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ESSAY

BY PAULA LEE

A call to action on ethics

Sacramento's commission needs public support

This is a call to action to ensure that we have an effective and independent Sacramento Ethics Commission.

It was the civic participation of community organizations, neighborhood associations, good government groups and concerned individuals that helped bring an independent ethics commission to the city of Sacramento.

But now its independence and effectiveness is at stake.

It has taken public engagement to establish successful ethics commissions in other cities in California. We want our ethics commission to have a meaningful role in creating a culture of ethics and trust in our city. Otherwise, why have an ethics commission in the first place?

The commission was established by the City Council in March 2017. Its authority extends to city elected officials, candidates for elected office, independent expenditure committees, members of city boards and commissions, the city manager, the city clerk, the city attorney, the city treasurer, the city auditor, the independent budget analyst and the director of public safety accountability.

The commission reviews and considers complaints against these elected and appointed city officials and seeks to ensure these officials are conforming their conduct to the city's code and policies. The panel also oversees ethics education and training to avoid inadvertent violations.

In February, the commission submitted its first annual report and provided recommendations that are key to its independence and effectiveness as we all envisioned. However, the commission is still waiting for the city attorney's office to respond.

Without vocal public support for the ethics commission and its recommendations, its effectiveness and independence will be seriously compromised.



Paula Lee is first vice president of the League of Women Voters of Sacramento County.

The commission must have an independent budget source that doesn't depend on City Council approval. The commission's administrator must be independent as well, and to avoid any potential conflict of interest, report only to the commission.

As an investigative and enforcement body, the commission needs subpoena power to compel people to testify and to hand over documents related to a complaint. The panel has suggested how subpoena power could be granted.

As volunteers who have other jobs, ethics commissioners need the flexibility to use a hearing officer if needed.

And ethics education, training and innovative policy development should be under the commission. The city code needs to expressly say this.

You are invited to meet our dedicated ethics commission. At a meeting at 5:45 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 16, they will discuss their role

in our community and how to file a complaint, and will listen to comments and questions. Mayor Darrell Steinberg will introduce the commissioners.

For more information about how you can help move these recommendations forward or to receive a copy of the Sacramento Ethics Code, contact Advocacy@lwvsacramento.org. □

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