

May 15, 2026

Los Angeles City Council  
Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012



**RE: Support for Key Charter Reform Proposals to Strengthen Representation, Ethics, Accountability, and Independent Oversight**

Dear Chair and Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee:

California Common Cause respectfully submits this letter in support of several proposed Los Angeles City Charter reforms currently under consideration. Collectively, these reforms would strengthen democratic representation, improve accountability and ethics enforcement, modernize campaign finance and ballot access systems, and bolster the independence of the City's oversight bodies.

Los Angeles is at a pivotal moment in its charter reform process. The City has experienced repeated ethics scandals, public frustration with City Hall, and growing concerns about political representation and accountability. These reforms represent a meaningful opportunity to modernize the City's governance structure and rebuild public trust.

## **Council Expansion**

**California Common Cause supports significantly expanding the Los Angeles City Council** and generally supports the Charter Reform Commission's proposed model to expand the Council to 25 single-member districts.

It has been nearly a century since Los Angeles last adjusted the size of its City Council. During that time, the City's population has dramatically increased while the size of the Council has remained stagnant. Los Angeles now has the largest city council districts of any major city in the United States. By comparison, the other nine largest cities average roughly 140,000 residents per district, and none exceeds approximately 209,000 residents per district.

This imbalance has significant implications for democratic representation and governance. Oversized districts make it more difficult for residents and neighborhood communities to meaningfully access their elected representatives and receive responsive constituent services. They also concentrate political power among a very small number of elected officials who govern one of the largest and most diverse cities in the country.

Expanding the City Council would improve constituent representation, increase accessibility to local government, foster greater geographic and community representation, and create a Council that better reflects the diversity and needs of Los Angeles residents.

Smaller council districts would also strengthen local democracy by lowering barriers to candidacy and reducing campaign costs, making it more feasible for grassroots and community-based candidates to run competitive campaigns. Councilmembers representing fewer residents are generally more accessible, accountable, and responsive to the communities they serve.

**California Common Cause has previously advocated for a Council expansion model tied to decennial census population changes that would establish approximately one council district per 150,000 residents, rounded to the nearest odd whole number, with no fewer than 15 districts citywide. Under current population estimates, that approach would result in approximately 25 to 27 council districts. We still support this model as the ideal.**

**That said, we believe the proposed 25 single-member district model proposed by the Charter Reform Commission is a sound alternative consistent with the principles of our preferred model. We are also open to alternative expansion models that achieve similar levels of representation and accessibility, including models that may incorporate regional or nested districts alongside single-member districts.**

Increasing the number of districts would help create a more representative, responsive, and accountable City government that is better equipped to serve Los Angeles residents in the decades ahead.

## **Ballot Access Reform**

**We support the Charter Commission's proposed reforms to extend filing deadlines and signature collection timeframes for candidates seeking ballot access, as well as lowering the nominating petition signature requirement from 500 registered voters to 350 registered voters.**

These reforms would reduce unnecessary barriers to candidacy and help encourage broader participation in local democracy. Los Angeles should strive to make ballot access achievable for grassroots and community-based candidates who may lack access to institutional political networks or large fundraising operations.

## **Ethics Commission Independence and Campaign Finance Reform**

California Common Cause strongly **supports the proposed reforms to strengthen the independence, authority, and effectiveness of the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission.**

Specifically, we support:

- Extending the appointment window for Ethics Commissioners from 45 to 60 days when vacancies occur;

- Prohibiting prospective appointees from being required to sign resignation letters as a condition of appointment;
- Authorizing the Ethics Commission to retain its own independent legal counsel and staff (beyond its currently limited capacity to do so);
- Increasing the Ethics Commission's minimum annual appropriation to \$10 million;
- Increasing civil penalties to align with administrative penalties for ethics violations, which is the greater of \$15,000 per violation, periodically adjusted to CPI, or three times the improperly reported or contributed amount;
- Granting the Ethics Commission discretion to Prohibit the use of campaign funds to pay certain ethics penalties;
- Authorizing the Ethics Commission to place ethics-related measures directly before voters; and
- Modernizing charter language concerning public campaign financing to permit broader public financing models beyond matching funds.

These reforms are essential to ensuring the Ethics Commission can effectively and independently carry out its oversight and enforcement responsibilities.

An ethics commission cannot credibly oversee powerful public officials and political actors if it remains dependent on those same officials for legal representation, staffing, or adequate funding. **Allowing the Commission to retain its own independent legal counsel and staff would help avoid both real and perceived conflicts of interest** and align Los Angeles with best practices for independent ethics oversight.

Similarly, **increasing the Commission's guaranteed budget is necessary** to ensure the agency has sufficient resources to investigate complaints, conduct audits, enforce campaign finance and ethics laws, educate the public, and administer increasingly complex disclosure systems.

**We also strongly support strengthening penalty provisions and prohibiting the use of campaign funds to pay certain ethics fines.** Ethics laws are only effective if violations carry meaningful deterrents. Allowing public officials to use campaign funds to pay penalties for willful and egregious violations weakens deterrence and undermines public confidence in accountability systems.

**California Common Cause additionally supports authorizing the Ethics Commission to place ethics-related measures directly before voters, subject to appropriate procedural safeguards.**

Independent ethics commissions possess specialized expertise concerning campaign finance, lobbying, governmental ethics, and anti-corruption laws. Providing the Commission with a pathway to place measures before voters helps safeguard ethics reforms from political stagnation or institutional resistance while preserving a public legislative process.

However, **California Common Cause recommends amending the Charter Reform Commission's proposed statutory language to clarify that the City Council may hold hearings and propose amendments to Ethics Commission-sponsored ballot measures, but may not block the placement of those measures on the ballot altogether.** This approach preserves opportunities for public deliberation and Council input while protecting the Commission's ability to advance reforms directly to voters.

For example, California Common Cause supports amended statutory language substantially similar to the following redlined text of the Charter Reform Commission's proposed language:

Charter Section 703

(d) The Ethics Commission shall have the authority to submit ordinance measures within their subject matter jurisdiction directly to the voters. Any ballot measure proposed by the Ethics Commission shall be presented to the City Council, which shall have the opportunity to hold a public hearing and propose amendments for Commission consideration within 90 days of submission to the City Council, but shall not have authority to mandate amendments or block the Commission from submitting ordinance measures within their subject matter jurisdiction directly to the voters. After the City Council concludes its review process or 90 days after transmission to the City Council Clerk, whichever occurs first, the Commission may, by a four-fifths (4/5) vote, place the measure on the ballot for a designated election date, either incorporating the City Council's proposed amendments, amendments of the Commission's own choosing, or no amendments.

## Vacancies Reform

**California Common Cause supports requiring special elections to fill vacancies in City offices when more than one year remains in the term of office and requiring those elections to occur within 180 days of the vacancy.**

The people of Los Angeles deserve the opportunity to elect their representatives rather than rely on extended interim appointments. Timely special elections strengthen democratic legitimacy and public accountability while ensuring residents maintain meaningful representation.

## Independent Redistricting Commission Reforms

California Common Cause strongly supports reforms to strengthen the independence of the Los Angeles Independent Redistricting Commission.

Specifically, we support:

- Authorizing the Independent Redistricting Commission to retain separate legal counsel; and
- Establishing a minimum annual budget allocation of \$10 million for the Commission.

The City's recent redistricting cycle exposed significant concerns regarding transparency, public trust, and the independence of the redistricting process. Independent commissions cannot effectively perform their duties if they lack independent legal advice or adequate resources.

Allowing the Commission to retain independent counsel would help avoid conflicts of interest and ensure that commissioners receive legal guidance focused solely on protecting the integrity of the redistricting process and compliance with applicable law.

Likewise, guaranteed funding is critical to ensuring the Commission can conduct robust public outreach, retain necessary technical experts, provide language access and community engagement, and administer a transparent and legally compliant mapping process.

## **Conclusion**

California Common Cause believes these reforms represent meaningful and necessary steps toward a more representative, accountable, transparent, and democratic Los Angeles.

We respectfully urge the Committee to move these reforms forward and preserve the strong independence and accountability provisions contained within them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Sean McMorris  
Transparency, Ethics & Accountability Program Manager  
California Common Cause