



## CHANGE Illinois Testimony: Fully Empower the Office of the Legislative Inspector General

*April 13, 2021*

*Illinois House Ethics and Elections Committee*

*To: Chair Burke and committee members*

*From: Ryan Tolley, Policy Director of CHANGE Illinois*

Thank you Chair Burke and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Ryan Tolley and I am the policy director of CHANGE Illinois and the CHANGE Illinois Action Fund. Both are nonpartisan nonprofits that educate, engage and advocate for ethics and efficiency in governments and elections.

For the last committee hearing, we submitted written testimony on critical issues that should be considered in an ethics reform package: Banning state officials from lobbying local governments, instituting a revolving-door ban on lawmakers immediately becoming lobbyists and lobbyist disclosure of “bundler fundraising,” among others. Today, our recommendation focuses solely on the Office of the Legislative Inspector General.

The Legislative Inspector General Office was created in 2003 to serve as watchdog over the legislative branch to ensure that misconduct is investigated and people are held accountable for their actions. Along with its investigative authority, its role is not only to root out bad actors, but to act as a shield for the many employees of the legislative branch to ensure they don't have to work in an environment where they are subjected to misconduct like sexual harassment.

After the office was established in 2003, a rule was issued that undercut the authority of the Legislative Inspector General. It requires the office seek approval from the Legislative Ethics Commission in order to start investigations after receiving allegations of misconduct.

Furthermore, at a February 6 hearing last year before the Joint Commission on Ethics and Lobbying Reforms, two former Legislative Inspectors General, Tom Homer and Julie Porter, along with the current Legislative Inspector General, Carol Pope, all said the office's independence is limited and agreed that the office should be able to start investigations, issue subpoenas and publish reports without approval by the Legislative Ethics Commission. According to meeting notes from that hearing, Porter and Pope both said they believed that their founded reports of misconduct were not published in an effort by the Legislative Ethics Commission to “bury” reports.

We strongly agree with the recommendations of those three Legislative Inspectors General. The Legislative Inspector General's office was created to serve as a watchdog over the legislative branch of government. It defies common sense that the Legislative Inspector General must receive approval from a group of lawmakers before launching an investigation of a lawmaker. The Legislative Inspector General's office should be given the



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full, independent authority it needs to complete its duties and to publish all results of founded investigations without interference from the very people it is supposed to oversee.

The Legislative Inspector General's office already has many guardrails in place and those who lead the office are held to a very high standard to qualify for the position. The following qualifications are required to even be considered for the role:

- Has not have been convicted of a felony
- Has earned a bachelor's degree
- Must have 5 or more years of service with law enforcement or as an investigator, prosecutor or judge.
- May not be a relative of anyone serving on the Legislative Ethics Commission
- Must be certified by both the Speaker of the House and the President of Senate after receiving an affirmative vote by three-fifths from both chambers

Changes to empower the Legislative Inspector General's office were not included in the ethics omnibus, SB 3071 House Amendment #2, that was filed during the lameduck session. We urge this committee to adopt our recommendations to fully empower the LIG's office in any ethics reform package. It is vital to establishing the Legislative Inspector General's office as truly independent and to starting to restore the people's trust in their government officials. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Tolley  
Policy Director  
CHANGE Illinois