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**ETHICS & ACCOUNTABILITY**

# **The Lincoln Line Campaign**

**a bright line of ethical conduct**

 **Common Cause**

Illinois  
*Holding Power Accountable*

In July of 1850, Abraham Lincoln gave a speech where he advised a new class of attorneys to “be honest in all events.” It’s a simple principle and a basic standard we should expect from anyone who seeks or enters public office.

Illinois has consistently been ranked as one of – if not the most – corrupt state in the nation. The list of elected officials in our state that have been embroiled in ethical scandal is long, and the scandals are so outrageous that the names are still haunt Illinois’ reputation – names like Dan Rostenkowski, Dennis Hastert, Jesse Jackson, Jr., Betty Loren-Maltese, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, and Rod Blagojevich.

**We deserve better.** The future of our state depends on our resolve. A clean, ethical government is an effective and efficient government. Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike – join our nonpartisan effort to create a **bright line of ethical conduct** for all elected officials in Illinois.

# **Our Guiding Principles**

# Before Taking Office

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- The road to public office shouldn't be paved by shady donations, quid pro quos, or shadowy conduct.
- Candidates should be open and forthright about their positions on the issues.
- They should strive to raise as much as they can from small dollar donors versus max out donors in order to grow a supporter base that is more representative of their community as a whole.
- They should avoid producing manipulative mailers, ads, and other campaign materials that seek to deceive or mislead the public.

# While in Public Office

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- Public officials should at all times vote and act in the best interests of their constituents.
- Yes, even if it is at odds with their personal, private interest.
- They should avoid even the appearance of impropriety. If it doesn't look good, it isn't in the public good.
- They should abhor ethical loopholes, not seek them out.
- No public official should seek to privately profit off of or unfairly benefit from his or her position while in office.

# **After leaving Public Office**

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- Public officials should refrain from selling their insider knowledge upon leaving office to the highest bidder.

# **Our Policy Proposals**

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**To truly change the culture of corruption throughout our state, we need tough, clear laws and regulations with meaningful enforcement actions.**



# Before holding Public Office

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- Candidates, campaigns, and political action committees should disclose all donors in a timely fashion, including bundlers.

Currently, candidates do not disclose bundlers – big time fundraisers who raise massive amounts of money for campaigns by pooling donations.

- Local governments and the state of Illinois should adopt campaign finance reform in the form of a small donor matching program or a voucher program in order to grow the state's donor pool and bring more diverse voices into the political and campaign process.

Our campaign financing system is broken. Although Illinois finally passed contribution limits in 2009, the reform measures passed then were just the beginning of the reforms that are necessary to reduce the influence of money in our politics and policy making process. The fact is that only a sliver of Illinois residents are donors, and those donors are disproportionately older, white, and wealthy. Campaign finance reform can transform and expand the donor

class. There are several forms of reform, with small donor matching and voucher programs being the most popular. We encourage all levels of government across Illinois to embrace some form of campaign finance reform that increases the number of small dollar donors in our state.

● **Candidates, campaigns, and political action committees should be banned from creating deepfake media or any other digitally deceptive materials.**

Disinformation in campaigns is at an all-time high, and new digital tools allow for the creation of authentic-looking fake videos that deceive voters. Whether it's lying about a candidate's statements, or altering video in a deceptive fashion, Illinois must pass laws that protect voters from such disinformation and hold individuals, campaigns, or other entities liable for such fraudulent behavior.

# While holding Public Office

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- Elected and appointed officials should be banned from paid lobbying in any form, at any level of government, in front of any government body.

Illinois currently has some of the weakest rules in the country when it comes to regulating the lobbying activities of its lawmakers. A member of the General Assembly can lobby for or against any interest in the state, in front of any legislative body in the state, with the sole exception of lobbying the General Assembly. This practice is a breeding ground for the exertion of undue influence, favor trading, and corruption. No member of the General Assembly should be allowed to represent corporate or special interests anywhere as a paid lobbyist at the same time they're oath-bound to represent the interests of the people of Illinois. Several bills are pending before the General Assembly that can restore commonsense to this Wild West practice.

- Conflict of interest recusal should be mandatory, with meaningful penalties for refusal to recuse.

Under the current law, a lawmaker does not have to recuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest between the policy they are voting on and their personal gain. Yes, that's right. A lawmaker

can propose, push for, and vote on a bill that gives the lawmaker a direct personal and even financial benefit and they don't have to step away from the vote. This situation is obscene. Lawmakers must be forced to refrain from voting on measures that give them an special financial or personal benefit, and if they refuse to address the conflict of interest, they must face stiff penalties for their misconduct.

- **The Legislative Inspector General should be empowered to be a truly independent investigative body, including having the power to open and pursue investigations, to subpoena witnesses and evidence, and to make public recommendations.**

Under the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act, “[t]he Legislative Inspector General may serve in a full-time, part-time, or contractual capacity.” 5 ILCS 430/25-10. We believe that, given the landscape in Illinois and the urgent need to restore trust in government, the Legislative Inspector General should statutorily be a full-time position. Declaring the position a full-time endeavor underscores the priority our state places on ethics and enforcement, and would send a powerful message to lawmakers and the public that our state takes the responsibility of ethics investigations and enforcement seriously.

But empowering the Legislative Inspector General goes beyond a change in employment status. *At its core, the Legislative Inspector General must function as a powerful and neutral investigator, armed with the tools*

*necessary to follow the facts, wherever they may lead.* As such, Common Cause Illinois believes that the Legislative Inspector General must be empowered to unilaterally open investigations across the ethical spectrum, from harassment claims to allegations of fraud or bribery. The Legislative Inspector General must also be empowered to issue subpoenas and – most importantly – publish founded summary reports. The work of the office of the Legislative Inspector General should not be filtered through a commission, especially when the Legislative Ethics Commission, in its current form, is composed of members of the General Assembly. In short, the Legislative Inspector General’s office and duties must be independent, not simply an appendage of the Legislative Ethics Commission. As an additional reform, while there are already prohibitions on the Legislative Inspector General becoming a candidate, holding any elected public office, or holding any appointed office for one year after service, we would recommend expanding the prohibitions in section (e-1) to explicitly prohibit the Legislative Inspector General from becoming a registered lobbyist for at least two years upon leaving office.

**The Legislative Ethics Commission should**  
**● similarly be empowered to properly root out**  
**corruption, via an expanded scope of authority**  
**and jurisdiction.**

Currently, the Legislative Ethics Commission is comprised of members of the General Assembly. We agree with [former Legislative Inspector General Julie Porter](#) that “even if you appoint people with the very best ethics and interest of the public in mind...they have inherent conflicts of interest. When people have inherent conflicts of interest that gets messy and complicated.” Common Cause Illinois believes there is great value in having members of the general public included on the Commission. Several states have seen the

value in this approach. In New York, for example, “[e]ach of the four legislative leaders appoints one legislative and one non-legislative member,” and an additional non-legislative member is appointed so that the balance weighs in favor of the general public. Several other states, including Alaska and Pennsylvania, include members of the general public on ethics commissions or committees.

Combined, the Legislative Inspector General and the Legislative Ethics Commission, through their subpoena powers, have a unique ability to uncover egregious conduct by lawmakers and issue reports on the same. Currently, the Legislative Ethics Commission submits its report and recommendations to an agency head or ultimate jurisdictional authority. It is that agency head or ultimate jurisdictional authority that can simply refuse the Legislative Ethics Commission’s recommendation, no matter how well-supported by the evidence that may be. Illinoisians must have faith that the Legislative Ethics Commission’s investigations won’t end with a whimper at the hands of political appointees. The Legislative Ethics Commission must be empowered to wield the type of enforcement authority that will sufficiently deter unethical conduct, from substantial civil fines and penalties to criminal referrals.



## **Make reporting alleged ethical violations easier.**

Currently, it takes too much effort to blow the whistle on unethical conduct in Illinois. It is impossible to file a claim via an online form, and locating and downloading the PDF complaint form is an endeavor on the current website, which is difficult to navigate. We recommend that Illinois adopt a framework similar to that in New York, where there is an option to file both anonymous tips as well as formal claims online. In addition, New York also has an ethics tip hotline: 1-800-87-ETHICS. We recommend that Illinois

adopt a similar approach of making the filing of ethical complaints or the reporting of anonymous tips easy and accessible.

## After holding Public Office

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### ● At least two year ban on paid lobbying

Prohibiting paid lobbying *while* in office only addresses part of the problem. The revolving door in Illinois swings fast and swings frequently, so much so that it's become expected for lawmakers to cash in on their public service *immediately* upon leaving office. We already know this practice is wrong. In fact, our Ethics Code already mandates a one-year "cooling off" period for state employees in the procurement context and a two-year period for holding ownership interests in a cannabis business establishment. We know that allowing a revolving door in these contexts gives rise to conflicts of interest and unethical behavior. Now is the time to expand that approach to slow down that revolving door in the General Assembly.

Members in the House and Senate have introduced various reforms on this issue. There are ample ways to tackle the problem, in terms of the length of the ban on lobbying and the reach of the ban. This is not a time or a topic for a half-measured approach. We believe that circumstances require a clear ban – at least 2 years – on paid lobbying by both legislative and executive officeholders and staff with significant decisionmaking authority, similar to the strong reforms adopted by Iowa (see Iowa Code §§68B.5A, 68B.7).

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**AS A CANDIDATE, ELECTED OR  
APPOINTED PUBLIC OFFICIAL, I  
PLEDGE TO...**



**...be honest and honor the public trust. With respect to campaign finances, I will strive to be as transparent as possible and to raise funds from as many grassroots supporters as possible. This includes: a commitment to campaign finance reform, and a promise to disclose my campaign's major donors and bundlers. Once in office, I pledge to never use my public office for private gain. This includes: a strict commitment to avoid nepotism and favoritism of donors, a promise to fight for stricter ethical and disclosure rules, and a vow to try to avoid even the appearance of impropriety in executing my public duties.**

**To join the pledge or learn more about this campaign,  
please email Common Cause Illinois Executive Director  
Jay Young at [jyoung@commoncause.org](mailto:jyoung@commoncause.org)**



**Common  
Cause**

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**Illinois**

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