

January 13, 2026



Commission Streamlining Task Force  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
Room 263  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Agenda item #5 (1. Ethics Commission) – **SUPPORT** options 1-3 and **OPPOSE** options 4-6  
regarding the Ethics Commission’s authority to place measures on the ballot

Dear Members of the Commission Streamlining Task Force,

California Common Cause writes in **strong opposition** to options 4 through 6 regarding the San Francisco Ethics Commission’s (SFEC) authority to place measures directly on the ballot. These three options would either repeal the law outright or undermine its core purpose: serving as an essential check on government abuse and the failure to act when such abuse occurs. If enacted, any of these three reforms would diminish the Ethics Commission’s independence and invite politics into the essential oversight and accountability role the Commission is tasked with.

However, we **support** options 1 through 3 regarding the SFEC’s authority to place measures directly on the ballot. These options preserve the intent and purpose of the law by retaining final discretion with the SFEC. In short, there is nothing wrong with, and there is merit to, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) weighing in as a body during the ballot measure public review process, but the SFEC should have final discretion on what goes on the ballot. This will better ensure that the BOS engages in the process in good faith, not self-interest.

California Common Cause believes that allowing the SFEC discretion to place ordinances on the ballot is perhaps the most important safeguard for both the Commission’s independence and meaningful accountability in San Francisco government. The SFEC has exercised this authority responsibly: it has been used only five times in the Commission’s history, and each measure placed on the ballot has passed. It is also reasonable to conclude that some or all of these reforms would have been blocked or substantially weakened if the final decision rested with elected officials. Ethics oversight is one of the few areas of government where elected officials should not have the last word—we do not elect public officials to police themselves. Independent oversight is essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring that accountability laws are strengthened when necessary, not diluted or deferred.

For these reasons, California Common Cause **strongly opposes** *Options 4–6*, which would repeal or weaken the SFEC’s authority to place measures within its purview directly on the ballot. We respectfully urge the Task Force to reject these proposals and instead **advance** *Options 1–3* to preserve the purpose of the law and uphold public confidence in San Francisco government.

Sincerely,  
Sean McMorris  
Transparency, Ethics, and Accountability Program Manager

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