

TRUST COMMISSION

2026 REPORT



NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL | NJOAG.GOV
TRANSPARENCY AND RELIABILITY UNITING TO SECURE TRUST COMMISSION

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Letter from Commission Chair, Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin

Trust. Transparency. Accountability. A thriving democracy requires that the people can trust their government to serve the public's interest. It requires that government be transparent about its motives and operations. And it requires that government is accountable to the people it serves. Sadly, as we near our nation's 250th anniversary, polls show that trust in government in our nation is at historic lows. But it does not have to be that way.

As New Jersey's Attorney General, I have made rooting out corruption, in all its forms, a priority. Any time a public official abuses their office, or places their private interests above the public good, real people suffer the consequences.

Too many in this Country and in New Jersey feel that the wealthy and well-connected play by a different set of rules. Corruption, and the perception of corruption, destroys the fundamental agreement between the government and the people we swear an oath to serve. It fosters a cynicism about public servants that is all too pervasive today, ultimately, undermining our democracy.

The TRUST (Transparency and Reliability Uniting to Secure Trust) Commission, which I established in January 2025, had one overarching goal - to develop a set of ideas and recommendations to restore the public's confidence in its government and to strengthen the connection between government and the people.

The recommendations contained in this report are not a panacea, but they offer pathways for progress as the Department of Law and Public Safety continues its efforts to root out corruption and ensure that our government responds to the needs of New Jersey's residents.

My thanks to each of the 11 TRUST Commission members for their willingness to serve. And a sincere thank you to the scores of New Jerseyans who submitted written comments to the Commission or who attended our listening sessions in Burlington and Essex Counties. As they spoke, their belief in democracy and their love for the state we all call home was evident. Their decision to come forward and share their concerns in a public forum served as a reminder of why the work of the TRUST Commission was so vital.

With the Commission's work now complete, we look forward to working with the incoming Administration to continue the good work.

Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin

Commission Members

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New Jersey Attorney General | Commission Chair

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Introduction

In January 2025, Attorney General Platkin established the TRUST (Transparency and Reliability Uniting to Secure Trust) Commission, which was designed to strengthen the connection between the Department of Law and Public Safety (DLPS) and the people of New Jersey. The TRUST Commission was borne out of a recognition that the public's trust in government has been eroded by New Jersey's unfortunate history of public corruption and the all-too-common perception that the wealthy and well-connected play by a different set of rules. Thus, the Commission was tasked with recommending ways DLPS can further the Attorney General's mission of eliminating corruption, promoting transparency, and strengthening the public's trust in government.

The Commissioners were chosen for their unique perspectives, expertise, and shared commitment to promoting a fair and just system of government. They include community advocates, scholars, former members of the judiciary, and former prosecutors, who have a shared commitment to building trust between our government and the people it serves. The Commission was divided into three subcommittees to focus on areas of particular significance: (1) civic engagement, outreach, and messaging; (2) investigations and prosecutions; and (3) transparency in processes and legal challenges.

Executive Summary

The following recommendations were developed by the Attorney General's TRUST Commission to promote a fairer and more just system of government, consistent with its mission of eliminating corruption, promoting transparency, and strengthening the public's trust in government. The recommendations are based on the expertise of the Commission members and the input of New Jersey residents shared at a series of public listening sessions. Each recommendation is discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations section of this Report.

Recommendations for the Attorney General to Consider:

Recommendation #1: The Attorney General should establish, and the Legislature should codify, an Inspector General's Office that is empowered expressly under the authority of the Attorney General.

Recommendation #2: The Department of Law and Public Safety should work with the Governor's Office and the Legislature to improve mechanisms for combating conflicts of interest in New Jersey government.

Recommendation #3: The Attorney General should establish a Compliance Unit within the Department of Law and Public Safety.

Recommendation #4: The Attorney General should streamline the process for accepting complaints and referrals from the public and responding to individuals who refer matters for investigation.

Recommendation #5: The Attorney General should improve upon the online portal dedicated to receiving referrals and complaints from the public regarding public corruption.

Recommendation #6: Funding and staffing for the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability's work should be increased and the benefits of reunification of the Division of Criminal Justice and the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability should be considered.

Recommendation #7: The Legislature should enact a criminal statute in New Jersey akin to the federal statute that criminalizes lying to a government official, 18 U.S.C. §1001.

Recommendation #8: The Attorney General should engage with alternative media outlets to increase public awareness of the Department of Law and Public Safety’s work.

Recommendation #9: The Attorney General should hold regular listening sessions to solicit feedback from the general public.

Recommendations for Other State Agencies and Branches of Government to Consider:

Recommendation #10: The Legislature should establish a Consumer Product Safety Commission within the Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety with the authority to conduct product recalls.

Recommendation #11: The Department of the Treasury should consider amending its regulations to permit the Attorney General to be the highest-ranking official on the Department of Law Public Safety’s letterhead.

Recommendation #12: The Governor’s Office should establish a working group with the Department of Law and Public Safety, the New Jersey Office of Information Technology, and other state departments, to add more data to the Open Data Center initiative.

Work of the Commission

Commissioners met with Attorney General Platkin and his leadership team over the course of this past year to discuss their charge. The Commission was given broad authority to meet with DLPS leadership to learn more about its inner workings, including its divisions' functions, staffing needs, and operational challenges. Early on, the Commissioners also had the benefit of hearing from the Office of the State Comptroller—the independent state agency whose mission is to promote integrity and transparency at all levels of New Jersey government by auditing government finances, examining the efficiency of government programs, investigating misconduct by government officials, scrutinizing the legality of government contracts, and overseeing the integrity of the state's Medicaid program. Hearing directly and candidly from Department leadership and the Comptroller's Office helped the Commissioners identify areas of strengths and potential weaknesses in transparency, efficiency, and integrity across DLPS and the State, and in turn helped the Commissioners shape their recommendations.

In developing its recommendations, the Commission also called upon the residents of New Jersey for input and held public listening sessions to ensure that its recommendations are grounded in what the public needs to feel appropriately served by its leaders. In planning these sessions, the Commissioners were especially sensitive to the need for convenience and accessibility. The Commission thus selected two locations, one in North Jersey and one in South Jersey, to help ensure that no one location was too far for those who wished to attend and held them in the evenings to maximize public participation. The Commission also looked to identify venues where members of the public felt comfortable attending and sharing their comments in a safe space.

Throughout these listening sessions, the Commissioners heard from approximately 50 members of the public, who shared their experiences and concerns with all levels of New Jersey government, from their local boards to the Statehouse. The Commission also had members of the Department's investigative staff on-site to meet privately with individuals who wished to submit referrals or complaints, or had process-related questions. Approximately 60% of those who commented publicly also spoke with an investigator on-site.

During the listening sessions, several themes ran through the comments, demonstrating significant areas of public concern. While not all of these concerns fall within the authority of the Attorney General to address, the Commission would be remiss not to acknowledge them. The first area of concern was corruption by government officials, compounded by the public's lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms, which is addressed in Recommendations #4 and #5. The second area of concern was abuses in group homes for the disabled, which was raised by several parents of adult children with disabilities. While this affects a small percentage of the population, the population it affects includes many of our most vulnerable residents. The Attorney General addressed this head on by calling all affected state departments to the table to work together to

improve the current hotline and referral process in this space. The Department of Law and Public Safety, Department of Human Services, Department of Health, and Division of Children and Families have been meeting regularly to improve upon the existing referral system and are actively implementing a user-friendly website where the public can find information on all the avenues for which they can receive help. The collaboration between the many departments should instill public confidence that no matter what number is called, their call will get to the right place.

The remaining three areas of concern fall beyond the Attorney General's authority. The first of those was the lack of accessible public transportation in many regions of the state, and the role transportation access plays in access to government. Simply put, if the people cannot get to where their government is, their voices cannot be heard. While this is beyond the Attorney General's authority, the Department of Transportation should review the concern for possible action. Another area of concern was the difficulty many average people face in breaking into the political arena and the importance of ranked-choice voting in eliminating that barrier to political involvement. While this, too, falls beyond the Attorney General's authority, the Commission appreciates the public's concern and the conflict of interest posed by asking those in power to support and submit themselves to ranked-choice voting. And the final area of concern fell within the world of easily accessible public data. While initiatives such as the New Jersey Office of Information Technology's open data initiative is a good start towards centralizing searchable state data, there are various key data sets that can be added, such as financial disclosures of legislators, which would improve transparency and help tackle government corruption.

Regardless of whether their comments resulted in formal recommendations within this Report, the public's engagement was inspiring. Their feedback as a whole demonstrated that when people are aware of the government's work and how the government functions, they care and they want to hold the government to account. They care about the misdeeds of government officials, the immense difficulty the average New Jersey resident faces in breaking into the political class, and they want to know that their government listens to their concerns. It is not always easy to speak truth to power, and the Commission is deeply appreciative of the time, effort, and bravery it took for those members of the public who spoke and for those who came to support their fellow residents. And although not every comment was developed into a formal recommendation by the Commission, each one was heard and, where possible, has been referred for appropriate action or implementation—and in some cases, quickly implemented prior to the issuance of this report.

The Commission's recommendations include both new initiatives and opportunities to build upon work already undertaken by DLPS to promote a more equitable and just system of government. They span the work of the Department and offer big and small changes that the Department, and government as a whole, can make to further its mission of building trust in the system at large and better serve the public overall.

Recommendations for the Attorney General to Consider

What follows is a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing the public's faith in government through the Attorney General's broad legal authority as the head of the Department of Law and Public Safety and as the State's chief law-enforcement officer. These recommendations were informed by the expertise of the TRUST Commission members and input shared by New Jersey residents during public listening sessions. They cover a broad range of subject matters, including both new initiatives and opportunities to build upon the important work already undertaken across the Department.

Recommendation #1: The Attorney General should establish, and the Legislature should codify, an Inspector General's Office that is empowered expressly under the authority of the Attorney General.

The Commission recommends that a Department of Law and Public Safety Office of the Inspector General be established as an independent division within DLPS, an Executive Branch Department where express authority to enforce the laws is grounded. The mission of the proposed DLPS Office of the Inspector General would be to deter non-criminal fraud, abuse, and unethical behavior by government employees, including prosecutorial misconduct, and by contractors, including conflicts of interest allegations (see Recommendation #2, *infra*) that might not rise to the level of a crime, or cannot be criminally charged due to insufficient proofs. To that end, the Commission recommends that the DLPS Office of the Inspector General be expressly empowered by statute under the authority of the Attorney General to conduct independent civil investigations, inspections, and reviews of all state agencies, and to issue civil subpoenas and compel the production of documents and testimony of witnesses. Investigative findings would be reported to the Attorney General who would determine the appropriate follow-up action, including whether any report should be made public. Public reports can serve as a deterrent to potential wrongdoing and misconduct and help to restore public confidence in government.

As some may be concerned with the roles of other watchdog agencies, the work of the proposed Office of the Inspector General would be distinct. For example, the Office of the State Comptroller's duties, functions, and powers relate to the audit and oversight of state funds and investigating allegations of misuse of such funds. The proposed Office of the Inspector General within DLPS, on the other hand, would not have as its focus the expenditure of public funds—rather, it would investigate and uncover matters of civil fraud, abuse, and unethical or illegal activity by state government officials or contractors, including exposing and rooting out conflicts of interest and addressing allegations of prosecutorial misconduct. The Office of the Inspector General would be able to address issues that fall outside the Attorney General's prosecutorial authority and the existing authority of the State Comptroller.

Thus, the Commission recommends that the Office of the Inspector General be codified through legislation as outlined in this recommendation. This would both grant the Office the authority and powers necessary to carry out its proposed functions and ensure its continuity across administrations. In order to operate appropriately, it is imperative that the Office of the Inspector General be supported by the express statutory power to issue civil subpoenas to compel the production of documents or the appearance and testimony of any person whom the Inspector General reasonably believes may be able to give information relating to a matter under investigation. Absent such authority, the Inspector General's ability to conduct meaningful investigations would be hampered by its need to rely on voluntary cooperation, which may itself be limited by bad actors' fear of discovery or good actors' fear of retaliation. Thus, a new legislative civil power is necessary because the Attorney General cannot use criminal subpoenas and criminal grand-jury material for non-criminal purposes.

At the conclusion of an investigation, the Inspector General, under the authority of the Attorney General, should have the statutory authority and discretion to issue reports and findings, and to refer matters for review and criminal prosecution. If, in a case of significant public interest, the Inspector General determines that there has been wrongdoing but that a referral for prosecution is not appropriate, the Inspector General should have the authority to decide whether it is nevertheless appropriate to issue a public report detailing the civil investigation. And where the Inspector General's civil investigation uncovers information about a law enforcement officer—whether because they were the initial subject of the investigation or by happenstance—the Inspector General should have the authority to inform the Police Licensing Commission of its findings and conclusions.

The work of the proposed Office of the Inspector General would expand the ability of the Department to ensure that the government is worthy of the public it serves, holding it to the highest standards and rooting out wrongdoing even when it does not rise to the level of criminality. In addition to serving a proactive investigative function, it is also the Commission's intent that the Inspector General's authority, including its authority to issue public reports in the absence of criminal behavior, will serve as a deterrent to potential wrongdoing and misconduct. This is what the public demands and what the government must demand of itself. Improving the public's trust in the government requires significant action and dedication to eliminating fraud, abuse, and unethical or illegal activity at all levels. Establishing a statutory Office of the Inspector General within DLPS is a necessary step in furtherance of that mission.

Recommendation #2: The Department of Law and Public Safety should work with the Governor's Office and the Legislature to improve mechanisms for combating conflicts of interest in New Jersey government.

When it comes to the public's lack of trust in government and the underlying causes of that mistrust, one of the enduring themes seen in the public feedback at the listening sessions and identified by the Commissioners through their own expertise and experience, is the corrupting influence of conflicts of interest at all levels of New Jersey government. Improper bidding on public contracts, self-dealing, and the immense and unjust benefits of political deal-making that line the pockets of the well-connected are pervasive. The public senses it and feels powerless to take any action to stop it. Not only do these conflicts of interest destroy the public's trust in government at all levels, but they also cost taxpayers money that should instead be spent to benefit the public as a whole, not a privileged few.

On the other hand, small businesses have consistently advocated for streamlining procurements and not adding additional requirements that make it difficult to bid on public contracts. Recognizing that this is not a singular or an easy task, the Commission recommends that the Department of Law and Public Safety, Governor's Office, and the Legislature work together to improve the mechanisms for combating conflicts of interest in New Jersey government, while keeping bidding accessible.

To be sure, there are mechanisms already in place to investigate waste, fraud, and abuse in government, but most lack prosecutorial power or are limited in statutory mandate. As noted in Recommendation One, the Office of the State Comptroller, housed in the Executive Branch, is focused on policing the expenditure of public funds and is tasked with auditing government finances, examining the efficiency of government programs, scrutinizing the legality of government contracts, and overseeing the integrity of New Jersey's Medicaid program. The State Commission of Investigation, on the other hand, was created in response to the organized-crime and political-corruption crises of the 1960s, and is an independent fact-finding agency, funded through the Legislature and independent of the Executive Branch. Its mission is to maintain a constant vigil against the intrusion of organized crime into society; to identify and expose corruption and governmental laxity; to shed light on waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' dollars; and to recommend new laws and other remedies to protect the integrity of the governmental process on behalf of the citizens of New Jersey. And as prosecutorial agencies, the Division of Criminal Justice and Office of Public Integrity and Accountability have the power to investigate misconduct rising to the level of criminal wrongdoing, and to prosecute the offenders.

But conflicts of interest in government still fall through the cracks, in large part because they are difficult to identify and even harder to prosecute. To aid in the elimination of conflicts of interest in public contracting, and in addition to implementing the Office of the Inspector General as set forth in Recommendation One, the Commission recommends the Legislature work with the Office of the Attorney General to craft a statute that establishes a criminal offense to intentionally include inaccurate or misleading statements in the bidding process or exclude relevant information with the intent to mislead or deceive.

Presently, the public can report conflicts to the Office of the State Comptroller, the State Commission of Investigation, the Division of Criminal Justice, or the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability. And with the implementation of Recommendation One, the public would be able

to refer conflicts of interest directly to the proposed Inspector General's Office to investigate and refer for prosecution if appropriate. The Commission also reminds the public that New Jersey law has long afforded taxpayers the power and standing to challenge a public procurement award in court. Dobco, Inc. v. Bergen Cnty. Improvement Auth., 250 N.J. 396, 400 (2022); Waszen v. Atl. City, 1 N.J. 272, 276 (1949). The public should be encouraged to use this tool when proper.

Recommendation #3: The Attorney General should establish a Compliance Unit within the Department of Law and Public Safety.

The Commission recommends that a Compliance Unit be established within the Department of Law and Public Safety, if possible within the new DLPS Office of the Inspector General. The Compliance Unit would be tasked with tracking and reporting on the compliance of individuals, agencies, and entities that fall under the supervision and regulatory authority of the Attorney General and DLPS, including the divisions and offices therein. This could include police officers licensed by the Police Training Commission, licensees of the Alcohol Beverage Commission, gambling and horse racing entities regulated by the Division of Gaming Enforcement, and health care professionals licensed by the Board of Medical Examiners. The Unit would ensure that these individuals and entities are complying with statutes, regulations, and Attorney General Directives. And the Unit would report out on the compliance to the public via its website. And as previously noted, the Unit could also ensure the Department's own compliance with statutes, regulations, and directives, as well as be responsible for referrals from and communication with the Office of the State Comptroller. Close communication with the State Comptroller would be vital to the success of a Compliance Unit.

While several divisions within the Department have specialized, internal compliance units, the Commission recommends a comprehensive Compliance Unit as an independent division within DLPS. Alternatively, if the Office of the Inspector General recommended by the Commission is established, the Compliance Unit could sit as a unit within that Office.

The proposed Compliance Unit would centralize the process for tracking substantial issues that demand ongoing compliance monitoring, and for receiving referrals from within the Department or from outside agencies or government bodies. The Compliance Unit should be empowered to determine the appropriate course of action, including whether to retain the issue for handling by its own staff or to delegate to the specialized compliance units housed elsewhere in the Department or elsewhere in the government for action. Such action may include further investigation, monitoring compliance with reports and recommendations from the State Comptroller or the proposed Inspector General, and issuing independent reports as necessary or otherwise appropriate.

The Compliance Unit would also assist in providing the public with notice of Comptroller reports and referrals touching on the Department or agencies, individuals, or entities that operate under OAG or Department authority and/or regulation, as well as the steps taken by the Department to ensure compliance. The Commission recommends that this be accomplished through a robust, public-facing website, through which the public could view the basis for the Compliance Unit's action—such as regular reporting required by statute, Attorney General Directive, or a report issued by the State Comptroller—as well as information responsive to those requirements or recommendations. While the nature of the responsive information may vary widely, from simple data to detailed formal reports, the unifying factor must be that the public can see for itself what its government has been required or recommended to do and what the government has done to ensure it is abiding by those standards.

Making the results of the Compliance Unit's work readily accessible to the public will significantly improve transparency, showing the public that the government is holding itself to account on an ongoing basis, and improving the public's trust in the government as a whole.

For both recommendations #1 and #3, the Attorney General should establish a working group within DLPS to draft a directive to establish both the Office of the Inspector General and the Compliance Unit therein. The working group should also provide to the Attorney General a resource assessment to identify what would be necessary to set both the Office and Unit up for success. The Commission therefore recommends the Attorney General include a request for funding and allotment of full-time employees from the Legislature and Governor during the upcoming budget cycle to properly implement these important recommendations.

Recommendation #4: The Attorney General should streamline the process for accepting complaints and referrals from the public and responding to individuals who refer matters for investigation.

The Commission recognizes that, as it currently stands, there are numerous ways for the public to submit complaints and referrals to DLPS, including a generalized process through OAG Office of Constituent Services. However, the lack of centralization makes it difficult for the public to know which channel is appropriate for their particular concern. Much of the general public, especially those who are unfamiliar with the inner workings of the Department or with the nature of its work as a whole, have little way of deciphering which division, office, or unit therein may be most relevant to their particular complaint. This confusion may unintentionally discourage members of the public who, in the absence of clear guidance or who may feel overwhelmed by the breadth of the Department's work, simply choose not to submit their complaints at all.

Thus, the Commission recommends several improvements to the current system to streamline the process for the Department to accept complaints and referrals from the public and respond to those who submit such information. First, the Commission recommends the Attorney General to create a central referral page with links, numbers, and other information on all of the different referral and complaint options, including a description of the types of things that could be referred all in one place. In addition, at the top it could include an advisory that if they don't know where to send their information, they could send it to the OAG's Office of Constituent Services (and include a link, email, and phone number), and the Office will make sure it gets to the right place. The Office of Constituent Services received over 18,000 referrals in just the first nine months of this year. Because this recommendation could increase the number of referrals each year, the Commission also recommends increased staffing for the Office of Constituent Services so they can continue to keep up with reviewing the important referrals that come in the door.

In addition, the Commission recommends that this process for submitting complaints and referrals to OAG's Office of Constituent Services include a dedicated telephone number and email address through which members of the public can share information. This telephone line and email inbox should be staffed by members of the Department with the knowledge necessary to properly route the complaint or referral to the appropriate division, office, or outside agency, and individuals who submit information should be assured, whether by a live person or through an automated response, that their complaint or referral has been received.

Currently, those reaching out are often left only with a generalized assurance that their complaint has been heard by one of the State's largest agencies, without any further update as to when their matter has been appropriately routed or which Division, Office, or agency it has been sent to. The Commission recognizes that in many, if not most, instances the Department cannot confirm or deny the existence of an investigation, or provide any details of any ensuing investigation. Nevertheless, individuals reporting information should be assured by the Office of Constituent Services that every credible submission is investigated, even though they may not receive any further information or communication regarding their complaint or referral. The current absence of a more personalized response regarding the routing of an individual's complaint does little to instill confidence in members of the public that their complaint had been truly heard—and heard by the appropriate parties—especially for those who already lack faith that their voice is meaningful and that the government is truly listening.

The Commission further recommends that the improved referral process be more readily accessible to the public. To ensure the public is aware of this avenue for submitting referrals and complaints, the Attorney General's public-facing website should prominently display on its front page a link to a page that includes information about the process for submitting referrals and complaints, and how they are handled once they are received. By improving the public's ability to submit complaints and referrals, the Commission aims to improve transparency, strengthen

the Department's ongoing work in combating public corruption, and show the public that their voices and complaints are being heard.

Recommendation #5: The Attorney General should improve upon the online portal dedicated to receiving referrals and complaints from the public regarding public corruption.

The Commission recommends that the Attorney General improve upon the online portal dedicated to receiving referrals and complaints from the public regarding public corruption. While the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability (OPIA) already maintains a tip line and online form for submitting complaints regarding public corruption, the Commission recommends that the process be enhanced by making the portal more readily understandable to the general public in a way that allows it to serve as a centralized resource for the public for all issues relating to public corruption. This portal should also be accessible directly from the front page of the DLPS website (www.njoag.gov) so that those with little or no familiarity with the internal divisions and offices within DLPS can locate it more easily. In the alternative, the portal could be on an entirely separate webpage with a different domain name, as long as it is easy for the public to find. The reporting portal on the DLPS website's homepage could redirect to the separate website.

This public-corruption reporting portal furthers DLPS's and OPIA's missions by helping to ensure that the public is aware of the offices' work and how to easily report corruption, and by encouraging people to come forward. The availability of this portal should also continue to be publicized by DLPS and OPIA on their public-facing websites and social media and through other public-awareness campaigns to ensure maximum visibility to the public.

Some changes to the corruption reporting portal that the Attorney General should consider, in addition to a direct link to it from the DLPS homepage, are to explicitly note that one's name, phone number, and email are not required to submit a complaint, and to explain the reference on the portal to "ACWP"—an acronym not widely known for the Anti-Corruption Whistleblower Program. In addition, the Attorney General could consider expanding reporting options to include additional options to report anonymously or by methods other than a web form, such as through a multilingual voicemail box.

It is an unfortunate truth that public corruption exists, and that the public's awareness of this fact severely damages their faith in the government as a whole. It takes vigilance at all levels of the public and the government to end this, and the Commission believes that by streamlining the system by which the public can share information about public corruption, it will increase detection, improve investigations, and ultimately help reduce corruption in New Jersey government.

Another way to improve the complaint process would be to publicize that a tip has contributed to a charging decision or successful prosecution. In other words, where appropriate, the Attorney General should note in case specific press releases that an investigation originated from a tip, while being sure to keep the tip anonymous. In addition, the website and press releases could also include statistics regarding the contribution that tips have made to the Department's work; for example, stating the number of matters charged or successfully prosecuted that originated from the tip line.

Recommendation #6: Funding and staffing for the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability's work should be increased and the benefits of reunification of the Division of Criminal Justice and the Office of Public Integrity and Accountability should be considered.

OPIA handles four critical functions for the State: 1) investigation and prosecution of criminal public corruption and election crimes; 2) investigation, presentation to the grand jury, and prosecution of fatal police encounters, as mandated by statute, and the supervision of reviews of non-fatal police uses of deadly force; 3) operating a Conviction Review Unit to ensure the integrity of convictions statewide; and 4) handling sensitive police internal affairs and disciplinary investigations statewide.

Since OPIA was established in 2018, it has had over 150 successful dispositions of charged public corruption cases, including over 55 since 2022 alone. It receives, on average, over 500 tips from the public each year and has opened over 1,000 investigations since its inception. The Fatal Police Encounters Unit has handled over 115 fatal investigations since 2019 and reviewed over 225 additional non-fatal investigations. In 2024, OPIA received over 900 internal affairs referrals. OPIA's Conviction Review Unit has received and is processing over 600 conviction review applications. OPIA handles all of this with a staff of under 100 people, including lawyers, detectives, and administrative staff. Its Corruption Bureau is currently staffed by 12 line deputy attorneys general and has over 130 active matters including investigations and charged cases. Despite all of this, OPIA's budget remained unchanged for five years, from FY 2021 to FY 2025, and only received a minor increase in the FY 2026 Appropriations Act.

In the face of extremely limited resources, the approximately one dozen career line prosecutors at OPIA handle some of the most complex and high-profile criminal cases in the State. Its Fatal Police Encounters Unit handles the equivalent of approximately 20 homicide investigations each year. OPIA frequently charges complex cases involving large amounts of data and documents, where defendants are often represented by well-resourced defense counsel at high-powered law firms. It is in the public's interest for the only statewide criminal public corruption prosecutors to be well-resourced and supported so that they can handle cases efficiently.

As recommended by a community member at one of the TRUST Commission listening sessions, the Commission further recommends that the increased staffing for OPIA include the addition of a dedicated community-engagement specialist. This community-engagement specialist would work closely with OAG's community-engagement team on stakeholder outreach and facilitate listening sessions in the community regarding both the work of OPIA generally, including combating public corruption, and following fatal police encounters. The community engagement specialist would also act as a liaison between OPIA staff, families, municipal police departments, and County Prosecutor's Offices following fatal police encounters. Through this liaison role, the specialist would help police departments reestablish trust in their communities after fatal police encounters, when this trust is often damaged.

Moreover, the timeline for State employee hiring can also detrimentally affect State agencies' ability to hire qualified staff and respond to needs. From the date an offer is accepted, it can take up to 6 months to onboard a new hire. The Commission thus recommends that any processes and approvals in the hiring process be streamlined and shortened to the extent possible to benefit the Department as a whole and the State's ability to hire qualified staff and improve all State agencies.

The Commission acknowledges that OPIA was created as a distinct, separate office to fully operationalize its mandate: to investigate and prosecute criminal abuses of public trust and handle sensitive matters that implicate the public's confidence in both government and the criminal justice system. Seven years later OPIA has made great progress.

Prior to 2018, OPIA's largest bureau, the Corruption Bureau, sat within DCJ proper. OPIA's other bureaus were effectively created or significantly expanded when OPIA was created. OPIA's work often overlaps with matters handled by other DCJ bureaus, and work is often coordinated between the office and DCJ. The prior separation of OPIA's bureaus from DCJ served a valuable goal in conveying to the public the importance of its work and its independence. It also allowed for institutional focus on the development of a new office that, despite criticism, has shown remarkable success.

Both DCJ proper and OPIA are functioning at a high level. As such, the Attorney General should consider whether OPIA's work can be achieved in a manner that also allows for both DCJ proper and OPIA to benefit from reunification. The Attorney General could consider creating any new internal systems, including separate chains of command, necessary for maintaining the independence and confidentiality of sensitive investigations, and the necessary allocation of substantial resources for public integrity work, in this alternate structure.

Recommendation #7: The Legislature should enact a criminal statute in New Jersey akin to the federal statute that criminalizes lying to a government official, 18 U.S.C. §1001.

The Commission believes that to combat public corruption, law enforcement needs to ensure individuals are not lying to State government officers, and to be able to hold them accountable when they do. Thus, the Commission recommends the Legislature consider and pass a bill that would make it a crime to purposely or knowingly lie to a government official. Federal law contains such a provision, 18 U.S.C. §1001, but New Jersey law does not.

The federal statute provides that it is a crime when, in any matter within the jurisdiction of the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of the Government of the United States, a person knowingly and willfully (1) falsifies, conceals, or covers up by any trick, scheme, or device a material fact; (2) makes any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or representation; or (3) makes or uses any false writing or document knowing the same to contain any materially false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or entry. 18 U.S.C. §1001.

Currently, New Jersey does not have any similar statute. The New Jersey crime of obstruction, N.J.S.A. 2C:29-1, requires a physical act such as flight or force, or an independently unlawful act. The crime of hindering, N.J.S.A. 2C:29-3, requires a purpose to hinder the investigation or prosecution of another or themselves. And the crime of false reports, N.J.S.A. 2C:28-4, requires a purpose to implicate another or the act of reporting an incident that did not occur. Therefore, lying to law enforcement authorities to explicate oneself or minimize one's prior participation in a crime would not currently be chargeable under 2C:28-4, 2C:29-1, or 2C:29-3. To avoid this loophole and prevent the powerful from escaping accountability through open deceit, the Commission recommends that the Legislature consider and pass a bill making it a crime to purposely or knowingly lie to a government official, akin to 18 U.S.C. §1001.

Recommendation #8: The Attorney General should engage with alternative media outlets to increase public awareness of the Department of Law and Public Safety's work.

The Commission recommends that the Attorney General consider alternative media outlets for the Department to engage with to help increase the general public's awareness of the Department's work. One of the recurring themes the Commission noticed at its listening sessions was that much of the general public does not have an awareness or general understanding of the Department's work, and thus does not know where to go when they need help. While some of this lack of understanding is a function of the sheer breadth of the Department's work, much of it comes from a lack of exposure to the myriad ways DLPS serves the public.

The Commission recognizes that the Department maintains a public-facing website and a presence on traditional media and social-media platforms. But these traditional platforms often fail to reach the historically underserved and underrepresented communities most impacted by public-safety issues, civil violations, and government misconduct. The Commission thus recommends that the Attorney General expand DLPS's methods of outreach to broaden the Department's audience and include a more diverse cross-section of the population by thoughtfully targeting community-specific traditional and non-traditional media outlets, such as community newsletters, podcasts, and local news outlets.

Speaking directly to the people will also offer DLPS the unique opportunity to humanize its work. Participating in more conversational media formats, such as long-form interview podcasts and live question-and-answer sessions on social media, will allow members of the Department to explain complex legal topics in relatable terms in ways that build trust and approachability with the public at large. While this practice is not new to New Jersey government officials—Governor Murphy notably recently appeared on “Hasan Minaj Doesn't Know” to discuss a variety of New Jersey-specific topics—it is underused. And it is critical.

Long gone are the days of traditional media outlets dominating the public discourse. The public is increasingly consuming more and more of its news and information from social-media platforms, podcasts, independent digital publications, and niche outlets that focus on specific special-interest areas. By opening itself up to these new communication channels trusted by communities that may be skeptical of the government, the Department can promote transparency while demonstrating its accessibility and willingness to meet the people where they are. With additional staffing in the Communications Office, the Department can expand its reach into more and more diverse media spaces, and therefore, increase its ability to combat misinformation, spreading accurate information and correcting misunderstandings about the Department's work to audiences that have never had the chance to hear it directly from the proverbial horse's mouth.

Recommendation #9: *The Attorney General should hold regular listening sessions to solicit feedback from the general public.*

The Commission recommends that the Attorney General continue the practice established in its meetings and hold regular listening sessions to solicit feedback from the general public. Though the public listening sessions held in furtherance of the Commission's mission were focused on ways in which the Attorney General could improve the public's trust in its government, they demonstrated just how much members of the public want to be heard and how their input can benefit everyone when those with the power to act are listening.

The Commission thus recommends that this practice continue and expand to include a variety of topics—for example, one session could cover housing, while the next provides an opportunity to speak about grant funding. These listening sessions, like those held by the Commission, will provide an avenue for the Department to build and restore trust in underserved communities that have historically been excluded from decision-making processes. The level of direct engagement offered by listening sessions demonstrate the Department’s commitment to hearing from those most impacted by its actions and reinforces that the Department values input from the community as a whole, not just from the upper echelons and government insiders whose voices have always been heard.

As demonstrated by the recommendations developed by the Commission, the practice of holding listening sessions also offers the government the opportunity to gather actionable insights to inform its policies and operations. This input from the public can help the Department identify gaps in its services and unintended harms from its policies, as well as areas where its work overlaps with the work of other state agencies and opportunities for collaboration with those agencies.

The practice of live listening sessions also provides the Department with the opportunity to provide direct assistance and onsite services in ways that not all of the Department’s divisions and offices often have. For those divisions and offices that do not regularly interact with the public at large, listening sessions offer a chance for them to have staff present to help answer questions, provide referrals for services, and offer onsite assistance. This opportunity for immediate action by members of the Department demonstrates its commitment to responsiveness and the removal of barriers to access for those who may not otherwise know how or where to seek help.

If the Commission’s recommendation for a formalized referral-submission process is implemented, the Commission recommends that the website containing information about the referral process also include a list of upcoming sessions and the topics that will be addressed at them, as well as a form through which members of the public can recommend topics for future listening sessions. This will give members of the public the information necessary to attend sessions that may be relevant to their individual concerns and allow them to suggest others so that the full scope of their concerns can be heard. It will also allow the Attorney General to ensure the attendance of other government agencies that may offer useful expertise and benefit from the information provided by the public. In this way, the Department can lead by example and inspire other government agencies to interact regularly with the public.

While the Commission’s mission was limited to recommendations for steps that DLPS can take to promote a more fair and just system of government, it would be remiss not to recommend that *all* cabinet members make similar efforts to hold public listening sessions. If the Commission

learned one thing from its charge, it is that the public yearns to be heard and that the government should be there to listen at all levels.

Recommendations for Other State Agencies and Branches of Government to Consider

Recommendation #10: The Legislature should establish a Consumer Product Safety Commission within the Division of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Law and Public Safety with the authority to conduct product recalls.

The Commission recommends the Attorney General establish, and the Legislature codify, a Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) within the Division of Consumer Affairs. The mission of the CPSC would be to publicize product-safety recalls issued by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to ensure that New Jersey consumers are made aware and remain informed of such recalls, and to conduct recall-effectiveness sweeps to monitor the removal of recalled products from store shelves. As it currently stands, no state agency has the authority to ensure that recalled products are removed from New Jersey store shelves, and this lack of accountability poses an ongoing threat to the safety of New Jersey consumers.

Implementation of this recommendation would both grant the CPSC the authority and powers necessary to carry out its proposed functions and ensure its continuity across administrations.

Recommendation #11: The Department of the Treasury should consider amending its regulations to permit the Attorney General to be the highest-ranking official on the Department of Law and Public Safety's letterhead.

The Commission recommends that the New Jersey Department of the Treasury (Treasury) permit the Department of Law and Public Safety's letterhead to be changed so that the Attorney General is the highest-ranking official named. Just as maintaining independence from political interference is critical to the proper functioning of the Attorney General and the Department, ensuring that the public is aware of and recognizes that independence is critical to the public's trust in the integrity of the work undertaken by the Attorney General and the Department as a whole. Fostering that trust includes demonstrating to the public every day—in both big and small ways—that the Attorney General is not subject to the political atmosphere in which so many have lost faith. Amending the Department's letterhead to make the Attorney General the highest-ranking official named would be an indication to the public at large that the work of the Department is not inherently political and instead serves the public as a whole.

In order for this recommendation to be implemented Treasury would have to amend Circular No. 24-18 Circular – ADM, Standards for Printed Stationary, Use of State Seal, etc., issued pursuant to Governor Florio’s Executive Order 36. The Commission recommends that Treasury change the Circular to allow the Attorney General to be the highest-ranking official on DLPS letterhead to preserve the public’s faith in the independence of the Department’s work.

Recommendation #12: The Governor’s Office should establish a working group with the Department of Law and Public Safety, the New Jersey Office of Information Technology, and other state departments to add more data to the Open Data Center initiative.

Transparency of data and information is the foundation of any anti-corruption efforts. Good data collection and infrastructure allow for public participation in compliance monitoring, can help law enforcement and state agencies identify patterns and problems, and has the potential to enable corruption prevention and detection at scale. The Attorney General’s Office already does this with its many searchable public dashboards, including but not limited to major discipline, use of force, ARRIVE, and bias incidents.

The New Jersey Office of Information Technology (NJOIT) Open Data Center also serves as a great initiative that centralizes state data and makes it available open to the public (www.data.nj.gov). The Commission recommends the Governor’s Office establish a working group to look into and provide recommendations to add additional anti-corruption data to NJOIT’s Open Data Center.

Potential new data sets for the Open Data Center could include financial disclosure forms for government officials. Currently the state legislators’ disclosures are only available for the most recent year and must be downloaded one at a time as PDFs, and some of them are handwritten. Disclosure forms for local government officials are downloadable from a different website, also as individual PDFs. This information could be digitized and centralized in a searchable format on the Open Data Center. Another new data set could be contracts on NJStart—currently a separate website—which are somewhat searchable but hard to read and understand. This could lay the groundwork for a system that could aggregate multiple data sets, so that conflicts of interest and procurement could be seen in one place.

To implement this recommendation, the Commission recommends that a working group begin by conducting a study to identify the data sets most critical for anti-corruption monitoring, assessing their current states, and mapping out immediate next steps for bringing them up to open-data standards. Thus, the Governor should convene a working group of officials from DLPS, NJOIT, and other state departments to begin this inquiry.

Acknowledgements and Conclusion

The Commission extends its heartfelt gratitude to the numerous partners and public servants across the state who worked diligently to support this work. We would be remiss if we did not thank the many contributors for their steadfast commitment to this body and the importance of trust and transparency in government.

The Commission recognizes that the recommendations and feedback brought forth in this report span the authority of many government entities. Fully implementing all recommendations will only be possible through partnership with various stakeholders, including our legislative partners, cabinet members, and incoming administrations.