cannot, during and for 1 year after their term:</i> become a candidate for elective office
Sacramento	<i>Cannot, during and for 1 year after their term:</i> be appointed to another City Commission; be paid staff/consultant to City elected official; receive a no bid City contract; register as a city lobbyist <i>Cannot, during and for 4 years after their term:</i> hold City elected office

To align with these best practices and reinforce the Commission’s quasi-judicial role, the GRTF recommends adopting clear during- and post-service restrictions for Commissioners and the Ethics Compliance Officer to prevent conflicts and maintain public trust.

Specifically, the GRTF recommends that Commissioners and the Ethics Compliance Officer be prohibited from:

- Running for any elected office in LA County during their tenure and for any LA County elected office during their tenure and for 2 years afterward.
- Supporting or opposing candidates or ballot measures in County elections during their tenure.
- Serving as a political party officer or employee during their tenure.
- Working as County lobbyists during their tenure or for 1 year afterward.
- Working for County elected officials or receiving gifts or compensation from them during their tenure and for 1 year afterward.
- Receiving no-bid County contracts during their tenure and for 1 year afterward.

Although limiting commissioners’ political activities is a widely adopted best practice for California ethics commissions that enforce campaign finance laws and operate in a quasi-judicial role, it may be in tension with California Government Code Section 3203, which generally restricts local governments from limiting the political activities of officers and employees. The GRTF nevertheless recommends retaining these restrictions and further recommends that the County, in coordination with the State Legislature, seek a narrow exemption to Section 3203 to clarify that such limits are permissible for local ethics commissions given their adjudicatory function.

Terms, Vacancies, and Removal

Most ethics commissions set commissioner terms between three and six years. Shorter terms (three to four years) are often paired with the option to serve two terms, while longer terms typically limit commissioners to a single term. Longer, nonrenewable terms can strengthen independence by reducing reliance on appointing authorities and allowing commissioners to build expertise over time. At the same time, overly long terms may allow ineffective members to remain in place and can deter qualified applicants from committing. Balancing these considerations, the GRTF recommends a single, nonrenewable five-year term, which provides continuity and independence while preserving regular opportunities for new appointments.

Term Length (Max # of Terms)

FPPC: 4 years (1x)	San Diego: 4 years (2x)	Oakland: 3 years (2x)
Los Angeles: 5 years (1x)	San Francisco: 6 years (1x)	Orange: 3 years (2x)
New York: 5 years (2x)	Chicago: 4 years	Proposal: 5 years (1x)

Maintaining a quorum is critical to the Commission’s ability to function, yet delays in filling vacancies have left some ethics commissions unable to operate for extended periods. To address this risk, the GRTF recommends allowing Commissioners to serve in a holdover capacity for up to one year after their term expires, ensuring continuity until a successor is appointed. The GRTF further recommends that nominating authorities act within 120 days to fill vacancies, after which the Commission would be authorized to nominate a replacement to prevent prolonged gaps.

At the same time, accountability mechanisms are necessary to address Commissioner nonparticipation or misconduct without undermining the Commission’s independence. The GRTF recommends automatic vacancies in cases of Commissioner resignation, death, relocation outside the County, felony conviction, or three consecutive unexcused absences. In addition, Commissioners may be removed for cause by a 5/6 vote of other Commissioners, preserving both accountability and institutional independence.

4. Office of Ethics Compliance & Ethics Compliance Officer

GRTF Recommendation: The Office of Ethics Compliance should be led by an Ethics Compliance Officer, who serves as the department's executive officer and acts on behalf of the Commission between meetings. The Compliance Officer should serve at the pleasure of the Commission and have full authority to hire, remove, manage, and oversee all staff and operations of the Office. To ensure independence, the Office should not be subject to the control of any other County department and should maintain its own in-house counsel with expertise in ethics and campaign finance law. Consistent with best practices, the Office should also have a guaranteed minimum annual budget that adjusts for inflation. Within that budget, the Office should retain full discretion over staffing and resource allocation to ensure it can effectively carry out its responsibilities free from external influence.

While the Ethics Commission is generally tasked with setting the overall policy for the Office and serving as the adjudicator (like a jury) in enforcement matters, the Office of Ethics Compliance staff does the work of the department like receiving and displaying lobbying disclosure and county ethics filings, providing education and advice to prevent violations, and conducting and presenting investigations when they occur.

This section outlines the role of the Compliance Officer, the recommended staffing structure for the Office, major duties of the Office, the Office's enforcement role and duties, and the need for the Office to have in-house legal counsel.

Compliance Officer

The Compliance Officer is the chief executive of the Office of Ethics Compliance, responsible for hiring, supervising, and directing staff. To ensure the independence of the Commission, the Commission must have the ability to hire and fire at-will the Ethics Compliance Officer. A commission cannot be independent when its executive director must ultimately report to a different master. Under the existing charter, the Board of Supervisors has the sole authority to hire and fire department heads until 2028, when that function transfers to the elected Executive. Absent a charter amendment, if these provisions were applied to the Compliance Officer, it may significantly reduce the independence, and undermine the credibility, of this Office.

It is the standard of ethics commissions up and down the state and also a core element of independence used in the state's redistricting commission. While there are many components that need to be changed within the charter to achieve an independent ethics commission this is a central one.

Executive Selection/Removal Process

Jurisdiction	Executive Director Selection	Executive Director Removal
FPPC	Commission appoints	Commission removes
Los Angeles	Commission appoints	Commission removes
San Francisco	Commission appoints	Commission removes
Oakland	Commission nominates 2-3 candidates, which the City Administrator must select from	Commission removes
San Diego	Commission appoints	Commission removes
GRTF Proposal	Commission appoints	Commission removes

Independent Staff & Structure

A professional, well-qualified staff is essential to the effectiveness and independence of an ethics commission. The Office of Ethics Compliance must be staffed with subject-matter experts capable of administering complex disclosure systems, providing guidance and training, and conducting fair, thorough investigations. Consistent with the current Charter, senior leadership positions, such as the Office’s Chief Counsel and Chief of Enforcement, should serve at the pleasure of the Ethics Compliance Officer, while the remaining staff should be part of the civil service system to promote continuity, expertise, and institutional stability. Salaries will be set using the standard County process, except for the Compliance Officer, whose salary should be set by the Commission.⁵

In determining the appropriate size and structure of the Office, the Subcommittee reviewed staffing models in peer jurisdictions, including the FPPC, the City of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and San Diego. The closest comparators are Los Angeles, with approximately 46 staff and a \$7 million charter-protected budget, and San Francisco, with a similar budget and 28 staff. (Another point of comparison was the FPPC, which has jurisdiction over the whole state, and has 110 staff.) Based on a comparison of likely workload of Los Angeles County’s Commission and Office, and a proposed organizational model developed by Assistant Executive Officer and former Oakland Ethics Commission Executive Director Kellie Johnson and consultant Nicolas Heidorn, the GRTF is recommending a staffing level of 54 full-time employees. This approach is more streamlined than the 73 to 93 positions estimated in the County’s October 2024 report (estimated at \$17 to \$22 million), while accounting for the transfer of existing functions, such as the Lobbying Registration Unit.

⁵ In other local ethics commission, including the city of Los Angeles, the ethics commission establishes the salary range for the executive director. This may be in tension with Article XI, Section 1(b) of the California Constitution, which generally provides that the local legislative body (here, the Board) sets employee compensation; however, Section 4 also provides counties with some authority to structure their governance by charter.

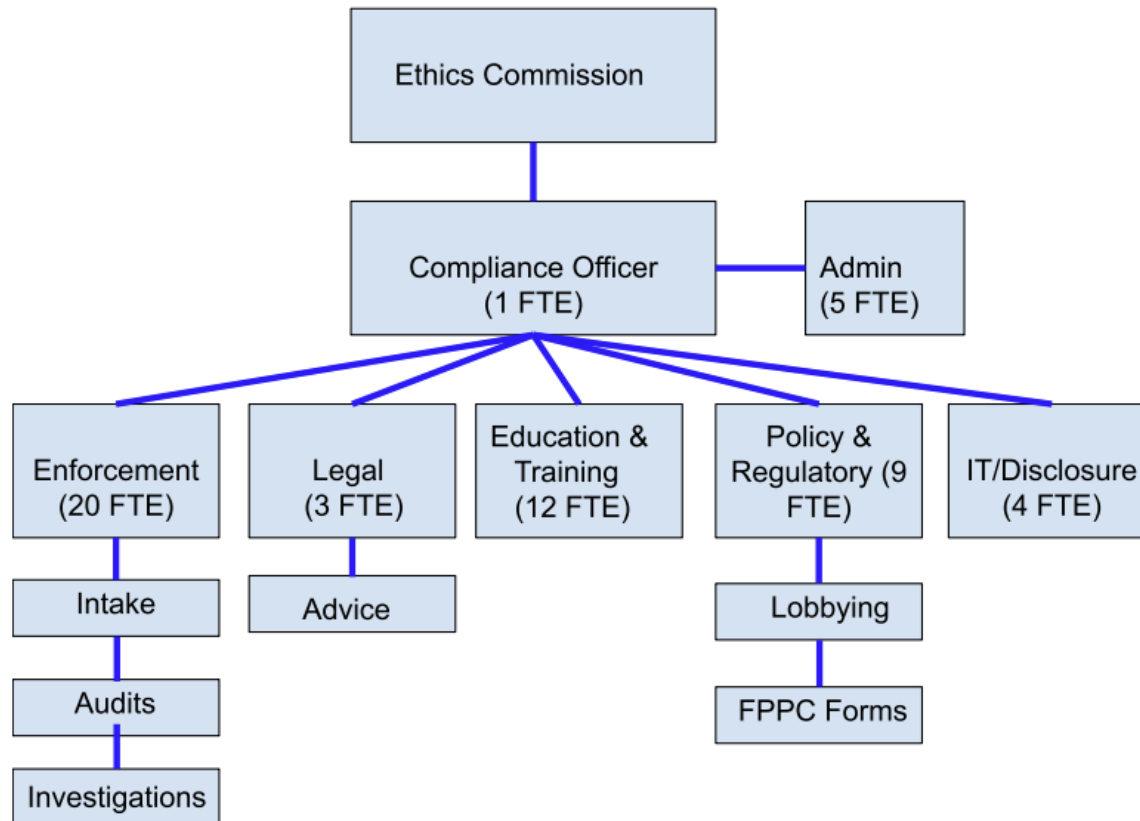
Comparison of Staff and Service Communities

	Elected Officials	Employees	Lobbyists	From 700 filers	Ethics Staffing:
San Francisco	18	34,800	212	5,955	28
LA City	18	50,300	790	10,450	46
LA County	13*	117,100	402	12,000	Proposed: 54

*after Board expansion and election of County Executive

To guide implementation and cost estimation, the GRTF recommends organizing the Office into six core divisions: Enforcement, Legal, Education and Training, Policy and Regulatory, IT/Disclosure, and Administrative. This structure reflects best practices and ensures the Office can effectively carry out its responsibilities from the outset. Within this framework, the Ethics Compliance Officer should retain full authority over staffing decisions within the Office’s budget, allowing the department to adapt over time while preserving its independence and operational effectiveness. The staffing below represents the approximate allocation of work between these divisions; the GRTF believes that the Commission should prioritize education and training to prevent violations from occurring, which is reflected in the proposed size of the educational division.

Proposed Organizational Chart



The GRTF modeled the Office's staffing needs, including specific positions, by analyzing the organizational structures of peer ethics commissions. County staff and the GRTF's consultant then reviewed and compared job duty statements from those jurisdictions to identify core functional roles and responsibilities to map those roles onto similar or comparable job classifications within Los Angeles County. The proposed staffing structure includes Chief of Enforcement (division manager), senior investigators, investigators, and auditors for the Enforcement Division; a Chief Counsel (deputy county counsel) and supporting attorneys for the Legal Division; information systems analysts for the IT/Disclosure Division; board specialists and senior typists for the Policy and Regulatory Division; staff development specialists for the Education and Training Division; and administrative services managers and analysts to form a small Administrative Division responsible for assisting with independent contracting, hiring and budget preparation. A full breakdown of each proposed position is provided in Appendix 3.

Legal Counsel

A particular staffing need is for the Ethics Commission and Office to have clear authority and dedicated resources to hire in-house attorneys and also retain independent legal counsel to assist with enforcing and providing guidance with respect to the laws under its jurisdiction. While the current Charter designates County Counsel as the legal advisor to all County bodies, this structure raises inherent conflict-of-interest concerns when the same office may be called upon to advise both the officials subject to investigation and the Commission responsible for enforcing ethics laws. Independent counsel is essential to ensure unbiased legal advice, protect due process, and reinforce public confidence in the Commission's work. In addition, the Commission's work is highly specialized, and dedicated legal experts in ethics and campaign finance laws will be necessary to ensure correct enforcement of the law and also for the Commission to properly and expeditiously advise elected officials, candidates, and County staff. Best practices support this approach. Research by the Los Angeles Governance Reform Project found that several major jurisdictions, including New York City, Philadelphia, and San Diego, authorize ethics commissions to retain counsel independent of the city attorney. Consistent with these practices, the GRTF recommends that the Commission be empowered to retain its own legal counsel.

Dedicated Budget

Budget sufficiency and independence are best practices for ethics commissions. The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance's budget should be protected to ensure it has sufficient resources to fulfill its responsibilities. Many of the challenges facing ethics bodies in other cities have been exacerbated, if not precipitated, by inadequate funding. In addition, without minimum budget protections included in a jurisdiction's charter, local ethics commissions are at-risk of being retaliated against and seeing their budgets or personnel cut for investigating powerful government elected or appointed officials.

Following best practices, and expert and community feedback which prioritized this concern, the GRTF recommends that the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance be provided with a minimum guaranteed budget to support its operations, along with discretion for how to expend those funds, for example in determining what staff positions best meets its operational needs. This recommendation is aligned with best practices found in several jurisdictions, most notably the recent adoption of a charter-guaranteed minimum budget for the City of Los Angeles's Ethics Commission with the passage of Measure ER (2024). The GRTF recommends that this minimum budget should adjust each year to account for inflation or the overall growth in employee salaries.

5. Duties and Powers

GRTF Recommendation: The Charter should clearly define the core duties and powers of the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance. These duties include providing training and education; serving as the filing officer for lobbying and government ethics filings; creating public data portals for ethics-related disclosures; issuing advice; and enforcing laws relating to campaign finance, government ethics, lobbying, and conflicts of interest. The Charter should also expressly grant key enforcement authorities, including the power to issue subpoenas, conduct administrative hearings, impose monetary penalties, and establish diversion programs for minor violations. Lastly, the Commission should play a key role in policy development to ensure ethics laws remain up-to-date.

The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance will be charged with a broad set of responsibilities that together form the foundation of an effective ethics oversight program for Los Angeles County. The Commission will develop and maintain a robust ethics education program for county officials, employees, and the public. It will investigate violations of county ethics laws and regulations and serve as the filing officer for lobbying disclosure reports and FPPC ethics forms. The Commission will also issue both informal and formal ethics advice to officials and employees navigating complex situations and provide policy advice and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on ethics-related matters.

While all of these functions are critical, this Subcommittee places particular emphasis on the Commission's education and outreach mission. Experience from ethics commissions across the country suggests that prevention through training, guidance, and a culture of awareness is more effective than punishment after the fact. An ethics commission that is well known, accessible, and trusted by the officials and employees it serves is one that can prevent violations before they occur, rather than simply responding to them. This is why the GRTF strongly urges that education and outreach be treated as a core, protected function of the Commission and not an optional program. Education is historically among the first casualties of budget cuts precisely at the moment when it may be needed most.

At the same time, the Commission must be equipped with sufficient enforcement tools to carry out its mission effectively. The proposed Charter authorizes the Commission to hold

administrative hearings, issue subpoenas, and impose fines of up to \$15,000 for serious violations, and also to resolve cases through education diversion programs for minor violations. The Charter requires the Commission to adopt Complaint Procedures and Penalty Guidelines to guide and create predictability in this work.

Finally, the Commission should also play an active policy development role to ensure that the County’s ethics laws remain effective and responsive to emerging issues. Drawing on its enforcement experience and expertise, the Commission would be empowered to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, which would be agendized within 180 days to ensure timely consideration. Beginning in 2030, the Commission would also have limited authority, by supermajority vote, to place a proposed ordinance related to the laws it enforces on the ballot, no more than once per decade. This authority reflects best practices from Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively, and helps ensure that necessary reforms can be advanced even when legislative action is delayed.

VI. INTERIM ETHICS ORDINANCE

The Los Angeles County Charter requires that an Ethics Commission and an Office of Ethics Compliance be established by 2026. While the GRTF strongly recommends that the Board pursue a permanent establishment of these entities through a Charter amendment to be placed on the November 2026 ballot, we further recommend that, in the interim, the Board establish both the Commission and the Office by ordinance to meet the deadlines in the Charter and the will of the voters.

To the maximum extent feasible, the GRTF recommends that the ordinance mirror the structure, duties, and powers set forth in its proposed Charter amendment, as discussed above. However, certain provisions of the existing Charter may limit the Board’s ability to implement all aspects of the proposal through ordinance alone. In the chart below, we identify potential conflicts with our policy recommendations and include alternatives that could be implemented by ordinance.

GRTF Charter Amendment Proposal	Potential Conflict with Current Charter Provisions or other law	Suggested Changes for an Interim Ordinance
Proposed §11.67.00(c)(2) provides that if the Board does not approve or reject a nominee to the Commission within 45 days they are automatically appointed.	§10.4 may require that appointments be by Board action, rather than inaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require that a Board vote to appoint or reject a nominee be held within 45 days.

<p>Proposed §11.67.50(b) provides that the Commission has the authority to hire and fire the Compliance Officer.</p>	<p>§10 and §10.5 may vest the appointment and removal of the Compliance Officer with the Board until Dec. 4, 2028. After that, when the elected County Executive takes office, §11.18 and §11.20 may vest appointment and removal in the County Executive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require the Ethics Commission to nominate one or more candidates for the permanent Compliance Officer for Board appointment (later for County Executive appointment). • Require a 4/5 vote of the Board to remove the Compliance Officer in open session until Dec. 4, 2028. • Require, if the County Executive removes the Compliance Officer, that an override vote be agendized before the Board within 45 days. • Permit the Ethics Commission to recommend the removal of the Compliance Officer to the Board, which shall be agendized within 45 days. <p><u>Note:</u> Similar to this proposal, the Board motion establishing the GRTF provides that GRTF members may only be removed by 4/5 vote. (See AGN No. 19, Nov. 26, 2024, §1(g).)</p>
<p>Proposed §11.67.50(b) has the Commission set the salary for the Compliance Officer.</p>	<p>§11 may require that the Board set the salary range for the Compliance Officer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omit this provision from the ordinance.
<p>Proposed §11.69.50 authorizes the Office to have in-house attorneys to advise and represent the Commission and Office and proposed §11.69.00(j) authorizes civil actions by the Commission to enforce laws within its jurisdiction.</p>	<p>§21 may provide that County Counsel is the exclusive legal representative of the Commission and Office and solely authorized to bring civil actions on its behalf.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct County Counsel to assign County Counsel to attorneys to serve as dedicated counsel to the Commission. <p><u>Note:</u> This is similar to County Counsel's recommended staffing structure in its ethics report, which included providing a legal division for the Commission.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require County Counsel to use outside counsel, selected by the Compliance Officer, in the event County Counsel has a conflict in representing the Commission or Office. • Require County Counsel to pursue civil actions at the direction of the Commission or Office to enforce laws within the Commission's jurisdiction.

Proposed §11.68.00(n) authorizes the Commission, by supermajority vote, to place measures on the ballot relating to the laws within its jurisdiction once per decade.	§11.68(A)(3) provides only that the Ethics Commission may recommend policy changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omit from ordinance.
Proposed §11.67.00(f) prohibits Commissioners and the Compliance Officer from engaging in political activity such as endorsing candidates and running for office.	May conflict with Cal. Gov. Code §3203 which provides that "no restriction shall be placed on the political activities of any officer or employee of a state or local agency."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain these best practice restrictions in the ordinance and direct the County’s legislative advocate to seek an exemption to §3203 as to any local ethics commission. <p><u>Note:</u> Every major California local ethics commission has similar provisions. See, e.g., Cal. Gov. Code 83105 (FPPC); Los Angeles City Charter §700(d); Oakland Charter §603(e); San Francisco Charter §15.100 (a) & (c); San Diego City Mun. Code §26.0406 and §26.0407; and Orange County Mun. Code §1-2-354.</p>

In addition, the GRTF is recommending that the Ethics Commission assume responsibility for enforcing “Proposition B,” the County’s campaign finance ordinance (Ch. 2.190). Amendments to Proposition B may be made by ordinance, but pursuant to Sec. 2.190.150 they must be made by a 4/5 vote and to further the ordinances purposes.

VI. COST ESTIMATE

In its 2024 Ethics Reform Report, and in response to the Board’s directive, County Counsel and the Chief Executive Office (CEO) prepared a comprehensive public analysis on the implementation of a County Ethics Commission and an Office of Ethics Compliance, including cost scenarios for various structural options. In that report, County Counsel and the CEO estimated that the Office of Ethics Compliance would require between 73 and 93 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, depending on its structure.

Using the list of proposed positions developed by County Counsel and the CEO, along with an assessment of the Office’s anticipated workload and a review of comparable local ethics commissions, we estimate that the Office will require a minimum of 54 FTE positions when fully established.

Consistent with the methodology used in the County Counsel and CEO report, overhead expenses were calculated by applying estimated Services and Supplies (S&S) costs to total

compensation.⁶ Contingent upon the proposed FTE count, the initial Ethics Office cost is estimated to be \$13,821,650; however, these figures may scale as operational requirements evolve. In addition to these baseline costs, the Task Force recommends that the Office receive a minimum of \$500,000 in additional ongoing funding to procure contracted services, along with one-time startup appropriations in FY 2026–27 and FY 2027–28.

Ethics Office Cost Estimate		
Salaries and Employee Benefits	\$	12,275,000.00
Services and Supplies⁷	\$	1,546,650.00
Net County Cost	\$	13,821,650.00
FTE		54

The Subcommittee further recommends that existing staff performing ethics-related functions that will be assumed by the new Office be transferred accordingly. Based on a review of current County personnel, the GRTF has identified nine positions (9.0 FTE) that could be reassigned. These include staff in the Executive Office responsible for administering the County’s lobbying and ethics disclosure programs, as well as staff in the Registrar-Recorder’s Office who provide oversight and support related to the County’s Proposition B campaign finance ordinance:

- **Executive Office, Conflicts/Lobbying Unit:** 1 Chief of Assessment Appeals, 1 Senior Board Specialist, and 3 Head Board Specialists
- **Registrar-Recorder, Policy and Programs Compliance Division:** 1 Elections Program Coordinator and 3 Senior Typist Clerks⁸

In addition to reassigning these positions, the GRTF recommends that the Board allocate sufficient funding to establish the remaining necessary positions, which may include repurposing currently frozen positions.

⁶ The S&S overhead rate was based on the approved Auditor-Controller S&S overhead rate for County Counsel FY24-25. This multiplier was used by County Counsel and CEO in estimating cost scenarios for the four options proposed in their ethics reform report. The CEO confirmed that no updated multiplier was available at the time the GRTF estimates were generated; therefore, the existing multiplier was applied.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Transferring enforcement of the County’s “Proposition B” campaign finance ordinance (Ch. 2.190) from the Registrar-Recorder to the Ethics Commission, potentially including moving over Registrar-Recorder staff assisting in these duties to the Office, may require a 4/5 vote and a finding that this amendment furthers the purposes of that measure.

VII. METRICS & ACCOUNTABILITY

The Board’s November 2024 directive requires that the GRTF recommend “performance metrics (both quantitative and qualitative) and accountability mechanisms for evaluating these changes at regular intervals in future years.”

The GRTF’s draft charter amendment language requires the Commission to publish “an annual public report summarizing the Commission’s activities in the prior calendar or fiscal year,” which must include, at minimum, “complaints received, investigations opened, enforcement actions completed, and penalties imposed.” There are a number of standard performance metrics used by ethics commissions that the GRTF would recommend also be included in the annual report, or potentially an ethics commission dashboard.

These include quantitative enforcement metrics such as:

- Complaints received or initiated
- Matters resolved
- Fines imposed
- Breakdown of types of matters investigated by subject matter or violation type
- Campaign finance audits completed

Once the Commission has been established and has worked out its processes for investigating and resolving complaints, and established benchmarks for its enforcement activities, additional performance metrics could be established, such as tracking the days required to complete a preliminary review of a complaint or matter. Any enforcement metrics should be adopted with the understanding that individual enforcement matters can vary significantly in their seriousness and in the time and resources required to enforce a complaint.

The GRTF also recommends that the Ethics Commission adopt education and training-related metrics, such as:

- Guidance documents produced or updated
- Advisories issued
- Number of trainings provided
- Number of attendees at provided trainings
- Advice requests responded
- Breakdown by subject matter advice requests received

Similarly, as the Commission develops a regular education and advice program to benchmark to, additional performance metrics could be adopted, such as the number of days required to reply to an informal advice request.

The annual report is also an opportunity for the Commission to report qualitatively on how it has furthered its established mission to promote fairness, openness, honesty, and

integrity in County government. Significant accomplishments towards improving honesty and integrity in the county could come from the Commission proposing policy reforms to the Board, which it would report on. In line with this, the GRTF is recommending that the Commission recommend the adoption of a proposed ordinance on post-service restrictions (as required by Measure G) and an ethics code for Board consideration.

In addition to its annual report, the Commission’s regular meetings and public process for the actions it takes helps to ensure the Office of Ethics Compliance remains transparent and accountable to the Commission, Board, and public.

VIII. CONSIDERATION OF UNINCORPORATED AREAS

The Board’s November 2024 directive also requires the GRTF to “analyze and justify, if changing the direction and oversight of municipal services for the unincorporated areas ..., how such changes would improve the quality and responsiveness of services and representation of the unincorporated areas.” The GRTF does not consider this proposal to change the direction or oversight of services in unincorporated areas; however, ensuring inclusion of residents from unincorporated areas was an important consideration for the GRTF in drafting this proposal. As a result, the GRTF has proposed that at least one Commissioner be from an unincorporated area.

IX. CONCLUSION - A Defining Step Toward the Future of Los Angeles County Governance

This proposal marks a pivotal moment in how Los Angeles County governs itself, transforming voter intent into a lasting system of accountability, independence, and public trust. Measure G’s mandate for an independent Ethics Commission was not simply about creating a new body, but about setting a higher standard for how government operates moving forward: transparently, fairly, and in service of the people. This set of recommendations:

- **Delivers on what voters demanded:** Establishes a truly independent Ethics Commission that brings Measure G to life and centers accountability at the core of County government.
- **Builds a government people can trust:** Creates clear, enforceable standards that strengthen transparency, fairness, and integrity across all levels of County leadership.
- **Protects the system for the long term:** Puts in place durable structures, through both immediate action and Charter reform, that ensure ethics oversight cannot be weakened over time.
- **Signals a new era of governance:** Positions Los Angeles County as a forward-looking, values-driven institution committed to serving the public with honesty and accountability.

- **Sets the foundation for the future:** Establishes a model of governance where ethical conduct is expected, enforced, and embedded, shaping a County that works better, more openly, and more equitably for all residents.

APPENDIX 1: Draft Charter Amendment Language

Article III-D of the Los Angeles County Charter is amended to repeal Sections 11.68 and 11.70 and to add Sections 11.67.00, 11.67.50, 11.68.00, 11.68.50, 11.69.00, 11.69.50, and 11.70.00 as follows:

11.67.00. County Ethics Commission.

(a) **Establishment.** There shall be a County of Los Angeles Ethics Commission, which shall set policy for and oversee the Los Angeles County Office of Ethics Compliance and which may adjudicate and impose penalties for violations of the laws the Commission enforces. The Ethics Commission and the Office of Ethics Compliance shall operate as a single independent department within County government, free from control by the Board of Supervisors or the County Executive.

(b) **Members.** The Commission shall have seven members. Members shall exercise their independent judgment in all matters relating to their service on the Commission and shall not serve as the representative of any County elected official, including any elected official involved in their nomination or appointment.

(c) Appointment.

(1) Members shall be nominated to serve on the Commission as follows:

- (A) The Governance Reform Task Force, following a public recruitment and application process, shall nominate one (1) member who has a background in public information and public meetings, community outreach and engagement, or using technology as relates to open government. Beginning on January 1, 2029, this member shall instead be nominated by the elected County Executive.
- (B) The Chair of the Board of Supervisors shall nominate one (1) member who has a background in public policy or public law.
- (C) The Assessor shall nominate one (1) member who has a background in campaign finance, accounting, auditing, compliance with ethics laws in the public or private sector, or protection of whistleblowers.
- (D) The Commission shall nominate the remaining four members at a public meeting following a public recruitment and application process, which should include outreach to communities that are underrepresented in the County's political process. The Commission's nominees shall be broadly representative of the general public and at least one member nominated by the Commission shall be a resident of an unincorporated area. The appointing authorities shall value lived experience, community leadership, traditional and non-traditional expertise, and working class accessibility. A member of the Commission shall not communicate with a county elected official, or an agent of a county elected official, about whom the Commission should nominate to serve on the Commission, except that a county elected official or agent of a county elected official may provide comment

on potential nominees at a Commission meeting. A Commission-nominated member may vote to nominate their successor.

- (2) Within 45 days of a person being nominated to serve on the Commission, the Board of Supervisors shall schedule a meeting to appoint or reject the nominee by a majority vote of the Board. If the Board does not act on a nomination within 45 days, the nominee shall be deemed appointed.
- (3) A nominator shall nominate a person to serve on the Commission, and the Board shall consider such a nomination, based on the nominee's relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial, and appreciation for the County's diverse demographics, to the extent feasible and permissible by law.

(d) **Terms of Office.**

- (1) The members of the Commission shall serve staggered five-year terms beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. No member who has served a complete five-year term shall be eligible for reappointment.
- (2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), to create staggered terms, the initial terms of members of the Commission shall be as follows:
 - (A) The term of the member nominated by the Assessor shall expire on June 30, 2027.
 - (B) The term of two members nominated by the Commission shall expire on June 30, 2028.
 - (C) The term of the member nominated by the Governance Reform Task Force (and subsequently the County Executive) shall expire on June 30, 2029.
 - (D) The term of the member nominated by the Chair of the Board of Supervisors shall expire on June 30, 2030.
 - (E) The term of two members nominated by the Commission shall expire on June 30, 2031.

After the completion of these initial terms, each subsequent term shall be for a period of five years, as provided in paragraph (1).

- (3) In the event a member's replacement has not been appointed by the conclusion of the member's term, that member may continue to serve as a member of the Commission during the following term in a holdover capacity until a new member is appointed for a period not to exceed one (1) year.

(e) **Qualifications.** Each member of the Commission shall be a resident of the County. A person is ineligible to be appointed to the Commission if that person, in the two (2) years preceding their appointment, has been any of the following:

- (1) A County elected official;
- (2) A spouse, registered domestic partner, parent, sibling, or child of a County elected official;
- (3) An employee of, or paid consultant to, a County elected official;
- (4) A candidate for a County elected office;
- (5) An employee of, or paid consultant to, a candidate running for a County elected office, or a campaign committee controlled by a County elected official;
- (6) An officer or paid employee of a political party;

(7) A County registered lobbyist; or

(8) A person who qualified as a major donor as provided under the Political Reform Act or who contributed, in the aggregate, more than \$1,000 to one or more candidates for County elected office.

(f) **During and Post-Service Restrictions.** No member of the Commission, nor the Ethics Compliance Officer, shall:

(1) Seek election to a Los Angeles County elected office during the member's tenure and for two (2) years thereafter, or seek election to any other elected office in a jurisdiction that intersects with the geographic boundaries of Los Angeles County during the member's tenure.

(2) Endorse, support, oppose, contribute to, or volunteer or work on behalf of, any candidate or ballot measure in a County election, or any County elected official running for any elected office, during the member's tenure.

(3) Serve as an officer or employee of a political party during the member's tenure.

(4) Employ or be employed as a person required to register as a County lobbyist during the member's tenure and for one (1) year thereafter.

(5) Have an employment or contractual relationship with a County elected official, or receive a gift or other compensation from such officials, during the member's tenure and for one (1) year thereafter.

(6) Receive a no-bid contract from the County during the member's tenure and for one (1) year thereafter.

(g) **Removal.** A member of the Commission may be removed by a minimum of five (5) votes of the other Commissioners. Removal shall be for cause for substantial neglect of duty, gross misconduct in office, inability to discharge the powers and duties of office, or violation of this Chapter, after written notice of the grounds on which removal is sought and an opportunity for a reply.

(h) **Vacancies.**

(1) A vacancy on the Commission will exist whenever a member dies, resigns, ceases to be a resident of the County, is removed from the Commission, is convicted of a felony during the member's term, or is absent from three (3) consecutive regular Commission meetings without written permission from the President of the Commission.

(2) The Ethics Compliance Officer shall notify the nominator responsible for nominating a replacement within 7 days of a vacancy occurring. An appointment to fill a vacancy shall be for the unexpired term.

(3) If the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, County Executive, or Assessor fails to nominate a person to fill a vacancy they are responsible for filling within one hundred twenty (120) days after the seat became vacant, or fails to nominate a new person within one hundred twenty (120) days after the Board of Supervisors rejected their previous nominee, the Commission shall instead nominate a candidate to fill that seat for the remainder of the term by the affirmative vote of at least four (4) members.

Any nominee proposed by the Commission shall meet the same background qualifications required of a nominee of the original nominator. This paragraph shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

(4) For purposes of this subsection, a seat held by a member serving in a holdover capacity shall be deemed vacant upon expiration of the member's prior term.

(i) Meetings. The Commission shall adopt a calendar of regular Commission meetings for the calendar year which shall be posted to the Commission's website. The Commission shall meet a minimum of six (6) times per calendar year. The Commission's meetings shall comply with the Ralph M. Brown Act.

(j) Quorum.

(1) Four (4) members shall constitute a quorum, and the concurring vote of at least four (4) members shall be required to take any action.

(2) Notwithstanding subparagraph (1), if the Commission has fewer than four (4) appointed members, quorum shall be reduced to a majority of appointed members. In such cases, the Commission may meet for the sole purpose of nominating new Commissioners by majority vote of appointed members in a public meeting.

(k) Officers. The Commission shall select a President and Vice President annually.

(l) **Compensation; Expenses.** Members of the Commission shall be compensated \$250 per meeting. The members of the Commission shall be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of their official duties.

11.67.50. Office of Ethics Compliance, Ethics Compliance Officer; Office of Ethics Compliance Staff and Delegation of Authority.

(a) There shall be an Office of Ethics Compliance to support the Los Angeles County Ethics Commission and to accomplish the Commission's duties and objectives. The Commission shall oversee the Office of Ethics Compliance and adopt policies and regulations to govern the Office.

(b) The Ethics Compliance Officer shall be the chief executive of the Office of Ethics Compliance and shall have all the powers provided for department heads. The Commission shall appoint and has the authority to discharge the Ethics Compliance Officer, who shall act in accordance with Commission policies and regulations and with applicable law. The Ethics Compliance Officer shall serve at the will of the Commission and shall not be subject to civil service provisions. The Commission shall establish a salary range for the Ethics Compliance Officer consistent with other County of Los Angeles executive officers, considering similar duties and responsibilities, and shall annually set or adjust the salary for the Ethics Compliance Officer from within that range.

(c) The Ethics Compliance Officer shall appoint and has the authority to discharge the Enforcement Chief, Chief Counsel, other chief deputies, and assistant chief deputies of the Office of Ethics Compliance, who shall serve at the will of the Ethics Compliance Officer and shall not be subject to civil service provisions.

(d) The Ethics Compliance Officer shall appoint and has the authority to discharge other employees of the Office of Ethics Compliance subject to applicable civil service provisions.

(e) The Ethics Compliance Officer shall act on behalf of the Commission between meetings of the Commission. This includes the power to perform all administrative duties of the Office, to oversee or manage investigations into the laws the Commission enforces, and to dismiss matters that do not warrant further investigation or enforcement because they do not constitute a violation of the laws the Commission enforces or as otherwise provided in the Commission's Complaint Procedures. The Commission retains sole authority to adopt rules or regulations, issue formal opinions, and make final adjudicatory decisions on cases that have been set for an administrative hearing or that impose a penalty on a respondent.

11.68.00. Duties and Responsibilities of the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance.

The purpose of the Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance shall be to promote fairness, openness, honesty, and integrity in County government. The Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance shall have responsibility for the impartial and effective administration and implementation of the provisions of the Charter, statutes, and ordinances concerning campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, and other related laws as provided by the Charter or County ordinance.

It shall be the function and duty of the Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance to do all of the following:

- (a) Develop a robust education program to promote understanding of, and compliance with, state and County campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics laws, and other laws the Commission enforces, including, but not limited to, conducting trainings for persons subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission and creating a manual that summarizes, in simple, non-technical language, ethics laws and reporting requirements applicable to County officers and employees.
- (b) Investigate allegations of misconduct by County officials, county employees, candidates, campaign committees, lobbyists, contractors, and other persons subject to the laws the Commission enforces.
- (c) Monitor and enforce laws in coordination with other agencies related to campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, including:
 - (1) Chapters 2.160, 2.175, 2.180, 2.190, and 2.195 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - (2) Section 2.165.040 and 2.165.060 of Chapter 2.165 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;

- (3) Sections 2.37.010 and [2.37.020](#) of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - (4) Sections 5.02.060 of Chapter. 5.02 of Title 5 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - (5) Sections 5.44.020 and 5.44.170 of Chapter 5.44 of Title 5 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - (6) other laws as provided by the Charter or County ordinance; and
 - (7) in the Commission’s discretion, Chapter 4 (Campaign Disclosure) and Chapter 7 (Conflicts of Interest) of Title 9 of the California Government Code, Article 4 (Prohibitions Applicable to Specified Officers) of Chapter 1 of Division 4 of Title 1 of the California Government Code, and Sections 8314 (Misuse of Public Resources), 84308 (Levine Act), and 89503 (Gifts) of the California Government Code, as these provisions relate to Los Angeles County.
- (d) No later than January 1, 2028, serve as the filing officer and receive and retain documents required to be filed pursuant to, and to otherwise administer, the provisions of Chapter 2.160 of the Los Angeles County Code, in lieu of the executive officer of the Board of Supervisors.
- (e) No later than January 1, 2028, to the extent permissible by state law, serve as the filing officer and receive and retain the original or a copy of the following forms created by the Fair Political Practices Commission and which must be filed with the County under the California Political Reform Act of 1974 (Government Code Section 81000, et seq.), as amended:
- (1) Form 700 (Statement of Economic Interest) for county officers and employees;
 - (2) Form 801 (Payments to Agency Report); and
 - (3) Form 802 (Agency Report of Ceremonial Role Events and Ticket Distributions).

For other Fair Political Practices Commission forms that state law requires be filed with a separate entity of the County, including as examples state campaign finance forms (including Form 460) and Form 803 (Behested Payment Report), the Office shall have access to the same versions of such filings, including any unredacted filings, and shall be granted the same level of electronic or administrative access to any filing system as is available to the filing officer for purposes of administering, reviewing, or enforcing applicable laws.

- (f) Develop and/or implement additional updates and features to enable searchable public data portals with sortable and downloadable data related to

campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, including, but not limited to, all lobbying activities such as registration, activity, contributions and expenditures, to be updated in real time, or as close to real time as practicable.

- (g) Issue informal oral and written advice and, in the Commission's discretion, formal written opinions concerning the laws the Commission enforces. Formal written opinions shall only be adopted by vote of the Commission. A person who acts in good faith based upon a formal opinion issued to that person by the Commission shall not be enforced against by the Commission for so acting, provided that the material facts are as stated in the opinion request.
- (h) Create and require the use of forms that enable the Office or Commission to administer or enforce laws within its jurisdiction. This includes, but is not limited to, forms for complaints, investigations, administrative hearings, reports, financial statements, notices, or other documents relating to the Charter, county ordinances, or other laws administered or enforced by the Commission. The Office or Commission may determine the format, content, and manner of submission for such forms and may require that they be filed electronically, unless a paper filing option is required by law. The Office or Commission may require that any such form, statement, or submission be executed under penalty of perjury.
- (i) Publish an annual public report summarizing the Commission's activities in the prior calendar or fiscal year, including complaints received, investigations opened, enforcement actions completed, and penalties imposed.
- (j) Assist departments in developing their conflict of interest codes as required by state law.
- (k) Receive grants and appropriations to support the Commission's or Office's functions. The Commission shall adopt guidelines related to applying for and accepting grants;
- (l) Submit by July 31, 2027, a draft ordinance for consideration by the Board of Supervisors that will prohibit former County officials, including a member of the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff, the Assessor, the District Attorney, the County Executive and any County employee or member of a County board or commission required to file a statement of economic interests pursuant to the Political Reform Act of 1974, as amended, from engaging in direct communication with any County agency, for the purpose of attempting to influence any action or decision on any matter pending before that County agency on behalf of any person or entity, other than a government agency, for a minimum of two years after leaving County service.

- (m) Submit by December 31, 2027, a draft Ethics Code ordinance, enforceable by the Commission, for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.
- (n) Regularly review the County Code and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for updates regarding campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, and other laws the Commission is responsible for administering or enforcing. The Commission may propose amendments to any law it enforces or administers which, upon request to the President of the Commission, shall be agendaized for consideration and potential action by the full Board within one hundred eighty (180) days.
- (o) Commencing in 2030, by a vote of at least five (5) members of the Commission, submit directly to the voters for consideration 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.
- (p) Perform such other functions and duties as may be prescribed by the County Charter or County ordinance.

11.68.50. Rules, Regulations and Policies.

- (a) The Commission may adopt, amend, and rescind rules and regulations, to carry out the purposes and provisions of the Charter and ordinances of the County that the Commission enforces or administers, and may adopt rules, regulations, or policies to govern procedures of the Commission and the Office of Ethics Compliance. A rule or regulation adopted by the Commission shall have the force of law and may be enforced by the Commission as provided in this chapter.
- (b) Prior to the meeting at which a rule or regulation is adopted, the Commission shall hold a public hearing concerning the matter.
- (c) The Commission shall transmit to the Board of Supervisors rules and regulations adopted by the Commission within 3 days of their adoption. A rule or regulation adopted by the Commission shall become effective 60 days after the date of its adoption unless, before the expiration of this 60-day period, two-thirds of all members of the Board of Supervisors vote to veto the rule or regulation.

11.69.00. Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings.

The Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance shall conduct investigations of alleged violations of state law, the Charter, and County ordinances relating to campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, and other laws enforced by the Commission.

Any person who violates any provision of the Charter or of a County ordinance relating to campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, or governmental ethics, or any other law

enforced by the Commission, or who causes any other person to violate any such provision, or who aids and abets any other person in such a violation, shall be liable under the provisions of this Section.

(a) Enforcement Authority. The Ethics Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance are authorized to:

- (1) Conduct investigations;
- (2) Conduct audits of compliance with disclosure requirements of laws enforced by the Commission, including campaign finance and lobbyist disclosure statements;
- (3) Conduct administrative hearings as provided by the Commission's Complaint Procedures or other law. If the Commission decides to schedule a hearing, the Commission shall decide whether to sit as a hearing panel or to delegate its authority to gather and hear evidence to one or more of its members or to an independent hearing officer, which may include a County administrative law judge;
- (4) Issue subpoenas to compel the production of books, papers, records and documents and take testimony on any matter under investigation by the Office or pending before the Commission. The Compliance Officer or Commission may seek a contempt order as provided by the general law of the state for a person's failure or refusal to appear, testify, or to produce required books, papers, records and documents;
- (5) Administer oaths and affirmations;
- (6) Impose penalties, remedies and fines for a violation of any law specified in Section 11.68.00, subsections (c) through (d), or any rule or regulation adopted to implement such law, by a vote of the Commission. The Commission's decision to impose penalties, remedies, or fines for violation of any law, rule, or regulation over which the Commission has enforcement authority shall be appealable to the Los Angeles County Superior Court by filing a petition for writ of mandamus. The ninety-day statute of limitations contained in California Code of Civil Procedure section 1094.6 shall apply to judicial review of enforcement decisions made pursuant to this section;
- (7) Submit referrals to other enforcement authorities, including, but not limited to, the Los Angeles County District Attorney, California Fair Political Practices Commission, and California Attorney General;
- (8) Seek remedial relief for violations and injunctive relief; and
- (9) Perform other functions as authorized by law.

(b) **Final Enforcement Action.** Final enforcement action by the Commission on a matter, including the imposition of fines, approval of a settlement, or dismissal of a case that has been set for an administrative hearing, shall be made by an affirmative vote of at least four (4) members.

(c) **Confidentiality.** Records and information obtained by the Office or Commission during the preliminary review and investigation of a matter shall be confidential and

exempt from public disclosure, to the extent permitted by law, except as provided in its Complaint Procedures.

Nothing in this Section limits the ability of the Office or Commission to disclose such records or information when charging, prosecuting, closing, or dismissing an investigation or complaint into alleged violations of the laws under its jurisdiction. This Section does not prevent the Office or Commission from applying any other exemption from disclosure that may be available under County or state public records disclosure laws. Disclosure of records or information in the course of making a referral to other enforcement authorities, or divulging evidence of possible unlawful conduct by County officials or employees to a government agency with authority to discipline that unlawful conduct, shall not constitute a waiver of the confidentiality protections under this Section.

(d) **Complaint Procedures.** The Commission shall adopt Complaint Procedures by rule or regulation to establish the administrative process for the investigation and enforcement of violations of the laws within the Commission's jurisdiction to enforce. These procedures shall include, but are not limited to, the process for receiving, initiating, and reviewing complaints, conducting investigations or audits, providing notice of an administrative hearing to the respondent, and resolving cases prior to an administrative hearing.

(e) **Penalty Guidelines and Enforcement Discretion.** The Commission shall adopt by rule or regulation Penalty Guidelines setting forth standards for imposing penalties and exercising enforcement discretion. Office of Ethics Compliance staff shall adhere to the Penalty Guidelines when recommending penalties. The Penalty Guidelines shall establish a diversion program as an option to allow for education of respondents who commit minor violations, in lieu of monetary penalties, pursuant to criteria and considerations established by the Commission.

(f) **Administrative Hearings, Orders, and Penalties.** After an accusation is issued and served on a respondent, the Commission shall cause a public evidentiary hearing to be held to determine if a violation has occurred. When the Commission determines on the basis of substantial evidence presented at the hearing that a violation has occurred, it shall issue an order which may require the violator to:

(1) cease and desist the violation;

(2) file any reports, statements, or other documents or information required by law; and/or

(3) pay a monetary penalty to the General Fund of the County of up to fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) for each violation, adjusted annually by the Commission to reflect changes to the Consumer Price Index for the Los Angeles area, or three times the amount which the person failed to report properly or unlawfully contributed, expended, gave, or received, whichever is greater. When the Commission determines that no violation has occurred, it shall publish a declaration so stating.

(g) **Ex Parte.** In any administrative proceeding, Commission members shall follow the ex parte rules provided in Government Code Section 11430.10, unless the Commission adopts

different procedures, consistent with the requirements of due process, in its Complaint Procedures.

(h) Represented Employees. A represented County employee may, upon request, have a union representative present during a formal investigatory interview conducted by Office of Ethics Compliance enforcement staff when the employee reasonably believes the interview may result in disciplinary action.

(i) Other County Enforcement Entities.

(1) Except as provided in subparagraph (2), nothing in this Article shall preclude other County officials, agencies, boards, or commissions from exercising enforcement authority heretofore or hereafter granted to them.

(2) Notwithstanding any other law, once the Commission by motion certifies that it is able to administratively enforce some or all of the laws under its jurisdiction, other county officials, agencies, boards, or commissions shall be precluding from bringing administrative enforcement actions as to those laws, provided that this subsection shall not be interpreted to preclude or terminate any pending administrative enforcement action when the certification is made.

(j) Civil Enforcement.

(1) In lieu of administrative enforcement, the Compliance Officer may determine that a civil action by the Commission is more appropriate and may refer the matter to the Commission. The Commission shall consider the matter and determine whether to authorize such an action.

(2) The penalties specified in subsection (f) may be sought and recovered in any civil action brought pursuant to this subsection.

(3) If the Commission authorizes and commences a civil action to recover monetary penalties pursuant to this subsection, it may not thereafter initiate an administrative enforcement proceeding seeking monetary penalties based on the same allegations against the same respondent. The commencement of a civil action by the Commission or Office solely seeking injunctive relief or penalties for contempt shall not preclude the Commission from initiating or maintaining an administrative enforcement proceeding based on the same allegations.

11.69.50. Legal Services.

The Office of Ethics Compliance shall employ a Chief Counsel, and may employ other attorneys or hire outside counsel in the sole discretion of the Ethics Compliance Officer, to represent and provide legal assistance and services to the Office or Commission. In addition, the Office of County Counsel shall represent and provide legal assistance and services to the Office and Commission, to the extent such assistance and services do not constitute a conflict of interest, without charge.

11.70.00. Appropriation and Expenditures.

- (a) The Board of Supervisors, and the County Executive upon establishment of the office of County Executive, shall provide reasonable funding and staffing for the Commission and Office.
- (b) Starting with the 2027-2028 fiscal year budget, the Board of Supervisors shall appropriate a minimum of \$14.3 million dollars for the Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance’s annual operating budget. Each year, the minimum operating budget appropriation amount shall be increased from the amount appropriated in the prior fiscal year (excluding any one-time appropriations) based on the greater of either (1) the percentage change in the cost of living in the Los Angeles area, as determined by the twelve-month (12) Annual Percentage Change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all items as published by the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics or (2) the percentage change in California per capita personal income, as determined by the California State Department of Finance and shown in the Price Factor and Population Information Report issued annually. However, increases to the Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance’s annual operating budget is not required if four-fifths (seven-ninths after January 1, 2032) of the Board of Supervisors finds that exigent circumstances exist such that an increase should not be made for that fiscal year.
- (c) The expenditures of the Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance shall not require prior approval of County offices or personnel where the expenditures are within the Commission and Office’s budget. The Commission and Office shall comply with applicable requirements, procedures, and laws relating to the expenditures.
- (d) The Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance are not subject to hiring freezes when operating within the Commission and Office’s budget.

Chapter 2.37 is added to Title II of the Los Angeles County Code

Chapter 2.37 - ETHICS COMMISSION & OFFICE OF ETHICS COMPLIANCE

2.37.010. Protection Against Retaliation.

- (a) No officer or employee of the County shall use or threaten to use any official authority or influence to effect any action as a reprisal against any person for acting in good faith to report or otherwise bring to the attention of the Commission, Office of Ethics Compliance, or other appropriate government agency, information regarding the violation of any law or regulation over which the Commission has authority.
- (b) No officer or employee of the County shall use or threaten to use any official authority or influence to discourage, restrain or interfere with any other person for the purpose of preventing such person from acting in good faith to report or otherwise bring to the attention of the Commission, Office of Ethics Compliance, or other appropriate government agency, information regarding the violation of any law or regulation over which the Commission has authority.

2.37.020. Duty to Assist.

Upon the request by the Office of Ethics Compliance, a County official or employee shall cooperate and assist with an investigation into an alleged violation of a law enforced by the Ethics Commission. This requirement shall not be construed as requiring the identification of a confidential whistleblower.

APPENDIX 2: Summary of Draft Charter Amendment Language

Establishment

- Establishes a Los Angeles County Ethics Commission which would oversee a new Office of Ethics Compliance.
- The Commission and Office would operate as an independent department within County government, free from control by the Board of Supervisors or the County Executive.
- The Commission's and Office's purpose is to promote fairness, openness, honesty, and integrity in County government.

Commission Composition & Selection

- The Commission would have 7 members. Members exercise their independent judgment and do not represent the official appointing them.
- Members would be nominated by different officials:
 - **Elected County Executive** (but **GRTF** through 2028) – 1 member with background in public information and public meetings, community outreach and engagement, or using technology as relates to open government
 - **Chair of the Board of Supervisors** – 1 member with public policy or public law background.
 - **Assessor** – 1 member with expertise in campaign finance, accounting, auditing, compliance with ethics laws in the public or private sector, or protection of whistleblowers.
 - **The Commission itself** – 4 members chosen through a public application process, including 1 resident of an unincorporated area. Commissioners may not communicate with elected officials about whom to appoint outside a public meeting.
 - *Notwithstanding any quorum requirements, if the Commission has fewer than 4 appointed members, it may meet for the sole purpose of nominating additional members by a majority vote of appointed members.*
- The **Board of Supervisors** votes to appoint nominees, but if it does not act within 45 days, the nominee is automatically appointed.
- Nominations and appointments shall be based on a person's relevant analytical skills, ability to be impartial, and appreciation for the County's diverse demographics, to the extent legally permissible.

Commissioner Eligibility and During- and Post-Service Restrictions

- **Eligibility.** To be eligible for appointment:
 - Commissioners must be **County residents**.

- People are **not eligible** if, within 2 years of appointment, they:
 - Or their immediate family have held a County elected office
 - Were a candidate for County office.
 - Worked for a County elected official or campaign.
 - Were a County registered lobbyist.
 - Were a campaign major donor (\$10k+) or gave more than \$1,000 to a candidate for county office.
 - Were a political party officer or employee.
- **Restrictions While Serving.** Commissioners and the Ethics Compliance Officer cannot:
 - Run for any elected office *in* LA County during their tenure and for any *LA County elected office* during their tenure and for 2 years afterward.
 - Support or oppose candidates or ballot measures in County elections during their tenure.
 - Serve as a political party officer or employee during their tenure.
 - Work as County lobbyists during their tenure or for 1 year afterward.
 - Work for County elected officials or receive gifts or compensation from them during their tenure and for 1 year afterward.
 - Receive no-bid County contracts during their tenure and for 1 year afterward.

Commissioner Terms of Office

- Commissioners serve one 5-year term and cannot be reappointed after a full term.
- Initial terms are staggered to ensure continuity.
- Commissioners may serve up to 1 year in a holdover role until a replacement is appointed.

Commissioner Removal and Vacancies

- A commissioner can be removed by 5/6 ~~4/6~~ votes of the other commissioners for cause.
- Vacancies occur if a commissioner resigns, dies, moves out of the County, is convicted of a felony, or misses 3 consecutive meetings without being excused in writing.
- If a nominating official fails to nominate a replacement for a vacancy on the Commission within 120 days, the Commission may nominate someone instead.

Commission Operations

- The Commission must hold at least 6 meetings per year posted to its website and will comply with the Brown Act.
- Four members constitute a quorum and are required to take action.
- Commissioners receive \$250 per meeting and reimbursement for expenses.

- The Commission elects a President and Vice President each year.
- The Commission may adopt rules and regulations for its own procedures and to administer or implement the laws it enforces. The Board of Supervisors may veto a rule or regulation within 60 days with a two-thirds vote.

Office of Ethics Compliance

- The Commission appoints and may remove at-will the ***Ethics Compliance Officer***, who leads the Office of Ethics Compliance.
- The Ethics Compliance Officer manages the Office, implements Commission policies, and acts on behalf of the Commission between meetings.
- The Ethics Compliance Officer (ECO) hires all staff including:
 - ***Enforcement Chief*** (serves at-will of ECO)
 - ***Chief Counsel*** (serves at-will of ECO)
 - ***Other chief deputies*** and assistant chief deputies (serves at-will of ECO)
 - and other employees (civil service).
- The Office shall employ a Chief Counsel and other attorneys to provide advice and representation to the Office and Commission, in addition to using County Counsel.

Duties of the Office of Ethics Compliance and Commission:

- ***Responsibility.*** The Commission and Office of Ethics Compliance shall have responsibility for the impartial and effective administration and implementation of the provisions of the Charter, statutes and ordinances concerning campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, and other laws as provided by the Charter or County ordinance.
- ***Education and Training***
 - Provide training on campaign finance, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and ethics laws.
 - Publish a plain-language ethics manual for County officials and employees.
- ***Advice and Guidance***
 - Provide informal advice and formal written opinions on ethics laws. A requestor who follows the formal advice provided by the Commission shall not be enforced against by the Commission.
 - Help County departments develop **conflict-of-interest codes** required by state law.
- ***Public Transparency***
 - Create and maintain searchable, sortable, and downloadable public databases for campaign finance, lobbying, and ethics filings.
 - Update data in real time or as close as possible.
- **Filing and Disclosure Administration**

- By **January 1, 2028**, become the filing officer for:
 - County lobbying reports.
 - Form 700 (Statements of Economic Interests) for county officers and employees.
 - Forms 801 and 802, relating to payments and tickets.
- Require that the Office be given administrator access to unredacted FPPC forms that state law requires to be filed with another county agency (e.g. campaign finance forms and Form 803 behested payments).
- The commission may create and require the use of electronic forms to administer or enforce the laws under its jurisdiction under penalty of perjury.
- **Enforcement**
 - Monitor and enforce laws in coordination with other agencies related to campaign financing, lobbying, conflicts of interest, and governmental ethics, including:
 - Chapters 2.160, 2.175, 2.180, 2.190, and 2.195 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - Section 2.165.040 and 2.165.060 of Chapter 2.165 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - Section 2.37.060 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - Sections 5.02.060 of Chapter. 5.02 of Title 5 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - Sections 5.44.020 and 5.44.170 of Chapter 5.44 of Title 5 of the Los Angeles County Code;
 - other laws as provided by the Charter or County ordinance; and
 - in the Commission’s discretion, Chapter 4 (Campaign Disclosure) and Chapter 7 (Conflicts of Interest) of Title 9 of the California Government Code, Article 4 (Prohibitions Applicable to Specified Officers) of Chapter 1 of Division 4 of Title 1 of the California Government Code, and Sections 8314 (Misuse of Public Resources), 84308 (Levine Act), and 89503 (Gifts) of the California Government Code, as these provisions relate to Los Angeles County.
- **Policy Development**
 - Propose a two-year “cooling-off” rule restricting former officials from lobbying the County after leaving office by July 31, 2027.
 - Propose a County Ethics Code ordinance by December 31, 2027.
 - Regularly review County ethics laws and recommend updates. Commission proposals shall be agendaized for consideration by the full Board within 180 days.

- Starting in 2030, the Commission may place ethics-related ordinances directly on the ballot once per decade by a vote of 5/7 commissioners.
- **Public Reporting.** Publish an annual report summarizing complaints, investigations, enforcement actions, and penalties.
- **Acceptance of Funds.** The Commission may accept grants and gifts for its work. The Commission will adopt guidelines for application and acceptance of grants.

Investigation, Enforcement, and Penalties

- **Investigations and Audits.** The Commission and Office may:
 - Investigate complaints involving County officials, employees, candidates, lobbyists, contractors, and others.
 - Audit filings and disclosures.
 - Issue subpoenas to obtain records and testimony.
 - Administer oaths and affirmations.
- **Administrative Hearings.** The Commission and Office may:
 - Hold public evidentiary hearings to determine whether violations occurred. The Commission may hold a hearing as a whole body, or delegate holding an evidentiary hearing to one or more members or to an outside hearing officer.
 - Reach a final enforcement decision by a vote of 4 commissioners.
 - Commissioners shall abide by the prohibition on ex parte communications in enforcement matters.
 - Enforcement actions may be appealed within 90 days.
- **Penalties and Remedies.** If a violation is found in an administrative hearing, the Commission may order a person to:
 - Stop the violation.
 - File required reports or disclosures.
 - Pay monetary penalties of up to \$15,000 per violation, adjusted for inflation, or 3x the amount of an unlawful contribution or undisclosed amount.
 - Fines or penalties are appealable to the Superior Court.
- **Civil Enforcement Option.** The Office or Commission may bring a civil enforcement action to enforce its laws in lieu of an administrative enforcement action.
- **Alternative Enforcement Options.**
 - The Commission shall create a diversion program allowing education instead of fines for minor violations.
 - Cases may also be referred to other agencies.
- **Complaint Procedures & Penalty Guidelines.** The Commission shall adopt Complaint Procedures for the administrative process of the Commission and Penalty Guidelines to set standards for imposition of penalties.

- **Represented Employees.** Represented employees may have a union representative during investigation interviews.
- **Confidentiality.** Records and information obtained by the Commission during the preliminary review and investigation of a complaint shall be confidential to the extent permitted by law, but may be shared with other agencies without waiving confidentiality.
- **Protection Against Retaliation.** No officer or employee can be retaliated against for reporting a potential violation of ethics laws to the Commission.
- **Duty to Assist.** Officers and employees have a duty to cooperate with Commission investigations.
- **Other Enforcement.** Ethics Commission enforcement does not preclude enforcement by other county entities (e.g. DA for criminal prosecution).
 - For county laws enforced by the Commission, existing county administrative enforcement provisions shall continue to exist until the Ethics Commission certifies it can conduct administrative enforcement. Thereafter, administrative enforcement for such laws shall only be performed by the Commission.

Funding and Budget Protections

- The Board of Supervisors must provide funding and staffing.
- A minimum annual budget of ___ will be set starting in FY2027-28.
- The Commission's budget will adjust by the greater of the percent increase in inflation or average salaries for Californians unless the Board declares exigent circumstances by 4/5 (later 7/9) vote.
- The Commission:
 - Does not need prior approval for expenditures within its budget.
 - Is exempt from hiring freezes if it remains within its budget.

APPENDIX 3: PROPOSED INITIAL STAFFING

PROPOSED ETHICS OFFICE STAFFING			
Proposed Title	Proposed Division	COUNTY EQUIVALENT	FTE
Compliance Officer	Compliance Officer	New UC class to be created	1
Enforcement Chief	Enforcement	Chief, Audit and Compliance, HS	1
Managers	Enforcement	Supervising Investigator, County Counsel	3
Senior Investigator	Enforcement	Investigator II	3
Investigator	Enforcement	Investigator I	7
Intake	Enforcement	Management Analyst	1
Audit Manager	Auditing	Principal Accountant-Auditor	1
Senior Auditor	Auditing	Senior Accountant-Auditor	4
Chief Counsel	Legal	Deputy County Counsel	1
Intermediate Attorney	Legal	Senior Associate County Counsel	1
Junior Attorney	Legal	Associate County Counsel	1
Manager	Regulatory Program/Policy	Chief, Assessment Appeals Boards, Board of Supervisors	1
Senior Analyst	Regulatory Program/Policy	Head Board Specialist	3
Intermediate Analyst	Regulatory Program/Policy	Senior Board Specialist	1
Elections Program Coordinator	Regulatory Program/Policy	Elections Programs Coordinator	1
Senior Typist	Regulatory Program/Policy	Senior Typist-Clerk	3
IT Manager	IT/Disclosure	Information Technology Supervisor	1
IT Specialist	IT/Disclosure	Network Systems Administrator II	1
Analyst	IT/Disclosure	Information Systems Analyst II	1
Engineer	IT/Disclosure	Information System Analyst I	1
Director	Education	Administrative Services Manager II	1
Managers/Sr. Analyst	Education	Head, Staff Development Specialist	3
Analyst	Education	Staff Development Specialist	8
Admin Manager	Administrative	Administrative Services Manager II	1
HR Analyst	Administrative	Administrative Services Manager I	2
Analyst	Administrative	Administrative Analyst	1
Admin Assistant	Administrative	Management Assistant	1
TOTALS			54