

01.06.09 - Task Force Report Released

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Ethics Task Force Report Released

January 5, 2009

As Delivered

I am joined here today by Ben Clements, my chief legal counsel, and several members of the Task Force of Public Integrity to announce their unanimous recommendations to strengthen the Commonwealth's ethics and lobbying laws.

As you all know, several recent charges of illegal, unethical conduct by public officials have rocked the State House. While the people who work in state government are overwhelmingly honest, fair and above-board, the actions of a few have cast a cloud over all. So, sixty days ago, I asked Ben to form a bi-partisan commission - a task force to examine the current rules for ways they could be clarified and strengthened.

Today, we are announcing the results of their review and their recommendations. Although the overall framework of existing laws is generally good, the Task Force identified significant gaps and weaknesses for enforcing... in the mechanisms for enforcing the ethics and lobbying laws. I'll give you a couple of examples. The State Ethics Commission has insufficient regulatory and investigatory authority to enforce the ethics laws. The Secretary of State has even less authority to enforce the lobbying laws. The Attorney General has authority to enforce criminal violations, but is hampered by the lack of several enforcement tools commonly available in other jurisdictions.

Accordingly, the Task Force has made a series of recommendations to significantly strengthening... strengthen the rulemaking, investigative, and enforcement authority of the Commission, the Secretary of State, and the Attorney General. The penalties for violating the rules are significantly enhanced as well. And the bill requires periodic training for all public employees in what is expected of us under the rules. Ben will take you through these in detail in just a moment.

No one can legislate morality. But we can assure ourselves and the public that the consequences for breaching the public trust will be serious, swift and certain.

I believe these recommendations accomplish that end. I will therefore file legislation tomorrow, on the first day of the new legislative session, to enact these recommendations into law. I call on the legislature to act on this bill within the first 30 days of the session.

I want to thank Ben Clements for his leadership and all the members of the Task Force for their important contributions. Their hard work helps affirm the principle that the currency of democracy is not money, but rather integrity and participation.