



October 29, 2024

## Open Letter to the Next Presidential Administration

Dear Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump:

Regardless of who wins the 2024 election, the undersigned organizations write to urge the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the United States to implement reinforced ethics guidelines that will bring oversight and accountability to the executive branch. Public service is a public trust, and we urge you to adopt clear and transparent ethics standards for your administration.

A lack of leadership on ethics threatens more than accountability — public trust in our institutions is eroding. Combatting pervasive disillusionment amongst Americans requires executive action to elevate ethics as a core value by prioritizing meaningful structural reforms and committing publicly to adhere to ethical rules, as well as those values and norms behind them.

Our elected officials and appointed leadership wield an immense amount of power over the daily lives of Americans, yet routinely fail to hold themselves to ethical principles that protect the public's trust in government. Under current rules and laws, public officials often do not face public or internal consequences when they use their positions of power for private gain. When ethics violations do come to light, patchwork enforcement measures fail to hold them accountable.

No matter which candidate becomes the next president, your priority must be making our democratic institutions more accountable to the public they serve.

In preparing your ethics agenda, we urge you to include the following principal actions:

- **Implement and enforce an ethics code as an integral element of the presidential transition team.** The highly skilled professionals overseeing the transition and staffing of government offices must be expected to avoid

actual and apparent conflicts of interest. Such conflicts include transition team members participating in matters that benefit their personal financial interest over the public interest. Yet the ethics code will not build public trust and is meaningless without transparent enforcement.

- **Establish the strongest ethics pledge of any prior president on day one for all senior members of the executive branch.** The president should set clear, binding expectations for ethical behavior by members of the executive branch and federal agency leaders to establish new norms for transparency, disclosures and accountability. The ethics pledge and subsequent ethics rules should work to close the revolving door between wealthy industry players and powerful government roles (and vice versa) that allow insiders to exploit their positions and work for personal gain over public interest.
- **Install an ethics czar responsible for administering the new administration's ethics program.** The president should appoint a single senior official in the White House to oversee and enforce the administration's ethics program. The appointment of an ethics czar is noncontroversial step with bipartisan history: both President George W. Bush and President Obama appointed ethics czars in their White Houses. It is a straightforward step to help streamline the application of the new administration's ethics agenda and to signal to the public that the administration is taking ethics seriously.

Our country is entering a new chapter. Now is the time for executive leadership to turn the page on a legacy of poor ethics enforcement. Americans have a right to know that the officials who write, implement and interpret the laws that govern this land are prioritizing the greater public good over their own personal interests. We call on the next administration to advance new ethics guidelines and laws that will bring the greatest level of transparency to the executive branch and set a high standard for ethics in public service.

Respectfully submitted,

Campaign Legal Center  
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington  
Common Cause  
Issue One  
Project on Government Oversight  
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