

San Francisco
Ethics Commission



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**ETHICS COMMISSION REGULATIONS FOR
HANDLING VIOLATIONS OF THE SUNSHINE ORDINANCE**

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CHAPTER ONE

I. PREAMBLE

Pursuant to San Francisco Charter, section 15.102, the San Francisco Ethics Commission promulgates these Regulations in order to ensure compliance with the San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance, San Francisco Administration Code, section 67.1, et seq. These Regulations shall apply to complaints alleging violations of the Sunshine Ordinance. All complaints alleging violations of conflict of interest, campaign finance, lobbyist, campaign consultant or other governmental ethics laws shall be handled separately under the Ethics Commission's Regulations for Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings.

II. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of these Regulations, the following definitions shall apply:

- A. “Brown Act” means California Government Code section 54950, et seq.
- B. “Business day” means any day other than a Saturday, Sunday, City holiday, or a day on which the Commission office is closed for business.
- C. “California Public Records Act” means California Government Code section 6250, et seq.
- D. “City” means the City and County of San Francisco.
- E. “City officer” means any officer identified in San Francisco Administrative Code Section 1.50, as well as any City body composed entirely of such officers.
- F. “Commission” means the Ethics Commission.
- G. “Complaint” means a Task Force referral or a referral from the Supervisor of Records, a written document submitted directly to the Ethics Commission alleging a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance, or a matter initiated by Ethics Commission staff alleging a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance.
- H. “Complainant” means a person or entity that initiated a matter with the Task Force, Supervisor of Records, or Commission alleging a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance. “Complainant” shall also mean the Commission if the matter was initiated by Commission staff.
- I. “Custodian” means a City officer or employee having custody of any public record.

J. “Day” means calendar day unless otherwise specifically indicated. If a deadline falls on a weekend or City holiday, the deadline shall be extended to the next business day.

K. “Deliver” means transmit by U.S. mail or personal delivery to a person or entity. The Commission, the Executive Director, the Task Force, a Respondent, or the Complainant receiving material may consent to any other means of delivery, including delivery by e-mail or fax. In any proceeding, the Commission Chairperson may order that the delivery of briefs or other materials be accomplished by e-mail.

L. “Elected official” shall mean the Mayor, a Member of the Board of Supervisors, City Attorney, District Attorney, Treasurer, Sheriff, Assessor, Public Defender, a Member of the Board of Education of the San Francisco Unified School District, and a Member of the Governing Board of the San Francisco Community College District.

M. “Executive Director” means the Executive Director of the Commission or the Executive Director's designee.

N. “Exculpatory information” means information tending to show that the Respondent has not committed the alleged violation(s).

O. “Order of Determination” means: 1) an order from the Task Force that forms the basis of a show cause hearing for Task Force referrals made under Sunshine Ordinance section 67.30(c); or 2) a final recommendation issued by the Task Force, made pursuant to Sunshine Ordinance section 67.34, that a willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance by an elected official or department head occurred.

P. “Public Records” means records as defined in section 6252(e) of the California Public Records Act, which includes any writing containing information relating to the conduct of the public's business prepared, owned, used, or retained by any state or local agency regardless of physical form or characteristics, and/or Sunshine Ordinance section 67.20(b).

Q. “Referral” means a document from the Task Force or Supervisor of Records to the Commission finding a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance.

R. “Respondent” means a City officer or City employee who is alleged or identified in a complaint to have committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance.

S. “Sunshine Ordinance” means San Francisco Administrative Code section 67.1, et seq.

T. “Task Force” means the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force, established by San Francisco Administrative Code section 67.30.

U. “Willful violation” means an action or failure to act with the knowledge that such act or failure to act was a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance.

CHAPTER TWO

I. REFERRALS TO THE ETHICS COMMISSION

A. Matters to be heard in a Show Cause Hearing.

1. Under this Chapter, the Ethics Commission will conduct a Show Cause Hearing on any referral, as defined by these Regulations, finding:
 - a. willful violations of the Sunshine Ordinance by City officers and employees (other than elected officials or department heads), or
 - b. non-willful violations of the Sunshine Ordinance by elected officials, department heads, or City officers and employees.
2. Complaints alleging willful violations of the Sunshine Ordinance against elected officials and department heads shall be handled pursuant to Chapter Three of these regulations.

B. Scheduling of Show Cause Hearing.

1. After receipt of a referral, the Commission shall schedule a Show Cause Hearing on the matter at the next regular Ethics Commission meeting, provided that the Show Cause Hearing can be scheduled pursuant to the agenda and notice requirements as set forth in Sunshine Ordinance section 67.7 and the Brown Act.
2. In the event that four or more Commissioners will not be present at the scheduled Show Cause Hearing, the Commission may reschedule or continue to the next practicable regular Ethics Commission meeting.

II. SHOW CAUSE HEARING

A. Public Hearing. The Show Cause Hearing shall be open to the public.

B. Standard of Proof. The Respondent(s) shall have the burden to show that he or she did not commit a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance.

C. Hearing Procedures.

1. Each Respondent and Complainant may speak on his or her own behalf, subject to the following time limits: **each** Respondent shall be permitted a five-minute statement; Complainant shall be permitted a five-minute statement; and **each** Respondent shall be permitted a three-minute rebuttal. At his or her discretion, the Commission Chairperson may allow additional testimony and may extend the time limit for the parties.

2. Unless otherwise decided by the Commission, formal rules of evidence shall not apply to the hearing. Each Respondent and Complainant may submit any documents to the Commission to support his or her position. Each party's written submission shall not exceed five pages, excluding supporting documents. Any documents so provided shall also be provided to the opposing party and shall be delivered to the Commission no later than five **business** days prior to the scheduled hearing. **Any party who fails to submit documents by this deadline may bring copies of the documents to the hearing and seek the Commission's approval for their submission, provided that the party brings sufficient copies for the members of the Commission, the opposing party, and members of the public.** Upon mutual consent of the Complainant(s), Respondent(s), and the Executive Director, a response may be distributed by e-mail. Commissioners may question each party or any other person providing testimony regarding the allegations. The Respondent(s) and Complainant(s) may not directly question each other.

3. If either party fails to appear and the Commission did not grant the party a continuance or reschedule the matter under Chapter IV, section I.E, then the Commission may make a decision in the party's absence.

D. Deliberations and Findings.

1. The Commission shall deliberate in public. Public comment on the matter shall be allowed at each hearing, in accordance with the Sunshine Ordinance and the Brown Act.

2. To determine that a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance did not occur, the Commission must conclude that, based on a preponderance of the evidence, the Respondent did not commit a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance. The Commission shall consider all the relevant circumstances surrounding the case.

3. The votes of at least three Commissioners are required to make a finding that a Respondent has not committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance. The finding that a Respondent did or did not commit a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance shall be supported by findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall be based on the entire record of the proceedings.

E. Ethics Commission Orders.

1. If the Commission finds that a Respondent committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance, the Commission may issue orders requiring any or all of the following:

a. the Respondent(s) to cease and desist the violation and/or produce the public record(s); and/or

b. the Executive Director to post on the Ethics Commission's website the Commission's finding that the Respondent(s) violated the Sunshine Ordinance; and/or

c. The Executive Director to issue a warning letter to the Respondent and inform the Respondent's appointing authority of the violation.

2. After making its decision, the Commission will instruct staff to prepare a written order reflecting the Commission's findings. The Chairperson shall be authorized to approve and sign the Commission's written order on behalf of the full Commission.

3. After issuing an order or instructing the Executive Director to act, or upon a finding of no violation, the Commission will take no further action on the matter.

F. Public Announcement.

Once the Commission determines that the Respondent did or did not commit a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance, the Commission will publicly announce this conclusion. The Commission's announcement may, but need not, include findings of law and fact.

CHAPTER THREE

I. COMPLAINTS ALLEGING WILLFUL VIOLATIONS OF THE SUNSHINE ORDINANCE BY ELECTED OFFICIALS OR DEPARTMENT HEADS **OR** **COMPLAINTS FILED DIRECTLY WITH THE ETHICS COMMISSION ALLEGING VIOLATIONS OF THE SUNSHINE ORDINANCE.**

A. Matters heard under this Chapter.

1. Pursuant to Sunshine Ordinance, section 67.34, the Ethics Commission shall handle complaints alleging violations of the Sunshine Ordinance by an elected official or department head.

2. Pursuant to Sunshine Ordinance, section 67.35(d), if the District Attorney and/or Attorney General take no action for 40 days after receiving notification of a custodian's failure to comply with an order made pursuant to Sunshine Ordinance section 67.21(d) or (e), then the person who made the public record request may file a complaint directly with the Ethics Commission relating to that failure to comply.

3. Ethics Commission staff may initiate a complaint to allege a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance against any City officer or City employee.

4. This Chapter will govern:

a. referrals alleging willful violations of the Sunshine Ordinance against an elected official or department head, and

b. complaints initiated under subsections A.2 or A.3 alleging violations of the Sunshine Ordinance by any City officer or employee.

5. Any referral that does not allege a willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance against an elected official or a department head shall be handled pursuant to Chapter Two of these regulations.

B. Scheduling of Hearing.

1. When the Executive Director receives a referral alleging a willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance against an elected official or a department head, or when the Executive Director receives a complaint filed under subsection A.2, or when staff initiates a complaint under subsection A.3, the Executive Director shall, within 15 business days of the conclusion of his or her investigation, schedule a public hearing at the next regular meeting of the Commission, unless impracticable, provided that the hearing can be scheduled pursuant to the agenda and notice requirements as set forth in Sunshine Ordinance section 67.7 and the Brown Act.

2. Within 15 business days of the conclusion of his or her investigation, the Executive Director shall issue a written notice and his or her report and recommendation pursuant to Chapter Three, section II.C, to each Commission member, each Respondent, and each Complainant, including the date, time and location of the hearing.

3. In the case of a referral, the Executive Director also shall provide a courtesy notice and a copy of the report and recommendation to the referring body.

II. INVESTIGATION AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Factual Investigation.

Upon receipt of a complaint, the Executive Director shall conduct a factual investigation. The Executive Director's investigation may include, but shall not be limited to, interviews of the Respondent(s) and any witnesses, as well as the review of documentary and other evidence. The investigation shall be concluded within 30 days following the Executive Director's receipt of the complaint. The Executive Director may extend the time for good cause, including but not limited to: staffing levels; the number of other pending complaints under these Regulations or the Ethics Commission Regulations for Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings; other Ethics Commission proceedings; other staffing needs associated with pending campaigns; or the cooperation of witnesses, Complainants or Respondents. If the Executive Director extends the time for the investigation to conclude, his or her reasons for the extension shall be included in the report to the Ethics Commission.

B. Subpoenas.

During an investigation, the Executive Director may compel by subpoena the testimony of witnesses and the production of documents relevant to the investigation.

C. Report and Recommendation.

1. After the Executive Director has completed his or her investigation, the Executive Director shall prepare a written report and recommendation summarizing his or her factual and legal findings. The recommendation shall contain a summary of the relevant legal provisions and the evidence gathered through the Commission's investigation. To support the report and recommendation, the Executive Director may submit evidence through declaration. The report and recommendation shall not exceed ten pages excluding attachments.

2. The report shall recommend one of the following:

a. that Respondent(s) willfully violated the Sunshine Ordinance;

b. that Respondent(s) violated the Sunshine Ordinance but the violation was not willful; or

c. that Respondent(s) did not violate the Sunshine Ordinance.

D. Response to the Report and Recommendation.

1. Each Complainant and Respondent may submit a written response to the Director's report and recommendation. The response may contain legal arguments, a summary of evidence, and any mitigating or aggravating information. In support of the response, each Complainant and Respondent may submit evidence through declaration. The response shall not exceed ten pages excluding attachments.

2. If any Complainant or Respondent submits a response, he or she must deliver the response to all parties no later than five business days prior to the date of the hearing. The Complainant or Respondent must deliver eight copies of the response to the Executive Director, who must then immediately distribute copies of the response(s) to the Commission and any other Complainant or Respondent. Upon mutual consent of the Complainant(s), Respondent(s), and the Executive Director, a response may be distributed by e-mail. **Any party who fails to submit a response by the deadline may bring copies of the response to the hearing and seek the Commission's approval for its submission, provided that the party brings sufficient copies for the members of the Commission, the Complainant or Respondent, and members of the public.**

III. PUBLIC HEARING

A. General Rules and Procedures.

1. The hearing shall be open to the public.

2. Each Complainant and Respondent may speak on his or her own behalf, subject to the following time limits: Complainant shall be permitted a ~~ten~~five-minute statement; ~~each~~ Respondent shall be permitted a ~~ten~~five-minute statement; and Complainant shall be permitted a ~~five~~three-minute rebuttal. At his or her discretion, the Commission Chairperson may allow additional testimony and may extend the time limit for the parties.

3. Unless otherwise decided by the Commission, formal rules of evidence shall not apply to the hearing. Commissioners may question each party regarding the allegations. The Respondent(s) and Complainant(s) may not directly question each other.

4. If either party fails to appear and the Commission did not grant the party a continuance or reschedule the matter under Chapter IV, Section I.E, then the Commission may make a decision in the party's absence.

5. Except when a complaint is staff-initiated or initiated pursuant to section 67.35(d), the Executive Director's role at the hearing will be limited to providing the report containing the legal and factual basis for his or her recommendation to the Commission and to respond to questions from the Commissioners.

B. Deliberations and Findings.

1. The Commission shall deliberate in public. Public comment on the matter shall be allowed at each hearing, in accordance with the Sunshine Ordinance and the Brown Act.

2. In determining whether a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance occurred, the Commission must conclude that, based on a preponderance of the evidence, the Respondent committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance. The Commission shall consider all the relevant circumstances surrounding the case.

3. The votes of at least three Commissioners are required to make a finding that a Respondent has committed a willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance or that a Respondent has committed a non-willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance. The finding of a willful violation or non-willful violation of the Sunshine Ordinance shall be supported by findings of fact and conclusions of law and shall be based on the entire record of the proceedings.

C. Ethics Commission Orders.

1. If the Commission finds that an elected official or a department head willfully violated the Sunshine Ordinance, the Commission shall so inform the Respondent's appointing authority, or the Mayor if Respondent is an elected official. In addition, the Commission may issue orders requiring any or all of the following if it finds that an elected official, a department head, or any City officer or City employee committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance:

a. the Respondent to cease and desist the violation and/or produce the public record(s); and/or

b. the Executive Director to post on the Ethics Commission's website the Commission's finding that the Respondent violated the Sunshine Ordinance; and/or

c. the Executive Director to issue a warning letter to the Respondent and inform the Respondent's appointing authority, or the Mayor if the Respondent is an elected official, of the violation.

2. After making its decision, the Commission will instruct staff to prepare a written order reflecting the Commission's findings. The Chairperson shall be authorized to approve and sign the Commission's written order on behalf of the full Commission.

3. After issuing an order or instructing the Executive Director to act, the Commission will take no further action on the matter.

D. Finding of No Violation.

If the Commission determines that there is insufficient evidence to establish that the Respondent has committed a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance, the Commission shall publicly announce this fact. The Commission's announcement may, but need not, include findings of law and fact. Thereafter, the Commission will take no further action on the matter.

CHAPTER FOUR

I. MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

A. Ex Parte Communications.

Once a complaint is filed with the Commission, no Commissioner shall engage in oral or written communications outside of a Commission meeting regarding the merits of the complaint with the Commission's staff, the Respondent(s), the Complainant(s), any member of the Task Force, the Supervisor of Records, any member of the public, or any person communicating on behalf of the Respondent(s), Complainant(s), the Supervisor of Records, or any member of the Task Force, except for communications, such as scheduling matters, generally conducted between a court and a party appearing before that court.

B. Access to Complaints and Related Documents and Deliberations.

Complaints, investigative files and information contained therein, shall be disclosed as necessary to the conduct of an investigation or as required by the California Public Records Act or the San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance. In order to guarantee the integrity of the investigation, internal notes taken by the Executive Director or his or her staff regarding complaints shall not be disclosed until the Commission has issued its final decision following the hearing.

C. Oaths and Affirmations.

The Commission may administer oaths and affirmations.

D. Selection of Designee by the Executive Director.

Whenever the Executive Director designates an individual other than a member of the Commission staff to perform a duty arising from the Charter or these Regulations, the Executive Director shall notify the Commission and the public of the designation no later than the next business day.

E. Extensions of Time and Continuances.

1. Any Respondent or Complainant may request the continuance of a hearing date in writing. The requester must deliver the written request to the Commission Chairperson, and provide a copy of the request to all other parties no later than ten business days before the date of the hearing. The Commission Chairperson shall have the discretion to consider untimely requests. The Commission Chairperson shall approve or deny the request within five business days of the submission of the request. The Commission Chairperson may grant the request upon a showing of good cause.

2. The Commission or the Commission Chairperson may reschedule a hearing at their discretion for good cause.

At any time a hearing is placed on an agenda regarding a matter under Chapter II or III of these Regulations, four or more members must be in attendance. Otherwise, the hearing shall be continued to the next regular Ethics Commission meeting, unless impracticable.

F. Place of Delivery.

1. Whenever these Regulations require delivery to the Commission, its members, or the Executive Director, delivery shall be effected at the Commission office.
2. Whenever these Regulations require delivery to a Respondent or Complainant, delivery shall be effective and sufficient if made by U.S. mail, personal delivery or any other means of delivery agreed upon by the parties under Chapter One, section II, subsection K, to an address reasonably calculated to give notice to and reach the Respondent or Complainant.
3. Delivery is effective upon the date of delivery, not the date of receipt.
4. Delivery of documents to the Commission may be conducted via electronic mail after a written request is made and approved by the Executive Director.

G. Page Limitations and Format Requirements.

Whenever these Regulations impose a page limitation, a “page” means one side of an 8½ inch by 11 inch page, with margins of at least one inch at the left, right, top and bottom of the page, typewritten and double-spaced in no smaller than 12 point type. Each page and any attachments shall be consecutively numbered.

H. Conclusion of Hearing.

For the purposes of these Regulations, a hearing concludes on the date on which the Commission announces its decision.

I. Complaints alleging both Sunshine Violations and Violations Handled Under the Ethics Commission’s Regulations for Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings.

If a complaint alleges both violations of the Sunshine Ordinance and violations handled under the Ethics Commission’s Regulations for Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings, the allegations involving violations of the Sunshine Ordinance shall be handled separately under these Regulations. Staff shall initiate a complaint of the alleged violations of the Sunshine Ordinance under Chapter Three, Section I.A.3 of these Regulations.

J. Certification by participating Commissioner if he or she did not attend proceedings held under Chapter II or III in their entirety.

Each Commissioner who participates in a decision, but who did not attend the hearing in its entirety, shall certify on the record that he or she personally heard the testimony (either in person or by listening to a tape or recording of the proceeding) and reviewed the evidence, or otherwise reviewed the entire record of the proceedings.

K. Withdrawal of complaint.

If a complainant or the referring entity withdraws a complaint that was referred to the Ethics Commission and that otherwise would be a matter to be heard in a show cause hearing under Chapter Two of these Regulations, the Ethics Commission shall take no further action on the complaint.

If a complainant who files a complaint with the Ethics Commission or if a referring entity withdraws a complaint that otherwise would be a matter to be handled pursuant to Chapter Three of these Regulations, the Commission may at its discretion dismiss the complaint at the hearing.

L. Complaint against the Ethics Commission or its staff.

To avoid the appearance of any possible conflict, if the Ethics Commission receives a referral concerning a violation of the Sunshine Ordinance by a member of the Ethics Commission, its Executive Director, or any staff member of the Ethics Commission, the Commission shall return the referral to the referring entity and shall take no further action on such referral.

To avoid the appearance of any possible conflict, if a complaint is filed directly with the Ethics Commission that alleges any violation of the Sunshine Ordinance by a member of the Ethics Commission, its Executive Director, or any staff member of the Ethics Commission, the Commission shall advise the complainant of other remedies available pursuant to applicable local and/or state law(s). Otherwise, the Ethics Commission and its staff shall take no further action on such complaint.

II. SEVERABILITY

If any provision of these Regulations, or the application thereof, to any person or circumstance, is held invalid, the validity of the remainder of the Regulations and the applicability of such provisions to other persons and circumstances shall not be affected thereby.