

FAQs - 2020 BALLOT QUESTIONS 3 AND 4

HONOLULU ETHICS COMMISSION

Q1. What are the two City Ethics Commission questions on the ballot?

Questions 3 and 4 propose City Charter changes relating to the Honolulu Ethics Commission. Question 3 asks: “Shall the Revised City Charter be amended to allow the Honolulu Ethics Commission to control its own budget after it has been enacted?” Question 4 asks: “Shall the Revised Charter be amended to require ethics commission staff to be appointed based on merit principles, but exempt them from the civil service position classification plan, and to have the salaries of all ethics commission staff set by the ethics commission, subject to specified limitations?”

Q2. Why are there two questions on the ballot, instead of one?

Ballot questions start out as “resolutions” introduced by the City Council. The Council passed two Commission-related resolutions to change the Charter—Resolution 19-331 (on Commission budget flexibility) and Resolution 20-83, FD1 (on ethics staff positions and salaries).

Q3. What is the purpose of Question 3?

Question 3 would give the Commission budget flexibility and independence after the Council approves and appropriates funds annually. The Commission would use the funds to carry out its city ethics duties and fulfill its strategic plan of increasing ethics staff.

Q4. What is the purpose of Question 4?

Question 4 would allow the City Ethics Commission to create the staff positions it needs and set staff salaries, within limits.

Q5. Why is a vote needed?

City law requires that citizens vote to change the Charter.

Q6. How will City residents benefit if the ballot questions pass?

The Commission would have greater independence and enhanced capability to do its job—to ensure that city officers and employees demonstrate the highest standards of ethical conduct so the public may have trust and confidence in the integrity of government.

Q7. Will this give the City Ethics Commission flexibility?

Yes. If Question 3 is passed, the Commission will have greater budget flexibility and independence to use funds approved by Council to carry out its ethics duties. If Question 4 is passed, the Commission will be able to create the ethics staff positions it needs and set staff salaries, within limits.

Q8. How many positions does this agency have now?

The City Ethics Commission currently has five full-time positions.

Q9. Does Question 4 take Commission staff out of the Civil Service regulations?

No, Commission staff are not currently civil service employees. Staff are “exempt” employees, meaning that the Commission may hire and terminate staff at any time without cause. Question 4 does not change this status.

Q10. How do the proposed changes affect the Commission’s budget?

The proposed changes give the Commission more independence and control over its budget.

Q11. What percentage of votes is needed for this to pass?

A majority of votes is needed for each question to pass.

Q12. How are blank votes counted?

Blank votes are not counted as either yes or no.

Q13. Is this the first time either issue has been introduced to the general public for a vote?

Yes.

Q14. Who introduced Resolution 19-331, the basis for Question 3, and why?

Councilmember Tommy Waters introduced the resolution out of a desire to support the City Ethics Commission and to promote and reinforce the idea that ethics should be a priority for the City and County of Honolulu.

Q15. If these questions pass, when would the changes take effect?

Question No. 3 on the Commission’s budget would take effect on July 1, 2021.
Question No. 4 on ethics staff positions and salaries would take effect on January 1, 2021.

Q16. What does the City Ethics Commission do?

The Commission ensures that all of Honolulu’s approximately 10,000 elected leaders, appointed officials, and employees understand and follow the highest ethical standards of conduct governing their work for the public. The Commission educates, advises, and enforces city ethics laws and lobbyist regulations.

Q17. What’s the difference between the Honolulu Ethics Commission and the Hawaii State Ethics Commission?

The Honolulu Ethics Commission is the City and County of Honolulu’s ethics watchdog agency for city officers and employees. The Hawaii State Ethics Commission is the State of Hawaii’s ethics watchdog agency for state officers and employees.

Q18. Where can we get more information?

For more information on the Honolulu Ethics Commission, go to: <http://www.honolulu.gov/ethics>
To look up Resolutions 19-331 (Commission budget flexibility) and 20-83, FD1 (ethics staff positions and salaries), go to the Honolulu City Council website: <http://www.honolulu.gov/council>