

**To: The Joint Commission on Ethics and Lobbying Reform**  
**Re: Written statement for Feb. 6, 2020 hearing**

Thank you, Chairperson Harris and Chairperson Sims. Thank you, members of this commission.

My name is Adam Schuster, and I am writing on behalf of Illinois Policy. Our staff has spent a significant amount of time researching and working on legislation relating to the role of the Legislative Inspector General.

For the past year, a steady stream of news stories highlighted instances of public corruption in Illinois. Two bodies, the Legislative Ethics Commission, and the Office of the Legislative Inspector General, are specifically charged with holding members of the General Assembly accountable for ethics violations.

But the structure of the commission and the lack of needed independence given to the inspector general render the process of complaints against lawmakers opaque to the public and create the appearance of lawmakers protecting their own.

The current structure of the ethics commission leaves the appointment of commissioners entirely in the hands of the legislative branch, and all of the current members of the commission are members of the General Assembly.

The LIG could provide more of an outside check on the commission, but the office is hindered by its lack of independence. Under the current process, the lawmakers on the commission can grant or deny permission to the LIG to open investigations, to issue subpoenas, and to publish summary reports, even if the LIG finds that a complaint is founded.

The LIG need not have these handcuffs placed on the office. The Illinois Executive Inspector General, responsible for investigating the executive branch, can already initiate investigations and issue subpoenas without approval of the Executive Ethics Commission.

The LIG should be entrusted with comparable authority, especially when the commission she reports to is made up of eight members of the General Assembly she is charged with investigating.

Illinois Policy has drafted bill language that would empower the inspector general to open investigations in response to a complaint and issue subpoenas without approval from the lawmakers on the Legislative Ethics Commission. More importantly, it would allow the Legislative Inspector General to make her summary reports public if her investigation finds that wrongdoing has occurred.

When allegations against members of the General Assembly are made, it can be difficult for the public to know whether there is any basis. And because the Inspector General has to gain the approval of lawmakers before pursuing investigations or publishing findings, it is

understandable that the public might think members will protect their own. Moreover, given that the Legislative Ethics Commission needs five of eight members to agree to take any official action, four members can deny the LIG's request on a party line vote.

However, by granting the Legislative Inspector General more authority to act independently, members of the General Assembly can assuage some of these concerns. By giving the Inspector General the authority to open investigations in response to complaints, to issue subpoenas in the course of those investigations, and to publish summary reports in the case of a finding of wrongdoing, the public will have more faith that corruption will be exposed if and where it exists, rather than buried by politicians watching out for their colleagues.

Adam Schuster  
Budget and Tax Research Director  
Illinois Policy Institute  
190 S. La Salle St., Suite 1500  
Chicago, IL 60603