

Executive Director's Report

April 14, 2025

Board Members

We have heard nothing further from the Mayor's Office regarding re-appointments of members David Daskal and The Honorable Barbara McDonald (Ret.), whose terms expired on July 31, 2024. They "hold office until [their] successor [if someone other than themselves] has been appointed and has qualified," per §2-156-310(b). Ald. Matt Martin (47th), Chair of the City Council's Committee on Ethics and Government Oversight, has urged the Mayor's Office to reappoint them, as has Bryan Zarou from the Better Government Association. I again urge the Mayor to re-appoint both David and Barbara, who are dedicated and conscientious Board members.

Note that two other members' terms expire on July 31, 2025: Chair William Conlon's and Norma Manjarrez's. I also urge the Mayor to act swiftly to re-appoint them.

Statements of Financial Interests

On March 1, we notified all 2025 filers of their requirement to file 2025 Statements of Financial Interests; we sent out 3,925 notices. To date, 67% have filed. In particular, I wish to thank Shela Sydnor in the Office of the City Clerk. She efficiently and professionally handles personnel transactions for the entire City Council, and processes entries into the City's CHIPPS database for those within City Council who must file for the first time and those no longer required to file. We could not do our work without her and her office's assistance.

All forms filed in 2018 and after are posted and viewable here, where they stay for seven (7) years after they are filed:
<https://webapps1.chicago.gov/efis/search>

Sister Agencies

We will meet next with our ethics counterparts from the Cook County Board of Ethics, CTA, CHA, CPS, City Colleges, Park District, Metropolitan Pier & Exposition Authority, and RTA, later this month.

Education

Mandatory Online Training

In early March we released the all-new training for lobbyists, and last week, the all-new 2025 training for employees and elected officials. The all-new 2025 training for appointed officials will be released next week.

Mandatory In-person Classes and other presentations

In-person classes began again in May 2024 for those City officials and employees required to attend them once every four years (about 3,400). To date, approximately 2,500 City employees and employees have attended. We held classes on March 5, 6, 12, 19, 20, 26, and 27; and April 9, and will hold more on April 30 and May 1, 7, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28 and 29. We will conduct a class for employees in the Committee on Immigrant and Refugee Rights on April 16, another for Department of BACP on May 21, and another on June 2 for CPD and CFD personnel. We will likely add more.

We also presented to the Mayor's Office on March 21.

Advisory Opinions

Since the Board's February 10 meeting, we have issued 699 informal advisory opinions. The leading categories for informal opinions were, in descending order: Travel; Gifts; Outside employment; Statements of Financial Interests; Lobbying; City Property; Post-employment; and Conflicts of Interest.

The leading City departments from which requesters came in this period were, in descending order: Mayor's Office; Chicago Police Department/Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA)/Community Commission for Public Safety and Accountability (CCPSA); City Council; Department of Public Health; Office of Inspector General; Chicago Fire Department; Department of Law; Department of Finance; and Department of Technology and Innovation.

75% of all inquiries came from City employees or elected officials; the remainder came from attorneys, vendors, lobbyists or potential lobbyists.

Please note also that we continue to receive large numbers of complaints from members of the public: since the last Board meeting, we have received 23.

Informal opinions are confidential and not made public, but are logged, kept, and used for training and future advisory purposes. This same practice occurs with our colleagues at the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board, who issue roughly the same number of informal opinions. They form the basis for much of our annual and periodic educational programs. Formal opinions are made public, in full text, with names and other identifying information redacted out. In the past five (5) years, the Board has issued 70 formal opinions.

Summary Index of Formal Advisory Opinions/Text of all Formal Advisory Opinions

The full text of every formal Board opinion issued since 1986 is posted on the Board's website (more than 922), redacted in accordance with the Ordinance's confidentiality provisions, here:

https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/auto_generated/reg_archives.html.

Redacted formal opinions are posted once issued or approved by the Board. Summaries and keywords for each of these opinions—and a link to each opinion's text, which we added since the August Board meeting—are available on the Board's searchable index of opinions, here:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/Publications/AOindex.docx>.

A few other ethics agencies have comparable research tools. We are unaware of jurisdictions that make their *informal* opinions public — though, like us, others issue them confidentially and enable requesters to rely on them in the event of an investigation or enforcement.

Lobbyists Filings

754 individuals are currently registered with our office to lobby City employees/officials. We have collected \$309,700 in 2025 lobbyist registration fees. These numbers are substantially greater than our last report in February, when 654 lobbyists were registered, and we had collected \$260,900 in 2025 registration fees.

All 862 lobbyists registered as of December 31, 2024 were required, on or before January 21, 2025, to either re-register for 2025 or terminate, and file Q4 activity reports. As required by law, on February 19, we found 74 violations for failure to timely register or terminate, or file activity reports. The names and violations were posted here:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/EnforcementMatters/Feb%202025%20posting%20of%20violations.pdf> .

Note that, in contrast, the Ordinance provides fines of \$1,000 per day for any individual who has reached either the quarterly hourly or compensation/expenditure threshold, but then fails to register as required within five (5) City business days of reaching that threshold. Fines begin on the sixth City business day until the person registers. These fines are not capped.

On April 10, we posted a current list of registered lobbyists and their clients here:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/LobbyistStuff/LISTS/lobbyistlist.xls> .

Lobbyists' filings dating back to 2014 can be examined here: https://webapps1.chicago.gov/elf/public_search.html.

Mayoral Gifts

Staff has worked closely with the Law Department and Office of the Mayor on a protocol for reporting gifts accepted on behalf of the City by the Mayor/Office of the Mayor. Beginning in early March, such gifts have been reported weekly to the Board, and made public on our website here: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/provdrs/reg/svcs/REQ-20201.html>. The Mayor's Office will also report events or meetings where he accepts reasonable hosting, and where the Mayor accepts travel expenses from a third party, and these also will be made public on the same page on our website.

Waivers

Since July 1, 2013, the Board has had authority to grant waivers from certain provisions in the Ethics Ordinance. The Board has granted eleven (11) and denied three (3) waiver requests. In accordance with the law, all granted waivers are posted here: https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/supp_info/Waivers.html.

Summary Index of Board-Initiated Regulatory Actions/Adjudications/pre-2013 Investigations

We post a summary index of all investigations, enforcement and regulatory actions undertaken by the Board since its inception in 1986 (other than those for violations of filing or training requirements or campaign financing matters). It includes an ongoing summary of all regulatory actions the Board undertook without an IG investigation, based on probable cause findings the Board makes as a result of its review of publicly available information, where no factual investigation by the IG is necessary. *See*

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/EnforcementMatters/Invest-Index.pdf>

There are no such matters currently pending.

The Board makes public the names of all violators and penalties it assesses when authorized by law to do so. But only in those that occurred after July 1, 2013, can the Board release the names of those found to have violated the Ordinance. Since July 1, 2013, there have been nearly 90 such matters.

Summary Index of Ongoing/Past IG/LIG Investigations/Adjudications

There are currently 11 completed IG ethics investigations in various stages of the adjudicative process. More information on these cases is posted here:

<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/provdrs/reg/svcs/ongoing-summary-of-enforcement-matters.html>.

In the first, 23045.IG, a confidential administrative hearing pursuant to §2-156-392 has been underway. The City is represented by the law firm Hinshaw & Culbertson, and the matter is before ALJ Frank Lombardo. The Board is pursuing a \$20,000 fine.

In the second and third, 23054.IG and 23055.IG, the Board found probable cause at its November 2023 meeting. The Board met in February with the subject's attorney. After that meeting, the Board requested further clarification from the IG, received that clarification, and presented it to the subject's counsel. The Board found 12 violations in 23054.IG and voted to pursue a \$60,000 fine (at its April 2024 meeting). In 23055.IG, at its May 2024 meeting the Board found two (2) violations, and voted to pursue the maximum penalty of \$5,000 per violation. The subject made offers to settle both matters, which the Board rejected. At its June meeting, the Board voted to proceed with a confidential administrative hearing on both matters. The City is represented by Anthony Masciopinto, from the firm of Kulwin, Masciopinto and Kulwin. ALJ Frank Lombardo has been assigned to both matters.

In the fourth, 23067.IG.1, .2,.3, and .4, the IG delivered its completed investigation to the Board on December 30, 2023. The matter involves four (4) employees from the same City department (one of whom is now retired). The IG concluded that one of them had a prohibited financial interest in City contracts, and that two of the others knew of this violation but failed to report it to the IG as required by §2-156-018(a). At its January 2024 meeting, the Board voted to refer the matter back to the IG, because the evidence adduced in the IG's investigation appears to show that the *fourth* employee from the same department also violated §2-156-018(a) by failing to report the violation to the IG. The Board requested that the IG review its investigation, and if appropriate, petition the Board for a probable cause finding with respect to that fourth employee. The IG reviewed the matter and then petitioned the Board for a probable cause finding with respect to all four (4) employees; the Board found probable cause as to each subject. One (1) met with the Board in June 2024, another in July 2024; and a third in September 2024. At the Board's October 21, 2024 meeting, it found all four (4) individuals in violation of the Ordinance and assessed a total of \$28,500 in fines. Two (2) agreed to pay their fines (in case .01 and .03). The agreements in .01 and .03 are posted on our website. The Board referred cases .02 and .04 to the Law Department for confidential administrative hearings to collect the fines assessed. The Law Department declined to file charges in .04. As to Case No. 23067.IG.02, ALJ Frank Lombardo has been assigned to hear the matter.

In the fifth, 24003.IG, the IG delivered its completed investigation to the Board on February 2, 2024. The matter involves an investigation into the deletion of comments from an elected official's official social media account. The Board requested and received clarification from the IG on certain factual issues; at its May 2024 meeting the Board voted to seek further clarification from the IG based on the factors set out by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lindke v. Freed*: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/22-611_ap6c.pdf . The IG responded, and the matter has been continued, pending guidance from the federal courts regarding the interpretation of *Lindke*.

In the sixth, Case No. 24018.IG, a completed investigation was delivered to the Board on August 8, 2024. The IG

concluded that an elected official from a non-City jurisdiction lobbied the City, in violation of the “cross-lobbying” ban, §2-156-309 of the Ordinance. At its September meeting, the Board voted to refer the matter back to the IG for further investigation, and the IG responded in November. The Board found probable cause at its January meeting. The subject and their counsel will meet with the Board at today’s meeting in Closed session.

In the seventh, Case No. 24020.IG, a completed investigation was delivered to the Board on August 27, 2024. The IG concluded that a now-former City employee failed to disclose, on Statements of Financial Interests filed for years 2019-2021, that they had a financial interest in real estate located in the City in four (4) instances. The subject never responded to the Board’s repeated notices, first of its probable cause finding; then of its finding that the subject violated the Ordinance and is subject to \$12,000 in fines—the maximum fines for these years—until January 13, after the Board had voted to refer the matter to the Law Department for a confidential hearing to enforce its determination. ALJ Frank Lombardo has been assigned to the matter. The Board will hear a report on this matter’s status in Closed session, including settlement discussions between the subject and Law Department.

In the eighth, Case No. 24025.IG, a completed investigation was delivered to the Board on December 2. The IG concluded that a City official misused their City title and authority in a dispute with a private business. The Board voted to refer the matter back to the IG for further investigation. The IG responded on April 8, 2025, and the matter will be on the agenda for the Board’s May meeting for consideration of a probable cause finding.

In the ninth, Case No. 24027.IG, the IG delivered a completed investigation to the Board on December 23, 2024, with a request that the Board find probable cause. It involves an employee who owns a company that was a listed subcontractor on a City contract, and which received money through that subcontract, in apparent violation of the Ordinance’s prohibition on having a financial interest in a City contract, work or business, and the subject’s failure to disclose ownership of that company on their filed Statements of Financial Interests. The subject and their counsel will meet with the Board at today’s meeting in Closed session..

In the tenth, Case No. 25006.IG, the IG delivered a completed investigation to the Board on March 11, 2025, with a request that the Board find probable cause. It involves a former employee who, the IG found, has assisted a post-City employer on the very same matters that in which the employee participated personally and substantially while a City employee. The matter is on today’s agenda for a probable cause finding.

In the eleventh, Case No. 25007.IG, the IG delivered a completed investigation to the Board on March 11, 2025, with a request that the Board find probable cause. It involves a former employee who, the IG found, failed to disclose outside income in excess of \$1,000 on Statements of Financial Interests filed in 2023 and 2024 (covering 2022 and 2023, respectively). The matter is on today’s agenda for a probable cause finding.

More complete summaries of these and all IG cases are available on our website, subject to the Ordinance’s confidentiality requirements. We post on our website and continually update an ongoing investigative record showing the status of every completed investigation brought to the Board by both the IG since July 1, 2013, and the former Office of the Legislative Inspector General (“LIG”), since January 1, 2012, and the status of all 50 petitions to commence investigations presented to the Board by the LIG. We update this record as appropriate, consistent with the Ordinance’s confidentiality provisions. See <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/provdrs/reg/svcs/ongoing-summary-of-enforcement-matters.html> and <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/EnforcementMatters/PulbicScorecard.pdf>

Whenever the IG presents the Board with a completed ethics investigation in which the IG believes there have been violations of the Governmental Ethics Ordinance, the procedure that follows is governed by §2-156-385 of the Ordinance: the Board reviews the IG’s report, recommendations, and the entirety of the evidence submitted in its completed investigation, including a review to ensure that the IG conformed with the requirement that it complete ethics investigations within two (2) years of commencing them (unless there is evidence that the subject took affirmative action to conceal evidence or delay the investigation), and that the ethics investigation was commenced within five (5) years of the last alleged act of misconduct.

If the Board finds that the evidence presented warrants a finding of probable cause to believe the subject violated the Ordinance, it notifies the subject of the allegations and affords the subject the opportunity to present written submissions and meet with the Board, together with an attorney or other representative present. The Ordinance provides that this

meeting is *ex parte* – no one from the City’s Law Department or IG is present. Note that the Board may also request clarification from the IG as to any evidence found in its investigation before making a probable cause finding, or refer the matter back to the IG for further investigation (and has done so). The Board cannot administer oaths at this meeting but can and does assess the subject’s credibility and the validity and weight of any evidence the subject provides.

If the subject does not rebut the Board’s probable cause finding, the Board may enter into a public settlement agreement – or may find there was a violation and proceed to a hearing on the merits that is not open to the public. That hearing is held before an administrative law judge (ALJ) appointed by the Department of Administrative Hearings. The City would be represented by the Law Department (or a specially hired Assistant Corporation Counsel for that purpose), and the subject by their attorney. At the conclusion of that hearing, the ALJ submits findings of fact and law to the Board, which can accept or reject them, based solely on the written record of the hearing. The Board will then publicly issue an opinion in which it may find violations of the Ethics Ordinance and impose appropriate fines, or find no violation and dismiss the matter.

These processes are based on specific recommendations of then-Mayor Emanuel’s Ethics Reform Task Force in Part II of its 2012 Report—the primary purposes being to: (i) guarantee due process for all those investigated by the IG; (ii) ensure that only the Board of Ethics could make determinations as to whether a person investigated by the IG violated the Ordinance, given the Board’s extensive jurisprudence and unique expertise in ethics matters; and (iii) balance due process for those investigated by the IG with an accurate adjudication by the Board and the public’s right to know of ethics violations.

On our website, we have a publication describing this process in detail:

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/Publications/EnforceProcedures.pdf>

Note: fines range from \$500-\$2,000 per violation for non-lobbying or non-campaign financing violations that occurred before September 29, 2019, and \$1,000-\$5,000 per violation for such violations occurring between September 29, 2019, and September 30, 2022. For violations occurring on or after October 1, 2022, the fine range is between \$500 and \$20,000 per violation, and the Board may also assess a fine equal to any ill-gotten financial gains as a result of any Ordinance violation. Fines for unregistered lobbying violations remain at \$1,000 per day beginning on the fifth day after the individual first engaged in lobbying and continuing until the individual registers as a lobbyist.

Please note, finally, that, in all matters adjudicated or settled on or after July 1, 2013, the Board makes public the names of all violators and penalties assessed, or a complete copy of the settlement agreement. All settlement agreements are posted here: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/ethics/provdrs/reg/svcs/SettlementAgreements.html>

Disclosures of Past Violations

July 2013 amendments to the Ordinance provide that, when a person seeks advice from the Board about past conduct and discloses to the Board facts leading it to conclude that they committed a past violation of the Ordinance, the Board must determine whether that violation was minor or non-minor. If it is minor, the Board, by law, sends the person a confidential letter of admonition. If it was non-minor, then, under current law, the person is advised that they may self-report to the IG or, if he or she fails to do so within two (2) weeks, the Board must make that report. In 12 matters, the Board has determined that minor violations occurred, and the Board sent confidential letters of admonition, as required by the Ordinance. These letters are posted on the Board’s website, with confidential information redacted.

Open Meetings Act/FOIA Challenges

The Board is currently involved in six (5) challenges filed with the Illinois Attorney General by the same person. These challenges request:

- (1) a review of the propriety of adjourning into executive session during the Board’s September 11, 2023 meeting under the Open Meetings Act (“OMA”);
- (2) A review of the propriety of adjourning into executive session during the Board’s August 14 and September 11, 2023 meetings under OMA;
- (3) A review of the propriety of adjourning into executive session during the Board’s July 18, 2022 meeting under OMA;

- (4) A review of the Board not producing certain records pursuant to FOIA;
- (5) A review of the propriety of the Board's method of taking final action at its April 15, 2024 and May 13, 2024 meetings.
- (6) A review of the Board's proceedings in both Open and Executive Session as to Case No. 24019.Q, at its September 30, 2024 meeting.

The Board has worked with the Law Department and responded to each.

In addition, on March 8, a seventh challenge was filed with the Illinois Attorney General's PAC by a citizen, alleging that the Board violated the FOIA because it had no responsive document of instructions to persons assessed a fine by the Board as to how they should pay that fine. That challenge was dismissed by the PAC.

Freedom of Information Act

Since the February 10 Board meeting, the Board has received seven (7) FOIA requests:

The first was for all meeting minutes and meeting records for the board of trustees of the Art Institute of Chicago that took place between May 1, 2024-October 31, 2024. The Board advised the requestor that it has no responsive documents.

The second was for documents pertaining to contract negotiations between the City Local 2 Firefighters Union from January 2020 to the present between the dates 1/1/20-current. The Board advised the requestor that it has no responsive documents, and is the wrong department.

The third was for the Board's supposed meeting on April 8, 2024, as mentioned in the January 13, 2025 meeting minutes—the January 13 meetings having been posted on February 11, 2025. Those minutes, according to the requestor (the requestor is incorrect), referred to an April 8, 2024 Board meeting, and asked for the minutes of that meeting. However, the Board did not meet on April 8, 2024, so there were no responsive documents. The requestor also claimed that the minutes of the Board's January 13, 2025 meeting (posted February 11, 2025), referred to a May 2024 Board meeting. The Board advised the requestor that the minutes to the May 13, 2024 meeting are posted on our website. The requestor incorrectly claimed that failure to timely post these respective minutes of meetings violates the Open Meeting Act. *The Board, however, has timely posted all minutes of all of its meetings.* The Board advised the requestor that minutes of all of its meetings are posted on the Board's website, together with the dates of those meetings, and that no minutes are missing, except those that have not yet been approved (that is, for the Board's most recent meeting). The Board provided the requestor with a link to those minutes.

The fourth was for any disclosures and/or Statements of Financial Interests filed by an individual. The Board advised the requestor that it has no responsive documents.

The fifth was for copies of an architectural plan and plans for plumbing, pipes, all interior design, rooftop, electrical and everything on file for an association. The Board advised the requestor that it has no responsive documents.

The sixth requested records sufficient to show all lobbyist filings by a particular individual. The Board identified the request as burdensome, but pointed out the requestor where lobbyists' filed information is available on the Board's website.

The seventh was for all communications between a City Council member and a business. The Board advised the requestor that it has no responsive documents, and informed the requestor where City Council members' disclosures are posted on its website.