

M. Zachary Mezera  
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May 15, 2020

Dear Chairman Kanter—

Effective today, I hereby tender my resignation as a member and Vice Chair of the Providence Ethics Commission.

As you know, I deeply value the work and goals of the Commission, and I regret being unable to complete my term. However, my new employment situation presents the potential for conflicts of interest, or for perceived conflicts of interest. In order to protect the Commission's public standing, I believe it is best that I resign before my new role begins on May 18.

Ethics oversight in our city is important work, and I'm grateful for all who have united over the years to advance this cause. That begins with everyone in the early 2000s who established the Providence Code of Ethics—here there are too many to name. I am also grateful to Mayor Jorge Elorza for leading the push to empanel the first Providence Ethics Commission in 2015, and to then-Council President Luis Aponte for partnering in that effort. I also want to thank the current members of the City Council, including Council President Sabina Matos, for their ongoing support of the Commission. I would also like to thank the various City employees who are critical to the Commission's work, including our legal aid from the City Solicitor's office and the City Clerks and meeting stenographers. Finally, my deepest gratitude to the hardworking local journalists whose coverage has helped keep our own body accountable to City residents.

As the longest-serving member of the Providence Ethics Commission, I have been party to the work of attempting to generate an effective Commission as best possible, using the outline provided by the Providence Ethics Code. Since 2015, the Commission has made important strides in developing its own practices and procedures, including holding transparent meetings, establishing regulations, and processing its first cases. I am grateful to Chairs Susann Mark and Andrew Kanter for their leadership, and for the chance to have served alongside so many talented and committed appointees to the Commission over the years.

However, it is my opinion that shortcomings in the original Code of Ethics itself have left our city residents under-protected. Ambiguities in the language of the Code, and the need for dedicated staffing, have at times made it difficult or near-impossible for the Providence Ethics Commission to process complaints with the haste and confidence that our residents deserve. In my observation, ways to further strengthen the Code include, but are not limited to:

- Requiring and funding an independent Executive Director / Chief Prosecutor who reports directly to the Providence Ethics Commission (similar to the structure of the Rhode Island Ethics Commission);
- Strengthening the Commission's ability to investigate ethics concerns absent a complaint (as already provided for in Providence Ethics Commission Regulation 2016-2);

IN CITY COUNCIL  
MAY 21 2020

READ  
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT  
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

*Sam Bell* CLERK

- More clearly defining and upholding the process and limits of “Initial Screening” of complaints—see Providence Ethics Commission Regulation 2016-2(c)(i)—prior to the formal opening of a complaint investigation;
- Requiring rapid hearings and action on regulations proposed by the Providence Ethics Commission to the City Council, to ensure that proposed regulations (like ours re: whistleblower protections) do not languish in committee; and
- Empowering and funding the Commission to conduct its own communications with the public.

By no means do I intend to suggest that a more powerful Providence Ethics Commission would uncover rampant corruption in Providence. On the contrary, my experience on the Commission has allowed me to work first-hand with numerous City employees who have displayed the very definition of ethical behavior. In that light, I believe a fully empowered Providence Ethics Commission would primarily serve to uplift the good work done every day by our public employees and elected officials, and ultimately increase residents’ confidence in our City. To me, this is a cause worth investing in.

Thank you again for your partnership and commitment to advancing ethical governance in the City of Providence. I have deeply appreciated the chance to serve our neighbors in this way.

Sincerely,



M. Zachary Mezera

CC: Members of the Providence Ethics Commission  
Mayor Jorge O. Elorza  
City Council President Sabina Matos  
Jeffrey Dana, City Solicitor  
Adrienne Southgate, Deputy City Solicitor  
Shawn Selleck, City Clerk