

# SUPERVISORS MOVE FORWARD ON ETHICS COMMISSION AMID DEBATE OVER ROLE OF SHERIFF, D.A.

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The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved a plan to create an Ethics Commission, following a lengthy debate over whether the new panel could be truly independent if it includes members appointed by elected officials – and if so, which officials.

In the end, the board agreed on a 7-member commission, with appointments to be made by the county assessor, the board chair, and the elected executive – but not the sheriff or the district attorney. The three appointees will then select the four other members after an application and vetting process.

Until the first elected executive takes office in 2028, that official's appointment will be made by the [Governance Reform Task Force](#), the body advising the Board of Supervisors on how to implement the sweeping governance overhaul adopted by voters in 2024 as Measure G.

County lawyers were instructed to return to the board with a draft ordinance by June 30. The commission is to be created by Aug. 6, and members appointed by Sept. 20.

But they won't constitute the "independent Ethics Commission" required by Measure G. Many of the features intended to confer independence would violate the county charter. Voters will be asked to fix that with a charter amendment on Nov. 3.

The ostensible subject of the board hearing was the nuts and bolts of the new commission. But the discussion took place against a backdrop of an ongoing and often heated debate over the role and power of law enforcement in L.A. County.

The Task Force recommendation excluded the sheriff and district attorney as appointing authorities. Supervisor Lindsey Horvath's motion, unveiled on May 13, added the two officials to the process, but at the board meeting Horvath agreed to Supervisor Holly Mitchell's amendment to leave them out.

The debate over whether to exclude the sheriff and D.A. dates back to a series of bi-weekly Task Force meetings earlier this year that divided members and prevented a unanimous vote on the ethics package.

Several Task Force members said they represent communities that are fearful of or oppressed by law enforcement and don't want the two officials to have any role in naming ethics commissioners.

Derek Hsieh, the executive directors of the largest union of sheriff's deputies (the Association of Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs, or ALADS), ultimately signed off on the proposal despite the exclusion of the sheriff because, he said, the overriding concern was to get a consensus recommendation to the supervisors.

But Task Force Chair Marcel Rodarte voted against the plan because it excluded the sheriff and the D.A. Rodarte is the executive director of the [California Contract Cities Association](#), an organization of cities that contract for law enforcement and other services with Los Angeles County or, in a few cases, other local governments.

The association made its objections official in an April 28 letter to the board. Appointments should be made only by people who are directly accountable to voters, it wrote, and should not exclude any countywide elected officials.

Others objected to the plan for the opposite reason. OUR LA, "a multiracial, multi-generational, multi-issue, and intersectional coalition of community-based organizations and racial justice advocates," urged in a May 13 letter to the board that no elected official have direct appointment power, and that a majority of commissioners be selected through a public application process and randomized drawing.

In response to Horvath's original motion, the coalition wrote the board again, to "express our deep discontent and disappointment."

Supervisor Janice Hahn floated a motion to ask the Task Force to start over, and come back with an appointment plan modeled on the independent redistricting commission that state law imposed on the county.

That suggestion was discouraged by Sara Sadhwani, the Task Force member who led the effort to craft the ethics proposal. Sadhwani, who was also a member of the redistricting commission, said the idea would probably be too difficult to put in place at this early stage of the county Ethics Commission.

There is some irony in the decision to let the assessor appoint a member to the Ethics Commission but not the district attorney. [Former Assessor John Noguez](#) is currently on trial for bribery. [District Attorney Nathan Hochman](#) is the former president of the Los Angeles City Ethics Commission.

Several members of the public testified that the sheriff and D.A. are both at the center of ethical misconduct, including alleged deputy gangs and wrongful prosecutions.

That objection may reflect the fact that neither the Task Force nor the Board of Supervisors has led an extensive public discussion about what an ethics commission does – and does not do. Such commissions generally manage campaign finance programs, including filing of required disclosure forms. They often manage public campaign matching fund programs to lessen the advantage of wealthy candidates and large donors. They regulate lobbying, and sometimes contracting, to guard against conflicts of interest. They investigate alleged official misconduct – but they don't generally have any jurisdiction over the professional ethics or standards of police, prosecutors or other officials in non-financial or non-campaign matters. They can impose administrative fines but cannot impose criminal sanctions.

Mitchell asked county lawyers to report back on whether the ethics measure on the November ballot could include a solution to the Measure J / Measure G problem.

Measure J was a 2020 charter amendment to set a spending floor for alternatives to incarceration. Measure G was the 2024 amendment that requires an independent ethics commission, an elected executive, an expanded Board of Supervisors and other reforms. It was inadvertently drafted to overwrite Measure J.

A court hearing is scheduled for July in a lawsuit to reconcile the two measures.

[Yet another charter reform](#) is already slated for the November ballot. Although its substance is unrelated to Measure G or the Ethics Commission, it falls within the same political landscape.

Proposed by Horvath, the as-yet unnamed ballot measure would alter the current process for resolving labor contract disputes with county employees in the Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department, the District Attorney's Office and other public safety agencies. Instead of the board imposing its last, best and final offer, any impasse over wages, hours and other conditions of employment would be referred to binding arbitration.

Law enforcement unions favor the move and widely applauded Horvath for persuading the board to put the measure on the ballot.