



Public Hearing on a Proposed Rule or Ethics Opinion Regarding Prohibitions on Elected Prosecutors from Seeking or Accepting Political or Financial Support from Law Enforcement Unions

On June 1, 2020, three current elected district attorneys (Contra Costa, San Francisco, and San Joaquin) and one former district attorney (San Francisco) submitted a letter to the State Bar requesting the promulgation of a new Rule of Professional Conduct – or issuance of an ethics opinion – that would prohibit an elected prosecutor, or a candidate for that office, from seeking or accepting political or financial support from law enforcement public employee unions.

On July 2, 2020, the State Bar's Interim Executive Director Donna Hershkowitz wrote a letter to the DA's identifying potential legal issues, including constitutional law issues, that would need to be reviewed to analyze the proposal. The July 2 letter also stated that Chair and Vice-Chair of the State Bar Board of Trustees had referred the DA's request to the State Bar's Committee on Professional Responsibility and Conduct (COPRAC) for an in-depth, comprehensive analysis.

As part of that effort, COPRAC is holding a public hearing via Zoom on Tuesday, August 11 at 10:00 a.m. to receive input regarding this proposal. Information about how to join the meeting is provided below.

COPRAC invites both written and oral public comment. COPRAC's own initial research and the public comment received at their July 24, 2020 meeting have identified a number of specific questions they would particularly welcome comment; however, commenters will not be limited to these questions and may provide comments on other issues:

The Nature and Extent of the Problem

1. Can you provide us with data or studies concerning the extent of elected prosecutors' failing to investigate or prosecute unlawful conduct by police officers? Is the problem uniform, or are there particular jurisdictions where it is more or less severe?
2. Can you provide us with data or studies addressing the following questions:
 - a. How large are direct contributions that law enforcement unions are making to local district attorney races, both in absolute amounts and the percentage of total contributions they represent? Are their particular local jurisdictions where the amount or percentage of union contributions appears to be especially high?
 - b. How much political support, other than direct contributions, are law enforcement unions providing in local district attorney races, whether in the form of donations to PACs, in kind donations, volunteers or otherwise? Are there other interest groups that also provide such support? Are there particular local jurisdictions where the amount or relative importance of political support from law enforcement unions appears to be especially high?
 - c. In many counties, it appears, direct union contributions would be limited to relatively modest levels - \$300 to \$500 per election. In counties where such restrictions are in effect, do they eliminate the risk or appearance of impropriety?
 - d. In counties which currently have no contribution limits, AB 571 will, starting in January, impose state law limitations on contributions to county and municipal elections. Will those provisions reduce or eliminate the problem?
 - e. Are there other restrictions on the financial or political support that law enforcement can provide to candidates for elected prosecutor?

Relevance and Effectiveness of Existing Conflict of Interest Provisions

3. To the extent that the problem is one of conflict of interest, why are existing conflict of interest standards, including Rules of Professional Conduct 1.7 and 1.10, Penal Code section 1424, and related case law regarding ethical walls or screening, inadequate to address the problem?
4. If existing law is not effective to address the problem, how would an ethics opinion construing that law be helpful?
5. How are conflict of interest issues typically handled within a district attorney's office? Is there any mechanism for informed written consent to a conflict? Is there uniformity of approach across the state, or is each office different?

Constitutional Questions

6. What conduct is encompassed in "seeking or accepting financial or political support?" Is a restraint on speech framed in those terms unconstitutionally vague? If so, what changes would have to be made to avoid that problem?
7. Assuming a ban on "seeking or accepting political or financial support" constitutes a restraint on protected speech, what standard of justification must be met for speech restrictions of this kind and would it be met here? Is the standard of justification the same for financial support as it is for political support? Can you point us to what you think is the federal and state case law that speaks most directly to the validity or invalidity of such restraints?
8. The proposed rule singles out financial and political support from a single type of donor, public employee law enforcement unions. Does this raise any additional issues, under either First Amendment or Equal Protection principles? Again, citations to the authorities deemed most relevant would be very helpful.
9. Some constitutional analyses turn on whether there are other, less restrictive means of achieving the same goal. Are any less restrictive means available here?
10. Can you point to any cases where similar restrictions have been enacted in this or other jurisdictions? Were those restrictions challenged, and if so, were they upheld?

Relevance of Other State Law

11. Does the history, structure and operation of Penal Code Section 1424, including its express rejection of appearance of impropriety as a basis for disqualification, have any implications for the proposed rule or for its enactment by the Supreme Court rather than the legislature?
12. How does the proposed restriction compare with the ways in which California regulates elected judges' seeking or accepting contributions or support?
13. Are there other California laws which bar elected officials from seeking support from particular classes of donors and how do they bear on this situation, if at all?
14. Would the proposed restrictions be consistent with other California statutes regulating local government campaign contributions, such as the Political Reform Act of 1974 and the recent amendments thereto in AB 571 and with section 81013 of the Government Code? In particular, is the Supreme Court a state agency who is empowered to enact further contribution restrictions on local government elections under section 81013?

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment as well as those who wish to simply observe the proceeding may access the public hearing on August 11 at 10:00 a.m. as follows:

Public Hearing [Notice and Agenda](#)

Zoom Link: <https://calbar.zoom.us/j/98699303214>

Call-In Number: 669-900-9128

Webinar ID: 986-9930-3214

We have created a speaker registration form in order to estimate the number of speakers and allot time accordingly. If you plan on providing oral comment, please fill out this [form](#). This form will also allow you upload any written materials in support of your comment. If you are unavailable, or do not wish to speak, but would like to submit a written comment you may use this [form](#) to submit your comment.

June 1, 2020

Alan Steinbrecher
Chair, Board of Trustees
State Bar of California
180 Howard St.
San Francisco, CA 94105

Donna Hershkowitz
Interim Executive Director
State Bar of California
180 Howard St.
San Francisco, CA 94105

RE: Ethics rule change request to reduce conflicts of interest for prosecutors.

Dear Chair Alan Steinbrecher and Interim Executive Director Donna Hershkowitz:

We are a coalition of current and former elected prosecutors representing millions of Californians in diverse counties across our golden state. In the wake of the recent killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others in California and beyond, we strongly urge the State Bar to implement a new rule of professional responsibility to reduce the possibility of political influence from law enforcement unions over prosecutorial decision making.

Across California there are dozens of law enforcement unions representing rank-and-file police officers, sheriff's deputies and correctional officers. These unions play a major role in local, state and even national politics. They are well-funded, and purport to represent the interests and positions of law enforcement in elections and on issues before the voters and the legislature. Their political endorsements are provided only to candidates whom they believe share their particular vision of public safety and whom they believe will advance their interests. When the unions grant an endorsement, they often also provide financial support to their endorsed candidate.

Prosecutors are in a unique position of having to work closely with law enforcement officers and evaluate whether some of those same officers have committed crimes. When prosecutors initiate an investigation or prosecution of an officer, law enforcement unions often finance their members' legal representation.

Receiving an endorsement and campaign contributions from an entity that finances opposing counsel creates, at a minimum, the appearance of a conflict of interest for elected prosecutors. District Attorneys will undoubtedly review use of force incidents involving their members. When they do, the financial and political support of these unions should not be allowed to influence that decision making.

The State Bar's Rules of Professional Conduct generally prohibit a lawyer from representing a client when, "the lawyer has ... a legal, business, financial, professional, or personal relationship with or responsibility to a party or witness in the same matter" ("Rule 1.7, Conflict of Interest," 2018). Further, the California Court of Appeal found in *People v. Vasquez* (2006) 39 Cal.4th 47, 45 Cal.Rptr.3d 372, 137 P.3d 199, "[A] 'conflict,' for purposes of California Penal Code § 1424, 'exists whenever the circumstances of a case evidence a reasonable possibility that the DA's office may not exercise its discretionary function in an evenhanded manner. Thus, there is no need to determine whether a conflict is 'actual' or only gives an 'appearance' of conflict.'" Similarly, the American Bar Association's rules governing conflicts of interest reference a slew of responsibilities related to financial or political interests for prosecutors. Specifically, "a prosecutor who has a significant personal, *political*, *financial*, professional, business, property, or other relationship with another lawyer should not participate in the prosecution of a person who is represented by the other lawyer" [emphasis added] ("Standard 3-1.7 Conflicts of Interest," 2017).

These rules and decisions were ostensibly crafted for the purpose of avoiding a conflict, or the appearance of a conflict, that exists when an attorney, or prosecutor, has a political or financial relationship with opposing counsel. These rules therefore suggest an elected prosecutor should either avoid soliciting financial contributions and support from an attorney representing an accused officer, or to recuse their office from a prosecution where the prosecutor has received financial or political support therefrom. These rules, however, do not preclude the attorney or prosecutor from soliciting or receiving financial support from an individual or organization that is financing opposing counsel. It is illogical that the rules prohibit prosecutors from soliciting and benefiting from financial and political support from an accused officer's advocate in court, while enabling the prosecutor to benefit financially and politically from the accused's advocate in public.

In order to cure this conflict, or the appearance of a conflict, the rules must therefore explicitly preclude elected prosecutors—or prosecutors seeking election—from seeking or accepting political or financial support from law enforcement unions. Such a rule change will not only help to avoid conflicts and ensure independence on the part of elected prosecutors, it will also enhance trust in our criminal justice system at a time when it is sorely needed.

Whether the State Bar takes action in the form of a new rule of professional conduct or an ethics opinion-the goal is the same: to protect the integrity of the prosecutorial function, the fair administration of justice, and restore public trust in law enforcement. Given the urgent national situation, we request an expedited review of this request. We appreciate your time and consideration on this incredibly time sensitive and important matter.

Diana Becton
Contra Costa County District Attorney

Chesa Boudin
San Francisco District Attorney

George Gascón
Former San Francisco District Attorney

Tori Verber Salazar
San Joaquin County District Attorney

CC: Alan Steinbrecher, Chair
Sean M. SeLegue, Vice-Chair
Mark Broughton, Trustee
Hailyn Chen, Trustee
José Cisneros, Trustee
Juan De La Cruz, Trustee
Sonia T. Delen, Trustee
Ruben Duran, Trustee
Chris Iglesias, Trustee
Renée LaBran, Trustee
Debbie Y. Manning, Trustee
Joshua Perttula, Trustee
Brandon N. Stallings, Trustee



The State Bar of California

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

845 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90017

donna.hershkowitz@calbar.ca.gov
213-765-1356

SENT VIA EMAIL

July 2, 2020

Hon. Diana Becton
Contra Costa County District Attorney

Hon. Chesa Boudin
San Francisco District Attorney

Hon. George Gascón
Former San Francisco District Attorney

Hon. Tori Verber Salazar
San Joaquin County District Attorney

RE: Proposal for Ethics Rule Change Regarding Elected Prosecutors

Dear District Attorneys Becton, Boudin, Gascón, and Salazar:

This letter is in response to your June 1, 2020, letter requesting that the State Bar adopt a Rule of Professional Conduct or issue an ethics opinion prohibiting elected prosecutors, or those seeking election to a prosecutorial post, from seeking or accepting political or financial support from law enforcement unions. To determine the appropriate next steps regarding this important matter, the State Bar has conducted a preliminary analysis of the issues you raised and the solution you proposed. Consideration of your proposal requires analysis of existing statutory and decisional law, including constitutional limitations. We want to advise you of the results of our preliminary analysis and the procedure the State Bar has established for further consideration of your proposal.

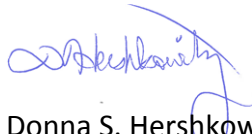
Our initial review identified some significant constitutional concerns with the solution you proposed, including possible First Amendment and equal protection issues. We also note that a statute enacted last year, which will take effect on January 1, 2021, addresses the issue of political contributions to those running for county and local office, including candidates for district attorney. Assembly Bill 571 ("AB 571") will impose state-wide limits on political contributions made by individuals or entities to candidates running for county and local office if local limitations do not otherwise exist. (See Assembly Bill 571 (2019-2020 Reg. Sess.) § 1(g).) Applied to the question of law enforcement union contributions to candidates for district attorney, AB 571 thus limits—but does not prohibit—contributions that such unions can make. Adopting a Rule of Professional Conduct that precludes elected prosecutors, or those seeking such office, from accepting any contribution from a law enforcement union could be said to conflict with AB 571, which permits such contributions, limiting only their amount.

In addition, limitations on political contributions have been the subject of significant constitutional challenges in recent years. In consideration of such issues, one alternative could involve addressing whether a district attorney's office has a conflict of interest in any case where the office is investigating any crime committed by, or misconduct of, a law enforcement officer, if the district attorney has taken a financial contribution from the officer, a police union that represents that officer, or the agency that employs or employed the officer. Our preliminary research identified potential issues with this approach as well. For instance, such a rule could be said to conflict with the statutory or decisional law that currently governs this area. As a result, pursuing a statutory change or litigating the matter through judicial decision is an alternative to your proposal to the State Bar for consideration.

In addition to the legal issues identified above, the policy issue you raise is without doubt deserving of thoughtful attention and analysis. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the State Bar Board of Trustees, therefore, have referred the matter to the State Bar's Committee on Professional Responsibility and Conduct (Committee) for a more in depth, comprehensive analysis. I want to give you an overview of the process the Committee will follow.

The Committee will have a preliminary briefing on this matter during its July 24 meeting. In addition, the Committee intends to hold a special session in August devoted solely to receiving input on this proposal so that there will be sufficient opportunity for public comment and thorough discussion on this important issue. We invite you and others interested in this issue matter to address the issues identified in this letter—and any other point related to the proposal—at the Committee's special meeting in August. For more information about the meeting, please feel free to contact Lauren McCurdy at lauren.mccurdy@calbar.ca.gov. We look forward to engaging with you further as the Committee's work progresses.

Sincerely,



Donna S. Hershkowitz
Interim Executive Director

cc: State Bar Board of Trustees
Steven M. Bundy, Chair, Committee on Professional Responsibility and Conduct
Dena M. Roche, Vice-Chair, Committee on Professional Responsibility and Conduct



June 16, 2020

Sent Via U.S. Mail

Alan Steinbrecher
Chair, Board of Trustees
State Bar of California
180 Howard St.
San Francisco, California 94105

Donna Hershkowitz
Interim Executive Director
State Bar of California
180 Howard St.
San Francisco, California 94105

Re: Response to the request to change ethics rules for prosecutors

Dear Chair Alan Steinbrecher and Interim Executive Director Donna Hershkowitz:

On June 1, 2020, a coalition of four current and former District Attorneys sent a letter urging the California State Bar to pass a Rule of Professional Conduct prohibiting prosecutors from accepting political donations from police unions. Peace Officers Research Association of California (“PORAC”) strongly opposes the proposed rule, which is an overt attempt to muzzle the political speech of organizations opposed to these candidates of so-called criminal justice reform. The pretextual basis for the proposed rule-potential conflicts in the prosecutions of peace officers-are easily managed under the existing Rules of Professional Conduct. The true motivation for the rule change is to silence their political opponents while imposing no constraints on the political participation of organizations conditioning their support for District Attorney candidates on predetermined charging decisions, a reduction of incarceration through lower sentences, refusal to seek the death penalty, and hinging prosecutorial decisions on immigration status.

The proposed rule intentionally discriminates against law enforcement unions and violates their First Amendment rights. Moreover, the proposal is a political ploy designed to increase the electoral prospects of its authors by silencing the political voice of their opponents who advocate for victims’ rights and justice. The proponents’ insincerity is demonstrated by the omission of any constraints on the organizations representing criminal defendants and prisoners, who not only have an direct interest in the District Attorneys’ exercise of their discretion but also condition support on a predetermination of cases that will come before them. The establishment of a partisan political advantage has no place in the rules that govern the ethical duties of the legal profession.

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary



I. The Proposed Rule is Unconstitutional

A. The First Amendment protects campaign endorsements and expenditures.

It is well established that unions have the right to freedom of speech under the First Amendment. (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) 588 U.S. 310 (*Citizens United*)). This includes the right to make campaign expenditures. (*Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) 424 U.S. 1.) In *Woodland Hills Residents Association, Inc. v. City Council of City of Los Angeles* (1980) 26 Cal.3d 938, 946, the California Supreme Court affirmed that campaign donations are protected political speech, and that a donation in itself does not give rise to a conflict of interest. The court determined that city council members could not be disqualified from voting on a subdivision map for a conflict of interest merely because developers had donated to the council members' campaigns. (*Ibid.*) The court stated, "Political contribution involves an exercise of fundamental freedom protected by the First Amendment..." (*Ibid.*) "To disqualify a city council member from acting on a development proposal because the developer made a campaign contribution to that member would threaten constitutionally protected political speech and associational freedoms." (*Ibid.*) In *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal, Co., Inc.* (2009) 556 U.S. 868, 884, the U.S. Supreme Court found that a judge should have recused himself from a case where one of the parties had contributed significantly to his campaign. However, the Court noted that this was "an exceptional case," and there was a "serious risk of actual bias" because of the disproportionately large donation. (*Ibid.*) Further, disqualification rules applicable to adjudicators are even more stringent than those that govern the conduct of prosecutors. (*County of Santa Clara v. Superior Ct.* (2010) 50 Cal.4th 25, 56 fn.12.) This case law makes clear that campaign endorsements and financial contributions to a campaign are forms of protected political speech, and do not create a conflict of interest.

B. The proposed rule violates the First Amendment because it is viewpoint-based.

Perhaps the most important principle of the First Amendment is that the government cannot regulate speech based on its content or viewpoint. (See, e.g., *Police Department of Chicago v. Mosley* (1972) 408 U.S. 92, 95; *R.A.V. v. City of Saint Paul* (1992) 505 U.S. 377, 382.) Content based restrictions on speech are "presumptively invalid." (*R.A.V. v. City of Saint Paul, supra*, 505 U.S. at p. 382.) Thus, courts use strict scrutiny when evaluating laws or regulations that discriminate against speech because of the viewpoint it espouses. (*Turner Broadcasting System v. Federal Communication Commission* (1994) 512 U.S. 622; see also *United States v. Playboy Entertainment Group, Inc.* (2000) 539 U.S. 803.)

The proposed rule is undeniably viewpoint based. It prohibits campaign contributions and endorsements by law enforcement unions alone and does nothing to prevent other organizations from contributing to D.A. campaigns. It is no accident that the members of the coalition are not supported by their local law enforcement unions. Adopting such a rule would allow the coalition's

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary



supporters to contribute to their campaigns while silencing their opponents. It is a political maneuver masquerading as an ethics rule, and it cannot withstand constitutional muster.

The proposed rule is overbroad, speculative, and fails to genuinely address the issue of a conflict. To pass the high standard of strict scrutiny, the law must be narrowly tailored to achieve a compelling government interest. (*United States v. Playboy Entertainment Group, Inc.*, *supra*, 539 U.S. at p. 813.) The coalition claims that the rule is justified to prevent any conflict of interest that might arise if a D.A. was forced to prosecute a member of the police union that had contributed to that D.A.'s election. Ensuring the integrity of the legal profession and effectively dealing with conflicts of interest is undoubtedly a compelling government interest. However, this proposed conflict is speculative and attenuated. The authors of this proposed rule are assuming that an individual officer may be charged, that the police union may fund their defense, that the union may have supported the D.A. who is handling the case, and that the D.A. will not recuse themselves in light of the conflict. This sort of speculation does not meet the high standard that strict scrutiny requires.

A blanket rule restricting police unions' participation in prosecutor elections is not a necessary or even effective solution. Attorney General Xavier Becerra has already analyzed the issue and came to the same conclusion: D.A. campaign contributions alone do not give rise to a conflict of interest. (See Enclosure A.) Should a true conflict of interest arise, the D.A. can simply recuse themselves from the case and ask another attorney to handle it. A hypothetical future conflict should not be used as justification to suppress the rights of one class of people.

II. The True Purpose for the Rule is to Promote the Authors' Political Agenda

This proposal is not only unconstitutional, it is disingenuous. It is not surprising that the D.A.s advocating for this rule are opposed by their local law enforcement unions. Forbidding union participation in elections would take money and resources away from their opponents. Meanwhile, the coalition would remain free to accept contributions from their own supporters. A sincere proposal would eliminate contributions and endorsements to D.A. races from all organizations, regardless of their viewpoint or politics. In short, it makes little sense to forbid police unions from contributing to elections, but continue to allow progressive groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), California Attorneys for Criminal Justice, or the National Association for Criminal Defense Lawyers to do so.

Review of police use of force makes up less than 1 percent of a D.A.'s duties. 99 percent of their time is spent prosecuting and charging accused criminals. The coalition's supporters have political agendas that create a much more direct and reoccurring conflict. For example, the ACLU's Campaign for Smart Justice seeks to "empower a new generation of prosecutors committed to reducing incarceration." (ACLU, *ACLU Launches New Initiative to Overhaul Prosecutorial Practices* (April 26, 2017) <<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-launches-new-initiative->

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary



[overhaul-prosecutorial-practices](#)>.) The Equal Justice Initiative advocates for ending mandatory minimum sentences and habitual offender statutes. (Equal Justice Initiative, *Criminal Justice Reform* <<https://eji.org/criminal-justice-reform/>> [as of June 12, 2020].) Billionaire George Soros has channeled millions of dollars into D.A. campaigns with the goal of expanding drug diversion programs and reducing sentences. (Bland, *George Soros' quiet overhaul of the U.S. justice system*, Politico (August 30, 2016) <<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/george-soros-criminal-justice-reform-227519>>.) These policies go to the heart of the D.A.'s job. Electing D.A.'s who promise to implement these sorts of policies will affect how 99 percent of the D.A.'s duties are carried out. This certain conflict is far broader than the hypothetical conflict with police unions that the rule is designed to address.

In a clear example of this conflict, the ACLU of California sends out a questionnaire to all D.A. candidates to help their affiliates determine which candidate to back. (ACLU of Cal., *California District Attorney Candidate Questionnaire* (2018) <<https://www.cdca.org/wp-content/uploads/ACLU-California-District-Attorney-Candidate-Questionnaire.pdf>> [as of June 8, 2020].) Some of these questions include:

- Will you commit to implementing practices that will reduce the jail population and reduce state prison commitments by a specific percentage by the end of your first term? (Question 2.)
- Do you commit to ending the use of money bail in this County? (Question 12.)
- Will you pledge to adopt a written policy and training which encourages prosecutors to consider the unintended immigration-related consequences of prosecutorial decisions at all stages of a case and to use their discretion to reach immigration-safe dispositions for noncitizens whenever it is possible and appropriate? (Question 17.)
- Will you commit to keeping all children out of adult court by pledging not to prosecute any minors as adults and by expanding the use of informal diversion and pre-filing diversion in juvenile cases? (Question 20.)

Not only does this questionnaire condition support on pre-determining cases that have not yet arisen, it also constitutes a commitment to deny individuals equal protection in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The advocates of criminal defendants and convicted individuals call for the D.A. to charge and treat individuals differently based on immigration status. If a state or local legislature were to enact a law that made distinctions on who to prosecute based on race, ethnicity, or immigration status, it would be promptly invalidated on constitutional grounds. D.A.'s, by contrast, can achieve a similarly discriminatory result under the guise of prosecutorial discretion.

In sum, if the Bar is inclined to implement policies that bar speech due to a conflict of interest, the ACLU and other criminal justice reform groups have a much larger conflict. The questions posed

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary



in the questionnaire and the policies they advocate for involve the core functions of the D.A.'s Office. The way a D.A. answers these questions will have a huge impact on their community. Allowing progressive organizations to have a say in electing D.A.'s but barring police unions from doing so creates an uneven playing field. It allows one side to impose the candidates and policies they support while stifling competing viewpoints. Adopting such a rule would be unconstitutional and unjust.

III. There are Already Effective Systems in Place to Deal with Conflicts of Interest

As the coalition's letter mentions, there are already Rules of Professional Conduct that address how attorneys should respond when faced with a conflict of interest. Rule 1.7 prohibits a lawyer from representing a client when, "the lawyer has...a legal business, financial, professional, or personal relationship with or to a party or witness in the same matter." (State Bar Rules Prof. Conduct 1.7.) Further, the American Bar Association has outlined standards for prosecutors. These standards include that prosecutors should not allow their "professional judgement or obligations to be affected by the prosecutor's personal, political, financial, professional, business, property or other interests or relationships." (3 ABA Stds. for Crim. Justice (4th ed. 2017), The Prosecution Function standard 3-1.7(f).) When such a conflict exists, "the prosecutor should recuse from further participation in the matter." (*Id.* at standard 3-1.7(a).)

Penal Code section 1424 also deals with recusal of a D.A.'s office due to a conflict of interest. Under section 1424, recusal of a D.A.'s office requires proof of a conflict of interest that makes it unlikely that the defendant could receive a fair trial if that D.A.'s office prosecutes the case. A conflict has been described as "a structural incentive for the prosecutor to elevate some other interest over the interest in impartial justice, should the two diverge." (*People v. Superior Court (Humberto S.)* (2008) 43 Cal.4th 737, 754.) "[A] prosecutor's interest should coincide with the interest of the public in bringing a criminal to justice and should not be under the influence of third parties who have a particular axe to grind against the defendant." (*People v. Parmar* (2001) 86 Cal.App.4th 781, 797 (*Parmar*).)

There are very few published cases in which a disabling conflict has been found. These cases generally only arise when an employee of the D.A.'s office is a victim of a crime, the D.A. represented the defendant previously, or the D.A.'s office received money for investigative costs from a victim. (See *People v. Conner* (1983) 34 Cal.3d 141 [D.A. employee victim of the crime]; *People v. Lepe* (1985) 164 Cal.App.3d 685 [D.A. previously represented the defendant]; *People v. Eubanks* (1996) 14 Cal.4th 580 [D.A. received money from the victim]). As stated in *Parmar*, "... *Eubanks* and virtually every other disqualification case has been concerned with situations in which the prosecutor has either had a personal interest or been claimed to be under the influence of a private party with a personal interest in the prosecution of the particular defendant, usually by virtue of having been a victim." (*People v. Parmar, supra*, 86 Cal.App.4th at p. 795.)

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary



In the rare case that there is a true conflict of interest, D.A.'s have a myriad of ways to resolve the conflict. In many instances, conflicts of interest can be handled by establishing an ethical wall around the affected employee. (See *Stark v. Superior Court* (2011) 52 Cal.4th 368; *People v. Gamache* (2010) 48 Cal.4th 347; *People v. Hamilton* (1985) 41 Cal.3d 211; *People v. Sy* (2014) 223 Cal.App.4th 44; *Hambarian v. Superior Court* (2002) 27 Cal.4th 826; *People v. Lopez* (1984) 155 Cal.App.3d 813; and *Trujillo v. Superior Court* (1983) 148 Cal.App.3d 368.) If there is a conflict with the office as a whole, another D.A.'s office, the Attorney General, or the U.S. Attorney can take over the case. If their impartiality is questioned after the fact, they can ask the Attorney General or U.S. Attorney to review their work. These measures can, and do, cure conflicts of interest in the small number of cases that they arise.

IV. Conclusion

This proposed rule is frankly inappropriate and exploitative. It is a poorly disguised attempt to silence the author's opponents and amplify the voices of their supporters. There are already rules and systems in place to deal with any legitimate conflicts of interest that might arise between prosecutors and police unions. It makes little sense to bar the participation of police unions but allow progressive groups that have a much more direct conflict to continue bankrolling D.A. elections. Arguably, under the rationale advanced by the coalition, *all* contributions or endorsements to *any* attorney who runs for elected office should be prohibited. Ultimately, this is not about true conflicts of interest. It is a political issue. It should be dealt with at the ballot box and not in the Rules of Professional Conduct.

Very Truly Yours,
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Peace Officers Research Association of California

Brian R. Marvel
President

Enclosure(s)

Brian R. Marvel
President

Damon Kurtz
Vice President

Timothy Davis
Treasurer

Randy Beintema
Secretary

XAVIER BECERRA
Attorney General

State of California
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



1300 I STREET, SUITE 125
P.O. BOX 944255
SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2550

Public: (916) 445-9555
Telephone: (916) 210-7687
Facsimile: (916) 324-2960
E-Mail: Michael.Farrelle@doj.ca.gov

RECEIVED

MAR 05 2018

ANNE MARIE SCHUBERT
District Attorney

February 28, 2018

Assistant Chief Deputy District Attorney Michael Blazina
Sacramento District Attorney's Office
901 G Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Conflict of Interest Analysis – Campaign Contributions

Dear Mr. Blazina:

In your letter, dated February 5, 2018, you asked whether campaign endorsements and contributions from an individual or an organization present a conflict that bars the District Attorney from impartially deciding whether to prosecute a case in which that individual is a potential defendant. Your questions focused on an officer-involved-shooting case in which an officer being prosecuted was a member of a labor union that had endorsed and financially contributed to the district attorney's campaign. The short answer to these questions is that there is no conflict.

Under Penal Code section 1424, recusal of a district attorney's office requires proof of a conflict of interest that makes it unlikely that the defendant could receive a fair trial if the district attorney's office prosecutes the case. A conflict has been described as "a structural incentive for the prosecutor to elevate some other interest over the interest in impartial justice, should the two diverge." (*People v. Superior Court (Humberto S.)* (2008) 43 Cal.4th 737, 754.) "[A] prosecutor's interest should coincide with the interest of the public in bringing a criminal to justice and should not be under the influence of third parties who have a particular axe to grind against the defendant." (*People v. Parmar* (2001) 86 Cal.App.4th 781, 797 (*Parmar*).)

Published cases in which a disabling conflict has been found are few and generally fall into the following three categories: an employee of the district attorney's office is a crime victim (see *People v. Conner* (1983) 34 Cal.3d 141, *Lewis v. Superior Court* (1997) 53 Cal.App.4th 1277; *People v. Jenan* (2006) 140 Cal.App.4th 782); the district attorney represented the defendant previously (*People v. Lepe* (1985) 164 Cal.App.3d 685); or the district attorney's

office received money for investigative costs from a victim (see *People v. Eubanks* (1996) 14 Cal.4th 580). As stated in *Parmar*, "...*Eubanks* and virtually every other disqualification case has been concerned with situations in which the prosecutor has either had a personal interest or been claimed to be under the influence of a private party with a personal interest in the prosecution of the particular defendant, usually by virtue of having been a victim." (*People v. Parmar*, *supra*, 86 Cal.App.4th at p. 795.)

In many instances, cases with conflicts of interest can be handled by a district attorney's office after an ethical wall has been established around the affected employee. (See *Stark v. Superior Court* (2011) 52 Cal.4th 368; *People v. Gamache* (2010) 48 Cal.4th 347; *People v. Hamilton* (1985) 41 Cal.3d 211; *People v. Sy* (2014) 223 Cal.App.4th 44; *Hambarian v. Superior Court* (2002) 27 Cal.4th 826; *People v. Lopez* (1984) 155 Cal.App.3d 813; and *Trujillo v. Superior Court* (1983) 148 Cal.App.3d 368.) That focus on fair adjudication of a case is borne out by the fact that failure to recuse a district attorney's office can be harmless on appeal when the district attorney's office "did not infringe upon defendants' state or federal rights to due process of law." (*People v. Vasquez* (2006) 39 Cal.4th 47, 66.) An ethical wall ensures that a defendant receives a fair trial.

The few published cases ordering recusal, as well as courts' acceptance of ethical walls in lieu of recusal, demonstrate that recusal is a disfavored remedy that appellate courts have cautioned should be exercised with "particular caution." (*People v. Lopez* (1984) 155 Cal.App.3d 813, 821-822.) The policy reasons for this position were set out in *Lopez*:

'when the entire prosecutorial office of the district attorney is recused and the Attorney General is required to undertake the prosecution or employ a special prosecutor, the district attorney is prevented from carrying out the statutory duties of his elected office and, perhaps even more significantly, the residents of the county are deprived of the services of their elected representative in the prosecution of crime in the county. The Attorney General is, of course, an elected state official, but unlike the district attorney, is not accountable at the ballot box exclusively to the electorate of the county. Manifestly, therefore, the entire prosecutorial office of the district attorney should not be recused in the absence of some substantial reason related to the proper administration of criminal justice.'

(*Id.*, at p. 822, quoting *Younger v. Superior Court* (1978) 86 Cal.App.3d 180.)

As to whether political contributions create a conflict of interest, it was claimed in another case that city council members should have been disqualified from voting on a subdivision map because developers had donated to the council members' campaigns. The Supreme Court stated, "Political contribution involves an exercise of fundamental freedom

protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and article I, section 2 of the California Constitution.” (*Woodland Hills Residents Association, Inc. v. City Council of City of Los Angeles* (1980) 26 Cal.3d 938, 946.) “To disqualify a city council member from acting on a development proposal because the developer had made a campaign contribution to that member would threaten constitutionally protected political speech and associational freedoms.” (*Ibid.*) The Court further found that law governing disclosure of campaign contributions “provides for disclosure of campaign contributions by recipients of contributions rather than disqualification of recipients from acting in matters in which the contributor is interested.” (*Ibid.*)

While the act precludes an elected official from participating in a decision in which he has ‘a financial interest’ (Gov. Code, § 87100), it expressly excludes from definition of ‘financial interest’ the receipt of campaign contributions. (Gov. Code, §§ 87103, subd. (c), 82030, subd. (b). Thus, the Political Reform Act -- dealing comprehensively with problems of campaign contribution and conflict of interest -- does not prevent a city council member from acting upon a matter involving the contributor.

(*Id.*, at pp. 946-947; see also *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal, Co. Inc.* (2009) 129 S.Ct. 2252, 2263 [“exceptional case” where campaign contributions required recusal of a judge]. Disqualification rules applicable to adjudicators are even more stringent than those that govern the conduct of prosecutors. (*County of Santa Clara v. Superior Ct.* (2010) 50 Cal.4th 25, 56 FN 12.)

Accordingly, the mere fact of campaign endorsements and financial contributions to a campaign does not create a conflict of interest for a district attorney. Case law makes clear that a conflict of interest stems from the district attorney’s perspective, not the public’s perception, and is rooted in the ability of a district attorney to wield discretion in a way to ensure that the defendant will receive a fair trial. The factual hypotheticals posed in your letter do not suggest that the District Attorney could not be fair to defendants who had either individually, or as part of an organization, endorsed or contributed financially to the District Attorney’s re-election campaign.

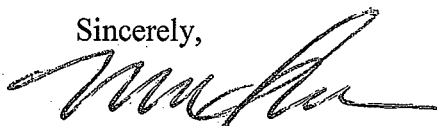
Your final question is, even if there was no legal conflict disabling the district attorney, would the Attorney General’s Office conduct a review of an officer-involved shooting simply to avoid an appearance of conflict? Sound policy counsels otherwise. The primary duty for enforcement of law in a particular county rests with the local district attorney, who is elected by the citizens of that county. Significant good cause is called for to warrant departure from the standard of Penal Code section 1424.

Additionally, the Attorney General’s unavoidable constraints of personnel, funds, and other resources require that the Penal Code section 1424 standard be taken seriously.

Assistant Chief Deputy District Attorney Michael Blazina
Sacramento District Attorney's Office
February 28, 2018
Page 4

Thank you for your letter. And, of course, you are always welcome to call me if you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Farrell", written over the printed name.

MICHAEL P. FARRELL
Senior Assistant Attorney General

For XAVIER BECERRA
Attorney General