



July 6, 2026

Chair Shenoa Payne
Oregon Government Ethics Commission
3218 Pringle Road SE, Suite 220
Salem, Oregon 97302-1680
mail@ogec.oregon.gov

Re: Local Government's Critical Concerns Regarding the Oregon Government Ethics Commission Organizational Integrity

Dear Chair Payne:

On behalf of our collective membership organizations and the local government entities we represent, we are writing to formally express a shared and deepening concern regarding the Oregon Government Ethics Commission's (OGEC) current trajectory. Local governments are committed to our shared goals of strong government ethics and transparency in public deliberations and decision making by governing bodies. We rely on a functional partnership with OGEC to meet these goals. Unfortunately, our organizations' confidence in OGEC's integrity and its ability to competently interpret and enforce state statutes is declining rapidly.

Openness and good faith are the cornerstones of any functional partnership, and those elements are lacking in our current partnership. Our collective trust has been eroded by a pattern of behavior where the OGEC's Executive Director's public statements are in direct conflict with her private actions. This is evidenced by the public disavowal of her own staff's training—which inaccurately advised elected officials to avoid the press under the guise of those interactions violating the public meetings law—and her private advocacy for a veto of HB 4177 despite a public commitment of neutrality on the bill. These instances represent a significant departure from the transparency required of her position and suggest an institutional lack of candor that we can no longer overlook.

The OGEC holds substantial power to penalize local elected leaders – the majority of whom are unpaid volunteers only wishing to serve their community. This power must be wielded with care, respect, and strict adherence to legislative intent. We find that the requisite care, respect, and strict adherence to the legislative intent is missing.

- Local governments have observed a consistent pattern where the OGEC interpretations diverged so sharply from statutory intent that legislative intervention (HB 4161 and 4177) became necessary during the 2026 legislative session to restore clarity.
- Equally troubling is the OGEC's insistence on interpreting statutes without regard for the operational realities of local government. This is clearly demonstrated in recent "[FAQ](#)" guidance that characterizes a city administrator's independent outreach as a prohibited serial meeting, effectively penalizing elected officials for the unilateral actions of staff. This interpretation erroneously presumes the "use" of an intermediary without evidence that the council directed or intended for the administrator to facilitate a serial deliberation. In a

practical environment, intent is the defining factor; it is irrational to impute personal liability to a locally elected volunteer for the unilateral actions of a third party they cannot control or for failing to cross-examine every administrative interaction.

- Finally, there is a clear disconnect between the volume of investigations and the Commission's ultimate findings. Despite a massive surge in public meeting law cases—up 128% in 2024 and 46% the following year—total fines remained completely flat. This stability in penalties demonstrates that the commission is largely dismissing or declining to penalize these additional cases, proving that the spike in activity does not reflect an increase in genuine wrongdoing.

In vetoing HB 4177, the Governor directed the Commission to work “urgently, diligently, and openly” with stakeholders—including the signatories of this letter—to provide clarity on the laws governing local leaders. She further committed her office to collaborating with these groups and the media to develop a workable policy solution for the 2027 legislative session.

Our organizations are prepared to answer that call in a transparent and proactive manner. We intend to engage thoughtfully with the Governor’s office, the Legislature, and the news media; we hope to do the same with the OGEC. However, the cumulative deficiencies and systemic issues outlined in this letter have made it increasingly difficult to rely on OGEC leadership’s credibility or fairness. Because we can no longer rely on staff-level engagements to resolve these fundamental concerns, we are requesting a special meeting with the full Commission to establish a direct, collaborative path forward that aligns with the Governor’s mandate for institutional transparency. The leaders of our respective organizations have been directed to support scheduling this conversation and representing our organizations in that meeting.

Thank you for your attention and for your efforts to restore our partnership.



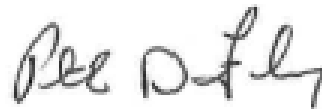
Carol MacInnes
Board President, League of Oregon Cities



Erin Skaar
Board President, Association of Oregon Counties



Kathy Kleczek
Board President, Special Districts Association of Oregon



Pat Fahey
Board President, Oregon Community College Association

CC OGEC Appointing Authorities:
Governor Tina Kotek
Senate Majority Leader Kayse Jama
Senate Minority Leader Bruce Starr
House Majority Leader Ben Bowman
House Minority Leader Lucetta Elmer
Senate President Rob Wagner
Speaker Julie Fahey