

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

(Second Draft, dated 7/6/2016)

[Charter Amendment - Public Advocate]

Describing and setting forth a proposal to the voters, at an election to be held on November 8, 2016, to amend the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco to: 1) create the Office of the Public Advocate; 2) set the Public Advocate's powers and duties; 3) authorize the Public Advocate to review the administration of City programs, including programs for transmitting information to the public, and to receive, investigate, and attempt to resolve complaints regarding City services and programs; 4) authorize the Public Advocate to receive and investigate specified whistleblower complaints; 5) provide for the Public Advocate's election, removal, and salary; and, 6) set City policy regarding sufficient funding and minimum staffing for the Office of the Public Advocate; and setting an operative date.

Existing Law

The City currently does not have a particular official or central office responsible for overseeing how City departments interact with the public. The City has a whistleblower program under the Controller.

Amendments to Current Law

The proposal is a charter amendment that would create the Office of the Public Advocate.

The Public Advocate would review the administration of City programs, including the distribution of programs and services throughout the City, the effectiveness of the public information and service complaint programs of City agencies, and the responsiveness of City agencies to individual and group requests for data or information regarding the agencies' structure, activities, and operations. The Public Advocate would also review the management and employment practices of City officers and departments, including City policies and MOU provisions, that promote or impede the effective and efficient operation of City government, and would review the City's contracting procedures and practices. And the Public Advocate would investigate and attempt to resolve complaints from members of the public concerning City services and programs.

The Public Advocate could introduce legislation at the Board of Supervisors to address any matter within the Public Advocate's jurisdiction.

The proposal would authorize the Public Advocate to receive and investigate confidential whistleblower complaints concerning: incorrect, unreasonable, or unfair decisions or rulings of City officers or agencies; inconsistent enforcement, or failure to enforce, laws, rules or regulations; poor or inadequate service delivery or treatment; poor communication, including unreasonably long response or wait times and unreasonable response delays; or inequitable or inefficient provision of City services. The Controller would continue to receive and investigate confidential whistleblower complaints concerning: the misuse of City funds by officers or employees; the use of City equipment or time for personal purposes; the purchase of unneeded supplies or equipment; nonperformance, or inadequate performance of, contractually-required services; or, improper or wasteful activities by City officers or employees.

The Public Advocate could not interfere with specific contract or personnel decisions or other administrative actions, or with criminal investigations or prosecutions. And during his or her tenure, the Public Advocate could not contribute to, or publicly endorse or oppose, a candidate for City elective office, or be an officer, director, or employee of an organization that makes political endorsements regarding candidates for City elective office.

The Public Advocate would be elected at a Citywide election, using ranked-choice voting, and serve a four-year term. The first Public Advocate would be elected at the first general or special municipal election occurring after January 1, 2017, and would serve a shortened term. Then, beginning with the general municipal election in 2020, the Public Advocate would be elected every four years. No person could serve as Public Advocate for more than two successive terms. And no person could serve as Public Advocate who in the last four years held the office of Mayor, member of the Board of Supervisors, City Attorney, District Attorney, Treasurer, Sheriff, Assessor-Recorder, or Public Defender.

The Mayor could file written charges of official misconduct against the Public Advocate and those charges would be heard and acted on by the Ethics Commission and the Board of Supervisors in the same manner as other charges of official misconduct, but the Mayor would have no power to suspend the Public Advocate prior to the determination of those charges by the Board of Supervisors.

The Civil Service Commission would set the salary of the Public Advocate every five years based on a salary survey of comparable offices, or using such other methodology as the Commission deemed appropriate.

The proposal would make it City policy to provide sufficient funding and administrative support for the Office of the Public Advocate to perform its functions, and to authorize the Office to have at least one staff member per Supervisorial district to perform constituent services and at least one staff member per Supervisorial district to perform investigations. The Public Advocate could request an advisory opinion from the Ethics Commission whether the City was providing the Office with sufficient funding to perform its duties.