

Governor Deval L. Patrick

Testimony before the Special House Committee on Ethics

State House, Boston, MA

January 26, 2009

Chairman Fagan and members of the Committee:

Good afternoon and thank you for convening this important hearing. I especially appreciate your going ahead with the hearing as scheduled even with the Speaker's announcement today. I know you agree the public expects us to remain focused on the people's business.

My experience gives me absolutely no reason to doubt that most public servants are honest and fair. But the actions of a few have cast a cloud over all. Recent charges of illegal and unethical conduct by those few have rocked the

State House and shaken the public's confidence in their government. We owe the people nothing less than a thorough re-examination of the current rules for ways that they can be clarified and strengthened.

That was my charge to the Public Integrity Task Force, which I convened in November, as the Chairman said. I thank Ben Clements, my Chief Legal Counsel, and all the members of the Task Force, many of whom are here – including you, Mr. Chairman – for your very thoughtful and unanimous recommendations to strengthen the Commonwealth's ethics and lobbying laws.

The bill before you reflects those recommendations. I urge you to act swiftly and favorably, and specifically to

move it to the full House for enactment in the next week or two.

Although the framework of existing rules is good overall, the Task Force identified significant gaps and weaknesses in the mechanisms for enforcing the ethics and lobbying laws. 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 of these laws, but is hampered by the lack of several enforcement tools commonly available in a number of other jurisdictions. Accordingly, our legislation significantly strengthens the rulemaking, investigative, and enforcement authority of the Commission, the Secretary of State, and the Attorney

General. It also increases penalties for ethics and lobbying violations to bring them in line with our times. Finally, it requires mandatory education and training for government employees and lobbyists.

No one can legislate morality – I've heard that from many. But we can assure ourselves and the public that the consequences for breaching the public trust will be serious, swift and certain. I believe this legislation accomplishes that end.

Again, I thank Ben Clements for his leadership and all the members of the Task Force, again thanking you Mr. Chairman, for your important contributions. Your good work helps affirm the principle that the currency of democracy is integrity and participation. I hope we can work together to

pass this bill by next week and shift our focus to the many other challenges facing our Commonwealth. Thank you all for your time and consideration.