

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2025

The Honorable Pamela Jo Bondi
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Bondi:

We write to express our profound concern regarding your decision on July 11, 2025, to terminate and remove from federal service Joseph W. Tirrell, who served since 2023 as Director of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Departmental Ethics Office.¹ This latest dismissal of a career ethics official continues the Department's systematic dismantling of its internal ethics safeguards under your watch, which further undermines public confidence and congressional trust in the Department and its senior leadership. Your action is particularly troubling against the backdrop of allegations regarding your own ethics conflicts, which remain under scrutiny.²

The DOJ's Departmental Ethics Office is responsible for administering the Department's ethics program and implementing Department-wide policies to comply with ethics laws and regulations governing the conduct of DOJ employees. Among the office's responsibilities is providing senior political appointees – including FBI Director Kash Patel, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, and yourself – advice on conflicts of interest, financial disclosures, and recusals.

During confirmation hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senators questioned several top DOJ nominees about whether they would recuse themselves from matters involving cases where they had previously served as President Trump's personal attorneys, including you.³ These nominees indicated they would consult with DOJ ethics officials, including “career prosecutors in the department,” before making recusal decisions. You also stated in your own written responses to the Committee that you would “consult with the appropriate officials at the Department of Justice, including career ethics officials,” regarding any matters that raise conflict of interest concerns prior to making any decisions.⁴ However, your removal of remaining career ethics officials renders these commitments meaningless and leaves the Department without the institutional expertise necessary to provide rigorous, impartial ethical guidance.

¹ Ben Penn, *Bondi Fires Her Personal Ethics Chief as DOJ Purge Continues*, (July 13, 2025).

<https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/bondi-fires-her-personal-ethics-chief-as-doj-purge-continues>.

² Letter from Ranking Member Durbin on Qatari Luxury Jet, (May 14, 2025),

<https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-05-14%20Letter%20to%20DOJ%20Qatari%20Plane%20Gift.pdf>; Letter to Senate Judiciary Committee Requesting Oversight Hearing into AG Pam Bondi's Pfizer Conflicts, (June 9, 2025), <https://www.citizen.org/article/letter-to-senate-judiciary-committee-requesting-oversight-hearing-into-ag-pam-bondis-pfizer-conflicts/>.

³ U.S. Senator Adam Schiff Questions Nominee to be Deputy Attorney General, (February 12, 2025),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IClINJrbesY&feature=youtu.be>; U.S. Senator Adam Schiff Questions to Nominee to be Solicitor General, (February 26, 2026), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kOHxeIWWdc>.

⁴ Responses from Pamela Jo Bondi, Nominee to be Attorney General, to Questions for the Record (January 15, 2025), https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-01-15_-_qfr_responses_-_bondi.pdf.

Mr. Tirrell's distinguished record of service speaks for itself. With 23 years of federal service, including 16 years at the Department of Justice, he has demonstrated unwavering commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards.⁵ His career trajectory prior to his appointment as Director in July 2023 reflects both his expertise and the trust placed in him by prior administrations of both parties.

The manner of Mr. Tirrell's termination, of which he was notified by a short letter providing no justification for his immediate removal from federal service, is particularly egregious.⁶ The dismissal of a career official who has dedicated his professional career to public service without explanation sends a chilling message to the entire federal workforce about the value this administration places on institutional knowledge and ethics expertise. Furthermore, Mr. Tirrell's termination comes on the heels of your decision earlier this year to remove or reassign other career DOJ ethics officials responsible for investigating attorney misconduct.⁷ You subsequently transferred these responsibilities, traditionally assigned to senior career DOJ officials, to inexperienced political appointees. Senate Judiciary Democrats expressed alarm at this decision in a February 20, 2025, letter, which the Department has failed to answer.⁸ At that time, we warned that transferring ethics decision-making authority from experienced career professionals to political operatives would compromise the Department's ability to provide impartial ethical guidance. The subsequent firing of Mr. Tirrell, which may be connected to Mr. Tirrell's role in reviewing former special counsel Jack Smith's standard ethics disclosures, validates our concerns and represents an escalation of this troubling trend.⁹

The American people deserve confidence that ethics determinations are made by experienced career officials based on established precedent and legal principles, not by politically-motivated appointees who lack the necessary expertise or independence. The removals of Mr. Tirrell and other career ethics DOJ officials create a dangerous vacuum in ethics expertise at a time when the Department and its officials face unprecedented ethical challenges.

In order to fulfill Congress's constitutional obligation to perform oversight over the Department and its components, we request that you provide detailed answers to the following questions no later than July 25, 2025:

1. What specific legal justification exists for Mr. Tirrell's termination and removal from federal service, and why was this reasoning not provided in his termination letter?

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Justice Management Division, "Director, Department Ethics Office: Joseph W. Tirrell," (March 7, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/staff-profile/ethics-leadership>.

⁶ Memorandum for Joseph W. Tirrell from the Attorney General, (July 11, 2025), <https://media.licdn.com/dms/document/media/v2/D4E1FAQFrc2ZLhnGpwQ/feedshare-document-pdf-analyzed/B4EZglqJOMG4AY-/0/1752491923971?e=1753315200&v=beta&t=yxawGIPXW3s1eE12hu1uXkuipL62liWfl6zP0bVMhbc>.

⁷ Ben Penn, *Trump DOJ Assigns Sensitive Ethics Powers to Political Aides*, (February 16, 2025), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/business-and-practice/trump-doj-delegates-sensitive-ethics-powers-to-political-aides>.

⁸ Letter from Senate Judiciary Democrats on Removal of Career Ethics Officials, (February 20, 2025), <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-02-20%20SJC%20Dems%20Letter%20to%20DOJ%20re%20Ethics.pdf>.

⁹ Sam Levine, *Pam Bondi fires US justice department's top ethics adviser*, (July 14, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/14/pam-bondi-fires-top-ethics-adviser>.

2. Who will assume responsibility for providing ethics guidance previously provided by Mr. Tirrell, and what are their qualifications and experience, including in federal ethics law?
3. What steps will you take to ensure that the DOJ's Departmental Ethics Office maintains the independence and expertise necessary to provide impartial guidance to DOJ officials?
4. At your confirmation hearing, you testified to the committee you would rely on career ethics officials for recusal decisions. Your Senate-confirmed colleagues made similar commitments. How do you reconcile that commitment with the fact that you have summarily removed or reassigned many of the Department's career ethics officials?
5. What measures will you implement to restore confidence in the Departmental Ethics Office and ensure that political considerations do not influence ethical determinations?

The American people deserve a Department of Justice that operates with the highest ethical standards, guided by experienced career professionals who understand the critical importance of maintaining institutional integrity. Your decision to terminate Mr. Tirrell undermines these principles and demands immediate explanation and corrective action.

We look forward to your prompt response and urge you to reconsider this decision in the interest of preserving the Department's ethical foundation.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator