



Ethics Committee

Government Ethics; Guest Speaker Galena West, Executive Director of the California Fair Political Practices Commission

Item 6a

July 14, 2026

Presented by: Galena West

Executive Director,

Fair Political Practices Commission

FPPC Overview: Presentation for Metropolitan Water District of Southern California July 14, 2026



Mission of the Fair Political Practices Commission

To promote the integrity of state and local government in California through fair, impartial interpretation and enforcement of political campaign, lobbying and conflict of interest laws

The mission of the Enforcement Division of the Fair Political Practices Commission is to **fairly, effectively, and efficiently** enforce the provisions of the Political Reform Act



Questions Presented

- Oversight & Structure:
 - What is the mission of the FPPC and what is its structure?
- Responsibility for Compliance - Balancing Enforcement & Education:
 - Most effective mechanisms (disclosure systems, audits, penalties, training, etc.)
 - Types of Resolutions
 - How does the FPPC encourage compliance while also holding violators accountable?
- Interaction with Local Entities:
 - Why are relationships with local ethics entities important?



History

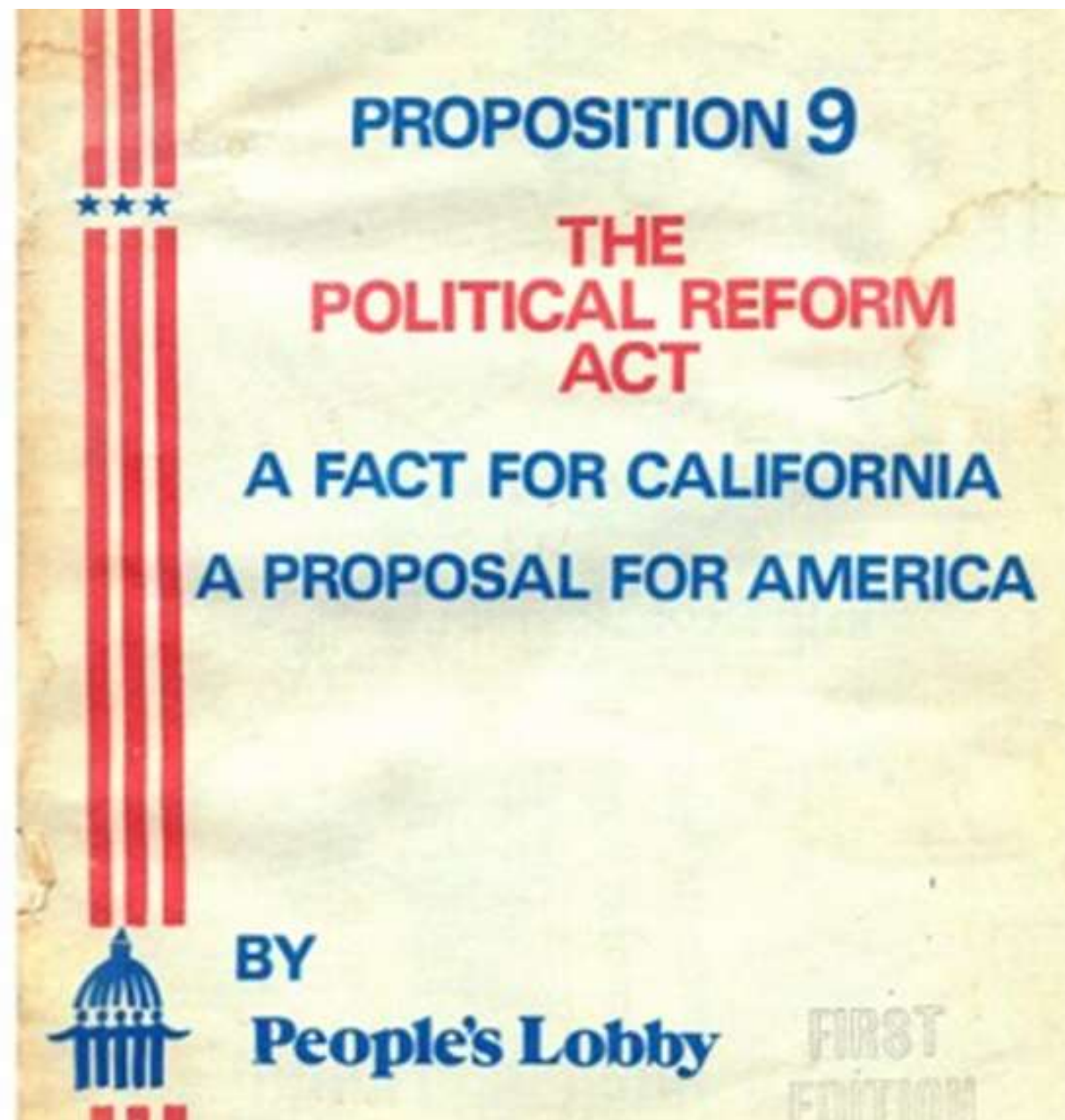
- The Act and the FPPC were created in 1974 when California voters approved Proposition 9.
- In the wake of the Watergate scandal, Californians wanted to reign in the potential corruptive influence of special interests by creating an agency to enforce the most rigorous restrictions on fundraising and lobbying in the country.
- Since the Act was adopted, additional ballot initiatives and other legislation have expanded the Act.



Purposes

The objectives of the Act are outlined in Chapter One, including:

- Election campaign receipts and expenditures must be **fully and accurately disclosed** to ensure voters are well informed and to prevent improper conduct.
- The actions of **lobbyists** should be controlled and their financial dealings revealed to prevent undue influence on public officials.
- Public officials' **assets and income**, which could be significantly impacted by their official duties, **should be disclosed**, and in certain cases, officials should be **barred from participating** to avoid conflicts of interest.
- The state ballot pamphlet should be improved to serve as a valuable resource, so voters are not solely reliant on paid advertisements for information about state measures.
- Laws and practices that **unfairly benefit incumbents** should be eliminated to promote fairer elections.
- Effective enforcement measures should be available to both public officials and private citizens to ensure that **this title is strictly enforced**. (Section 81002.)



The Chair and Commissioners



Adam E. Silver
Chair



E. Dotson Wilson
Commissioner



Alf W. Brandt
Commissioner



Elsa Ortiz
Commissioner

Vacant
Commissioner

- Five members appointed for staggered four-year terms
- Non-partisan - No more than 3 Commissioners may be from the same political party
- The Chair and one other are appointed by the Governor, then one each appointed by the State Controller, Secretary of State and the Attorney General
- The Chair is the only salaried, full-time member of the Commission



Commission Duties

- Approve settlements and administrative decisions for violations of the Act and potentially conduct administrative hearings
- Adopt, amend or rescind regulations to carry out the purposes of the Act
- Issue formal opinions interpreting the Act upon the request of concerned parties
- Approve forms for required reports, statements, notices and other documents
- Sponsor and take positions on legislation concerning the Act
- Provides oversight function



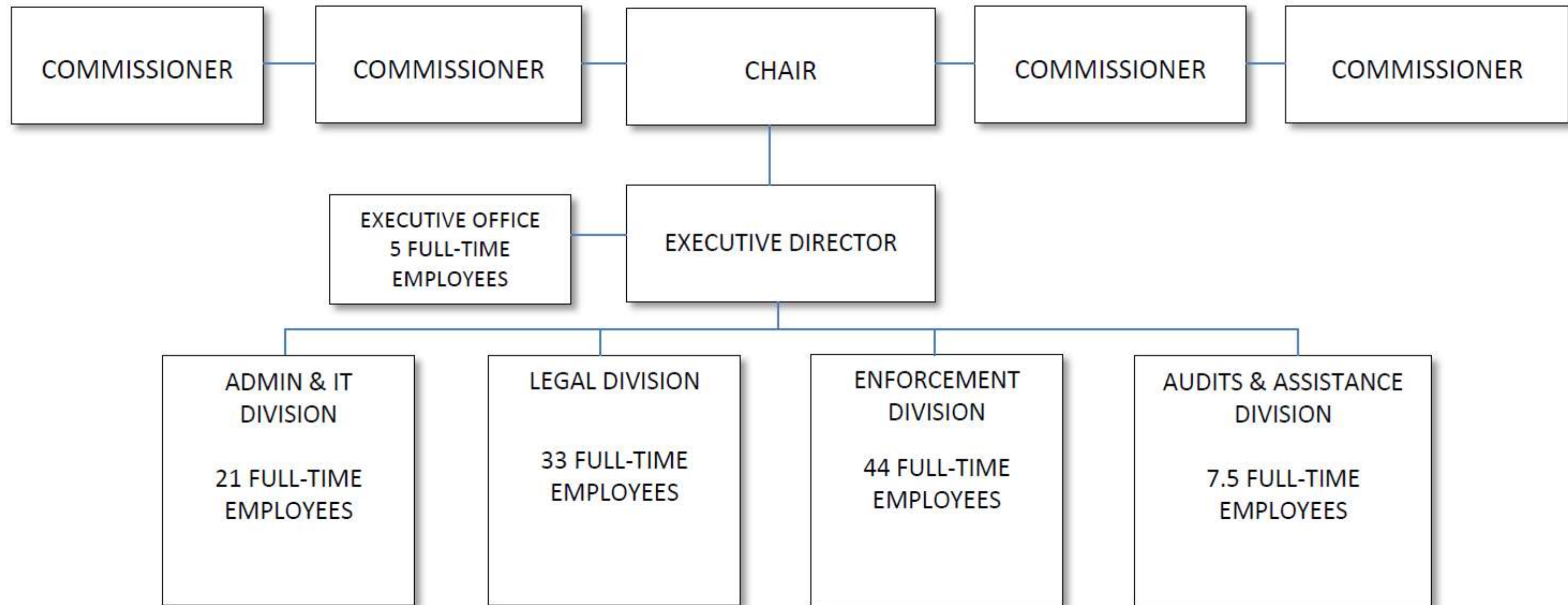
FPPC Structure

- The FPPC is an independent executive branch agency that has approximately 100 staff members.
- 2025/26 Fiscal year budget is \$19,290,000, 86% is for salaries and benefits
- Under the joint leadership of the Chair and the Executive Director, the FPPC staff is organized into four divisions:
 - Legal
 - Enforcement
 - Administration and Technology
 - Audits and Assistance





FAIR POLITICAL PRACTICES COMMISSION



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FPPC Educational Programs and Advice

- Extensive training and outreach through workshops, webinars, video tutorials, and other training materials to help individuals better understand their obligations under the Political Reform Act. In 2025, 52 trainings conducted and 5,368 total views of FPPC video tutorials.
- Develops the forms and manuals used for financial disclosures and provides telephone advice for filers, their staff, and filing officers throughout the state
- Provides advice to public officials. In 2025, 6,246 emails providing advice on compliance with the Act, 169 advice letters issued, and 4,758 telephone calls providing technical assistance.



FPPC Enforcement Division Duties

- Investigates potential violations of the Act. Enforcement cases are initiated by:
 - Complaints (Sworn, Non-sworn or Anonymous)
 - FPPC and filing officer referrals
 - Audits and audit referrals
 - Media reports
 - Staff-initiated investigations
 - Tips
 - Referrals from law enforcement/other agencies
- Prosecutes violations of the Political Reform Act through administrative and civil actions
- Provides expertise and training to law enforcement and other ethics agencies



FPPC Enforcement

- “In enacting the Political Reform Act, the people find and declare that previously laws regulating political practices have suffered from inadequate enforcement by state and local authorities.” (Gov’t Code § 81001(h))
- “Adequate enforcement mechanisms should be provided to public officials and private citizens in order that the Political Reform Act will be vigorously enforced.” (Gov’t Code § 81002(f))



FPPC Enforcement Duty to Investigate

- “Upon the sworn complaint of any person or on its own initiative, the Commission shall investigate possible violations of this title relating to any agency, official, election, lobbyist or legislative or administrative action.” (Gov’t Code § 83115)
- “...the Commission may make investigations and audits with respect to any reports or statements required by this title.” (Gov’t Code § 90003)



What the FPPC Enforces

- Financial Reporting by Public Officials (SEIs)
- Conflicts-of-Interest for Public Officials (GC 87100 & 1090)
- Gifts and Honoraria
- Post-Governmental Employment (State & Local)
- Mass Mailings & Advertising Disclosure
- Campaign Finance and Reporting
- State Lobbying



Prosecutions under the Political Reform Act

- Most violations of the Act can be prosecuted two ways:
 - Administrative
 - Civil
- Some violations can also be prosecuted criminally but **the violation must knowingly or willfully violate Political Reform Act:**
 - Violations are misdemeanors
 - Statute of Limitations – 4 years
 - If convicted, can't be candidate or lobbyist for four years (can be waived)



FPPC Administrative Prosecutions

- Most common type of FPPC action
- Can seek penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation (more for certain advertising violations)
- Statute of Limitations – 5 years (can be tolled with a PC Report, tolling agreement, or if intent to conceal)
- Applicable to all violations of the Political Reform Act
- Faster and more efficient resolution than civil court



Types of Resolutions

- **No Action closure letter** – If there is insufficient evidence to prosecute, further information would not be helpful to move forward, the allegation has been disproven, the potential violations lack sufficient public harm to pursue, includes cases resolved through the FPPC's PREP program
- **Advisory letter**– If there is insufficient evidence to prosecute a case but the person complained about appears to need information about the Act to ensure future compliance
- **Warning letter**– If a violation of the Act is found but the seriousness of the offense is low, public harm is minimal, or other mitigation is found so a monetary penalty is not warranted
- **Stipulation** – negotiated settlement – Streamline or Mainline
- **Default judgment**– Respondent does not participate in settlement or administrative hearing process
- **Administrative Law Judge Decision**– The decision is issued after an administrative hearing conducted pursuant to the Admin Procedures Act. Commission approves final outcomes.
- **Civil action**– Judgment issued by a superior court



Conflict of Interest Example

- In the Matter of Kellie Schneider, FPPC No. 19/1775 (Approved January 18, 2024.) Schneider had an economic interest in a business entity, as the business was the employer of the respondent's spouse. Schneider participated in and made a decision that had a reasonably foreseeable financial effect on that financial interest when Schneider reviewed and approved a bid from the business. Schneider failed to report this economic interest on an SEI. The Commission imposed a penalty of \$4,000 for the conflict of interest and a penalty of \$1,500 for the failure to disclose a financial interest where the reporting was filed after the conflict of interest had already occurred. Schneider stated that she had a misunderstanding about conflict of interest laws by assuming that if she personally would not directly benefit from the governmental decision, it was not prohibited to participate in that governmental decision, and she failed to disclose the relevant economic interest that led to a conflict of interest.



Conflict of Interest Example

- Warning Letter: FPPC No. 2023-00575, In the Matter of Eleassia Davis – in Davis’ former capacity as Mayor Pro Tem of the City of Tracy, complaints alleged a conflict of interest when Davis repeatedly discussed a City project, referred to as the Aquatic Center, at City Council meetings. Davis had a conflict of interest in governmental decisions related to this project because of real property owned within 500 feet of the project’s intended location.
- Mitigation for a Warning Letter:
 - Davis **consistently recused herself** from prior and subsequent agenda items that directly and specifically involved the Aquatic Center, citing the nature of your conflict and leaving the meeting.
 - Davis **received advice** from counsel that her presence at the discussions was not improper because there was no decision related to the Aquatic Center directly before the city council at the time.
 - Davis is **no longer in office**, having reached your term limit as a member of the city council.



Mainline and Streamline Resolutions

- Mainline Stipulation
 - Admission of the violations
 - Agreement on relevant facts
 - Can require amendment/filing for disclosure
 - Public disclosure through a narrative
 - Monetary fine, typically higher penalties, full payment required prior to notice on agenda
 - Noticed and approved by the Commission
- Streamline Settlement (SEI violations included but not conflict of interest violations)
 - Admission of the violations
 - Respondents must sign a standardized form and staff applies standardized criteria
 - Full payment required prior to notice on agenda
 - Can require amendment/filing for disclosure



Political Reform Education Program (PREP)

- PREP allows for the education of people who have violated the Political Reform Act but have little or no experience with the Act and commit minor violations, in lieu of monetary penalties.
- Learners who complete PREP, which is similar to traffic school, have their Enforcement cases closed with No Action Letters, leaving no mark on their record. (SEI violations included but not conflict of interest violations.)
- In 2025, PREP achieved 266 course completions, its highest number since the program's launch in 2022. Completion rate is 90%.



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Interaction with Local Entities:

- Why are relationships with local ethics entities important?
 - Education at the local level (FPPC statewide)
 - Confidential vs Public Investigations
 - Experts in the area of law – Metropolitan Water
 - Frivolous complaints handled efficiently internally
 - Case loads and timelines
 - Working relationship for advice – able to represent the public official to answer questions regarding facts; act as liaison
 - Can provide input into law changes



Case, Complaints and Referrals Last Year

Year

2025

Complaints Received

910

Referrals Received

1,518

Total Complaint and Referrals Received

2,428

Cases Opened

1,302

Cases closed

1,268

Total fines imposed

\$543,539



Questions?



