



For Immediate Release

June 7, 2019

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Bill King ethics reforms will bring sunshine to city hall

Mayoral Candidate Bill King has unveiled a sweeping package of ethics reforms designed to safeguard against corruption and increase accountability and transparency within Houston city government.

"Everywhere I travel across this city, people are fed up with the pay-to-play and cronyism," said King. "They are sick and tired of the fact that people who make large campaign contributions play by a different set of rules than everyone else. They have lost their patience with the City hiding how their tax money is spent."

King's plan includes creation of a truly independent Office of Inspector General who is not beholden to any one entity, but instead reports to a tribunal of the mayor, city controller and one City Council member selected by a council vote in which the mayor is not allowed to participate. Currently, the OIG is under the supervision of the city attorney who is hired by the mayor.

King also fully supports the End Pay-to-Play Petition to place new limits on city campaign contributions. If that petition effort should fail for any reason, King will place the reforms on the city council agenda for approval when he is mayor. All campaign contributions would be loaded into a searchable database that is more user-friendly than the current system.

Houstonians will be able to sign the End Pay-to-Play Petition until July 8. The petition limits contributions from City contractors and vendors to \$500 per year, prohibits contributions from those sitting on City boards and commissions and prohibits contributions from strip clubs and other sexually-oriented businesses. Forty thousand signatures are needed.

The rest of King's plan is focused on increasing fiscal responsibility and openness to public information. Contracts will be awarded based on lowest responsible bid rather than the current process that is very subjective and often results in costing taxpayers more money and fewer projects being completed. All contracts and vendor payments will be available in a searchable online database and all contracts that fall below the \$50,000 threshold that triggers the need for City Council approval will be listed in the Monthly Financial and Operations Report. In addition, King will restore to the annual budget document hundreds of pages of details about how taxpayer money is spent that were removed by the Turner Administration.

Finally, King would reform the way public information requests are handled. All documents for which the city has discretionary authority to release or withhold will only be withheld upon the approval of both the mayor and city controller.

"It will obviously take new leadership to reform City Hall," King said. "But just new leadership is not enough. If we are to truly end the corruption and get back to the basics, we must overhaul our ethics rules and take steps to guarantee transparency in how the City conducts its business. Sunshine is the best disinfectant."

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