

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2026

Jolene Ann Lauria  
Assistant Attorney General for Administration  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Lauria:

We are writing to seek information regarding recent reports indicating that potentially serious ethical violations have taken place at the highest levels of the Department of Justice (DOJ). As the Designated Agency Ethics Official and most senior career official at the Department, you have a unique and important role in defending the Department's integrity. Specifically, we are seeking prompt clarification regarding Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche's apparent failure to recuse himself from matters involving his former private client, President Donald Trump, even after he was advised to recuse himself by ethics officials. Furthermore, we request that you personally ensure the preservation of all existing and future records, communications, and materials related to ethics advice provided by Department or external ethics officials to senior political DOJ appointees – including previous officials who have left the Department.

In a stark diversion from institutional norms, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche – as well as others appointed to lead the Justice Department – previously served as President Trump's personal attorneys.<sup>1</sup> Recent public reporting revealed that in March 2025, less than two weeks after assuming the role of Deputy Attorney General, Mr. Blanche was explicitly and formally advised by the Department's top career ethics lawyer that his recusal from legal cases involving President Trump in his personal capacity was necessary.<sup>2</sup>

At Mr. Blanche's confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee on February 12, 2025, he committed to recusing himself from cases when advised to do so by government ethics officials. When Senator Schiff asked Mr. Blanche about potential conflicts of interest he may face as Deputy Attorney General stemming from his private representation of President Trump in federal criminal matters, he stated under oath, "I will follow the rules as told to me by the experts, career prosecutors in the department, if it comes to ever recusing."<sup>3</sup> The unmistakable

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<sup>1</sup> Michael R. Sisak, *What to know about Todd Blanche, Trump's pick for acting attorney general*, PBS NEWS (Apr. 3, 2026), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/what-to-know-about-todd-blanche-trumps-pick-for-acting-attorney-general>.

<sup>2</sup> Katelyn Polantz, Evan Perez, and Hannah Rabinowitz, *Exclusive: Acting AG Todd Blanche was told last year to recuse from Justice Department matters involving Trump*, CNN (May 14, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/05/14/politics/todd-blanche-recusal-trump-investigations-brennan>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Confirmation Hearing of Todd Blanche to be Deputy Attorney General, 119th Cong. (February 12, 2025). In written questions for the record, Mr. Blanche gave similar answers, stating "In the event of any potential conflict of interest, I will consult with the appropriate Department of Justice ethics officials

understanding from this sworn testimony is that Mr. Blanche would recuse himself from matters where he was advised to do so by an ethics official.

Upon his confirmation as Deputy Attorney General, Mr. Blanche signed an ethics pledge – addressed to you – stating that, pursuant to the Department’s impartiality regulation, he would not participate “personally and substantially in any particular matter” involving parties in which a former client – such as President Trump – is a party for a period of one year after he last provided service to that client or until the client satisfies any outstanding bill, whichever is later.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Department regulations strictly prohibit his participation in any criminal investigation or prosecution in which he holds a relationship – including a “close personal relationship,” as an attorney, or otherwise – with anyone involved in the matter.<sup>5</sup>

Instead, Mr. Blanche appears to have ignored ethics and legal advice. This misconduct would be considered extreme on its own and is even more offensive given President Trump’s unprecedented efforts to seek vast personal financial compensation from taxpayer money and use the Department to exact vengeance against his political enemies.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond the well-known fact of Mr. Blanche’s legal representation of Donald Trump, Mr. Blanche emphasized his close and partial relationship with Trump during his first press conference as Acting Attorney General in which he stated, “I love you, sir.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, Mr. Blanche’s involvement in decision making regarding any investigations or cases involving President Trump in his personal capacity threatens to fundamentally subvert the Department’s core mandate to dispense impartial justice.

These apparent ethical failures were not isolated to Mr. Blanche. His then-top deputy, Emil Bove, was similarly given an in-depth presentation on ethics guidelines and warned that he may also hold a conflict of interest related to his role overseeing efforts to target and purge Department employees who had worked on prosecutions of President Trump.<sup>8</sup> Because Mr. Bove had

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and act consistent with governing regulations.” Blanche stated or referenced this answer 18 times in his written submissions to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

<sup>4</sup> Ethics Agreement Signed by Todd Blanche (Feb. 10, 2025), [https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/0E4C3EB0ACE8404785258C30003217F2/\\$FILE/Blanche%2C%20Todd%20%20finalEA.pdf](https://extapps2.oge.gov/201/Presiden.nsf/PAS+Index/0E4C3EB0ACE8404785258C30003217F2/$FILE/Blanche%2C%20Todd%20%20finalEA.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 45.2.

<sup>6</sup> Devlin Barrett and Tyler Pager, *Trump Said to Demand Justice Dept. Pay Him \$230 Million for Past Cases*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Oct. 21, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/21/us/politics/trump-justice-department-compensation.html>; Lucien Bruggeman and Elizabeth Schulze, *Trump sues IRS, Treasury for \$10 billion over tax returns leak*, ABC NEWS (Jan. 29, 2026), <https://abcnews.com/Politics/trump-sues-irs-treasury-10-billion-tax-returns/story?id=129687076>; Peter Stone, *How Trump is weaponizing the DoJ to ‘bully, prosecute, punish and silence’ his foes*, THE GUARDIAN, (Nov. 4, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/nov/04/trump-department-of-justice-weaponization-enemies>.

<sup>7</sup> Ashley Oliver, *Blanche invokes Trump ‘love’ when asked about staying on after Bondi*, FOX NEWS (Apr. 7, 2026), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/blanche-invokes-trump-love-when-asked-about-staying-after-bondi>.

<sup>8</sup> Katelyn Polantz, Evan Perez, and Hannah Rabinowitz, *Exclusive: Acting AG Todd Blanche was told last year to recuse from Justice Department matters involving Trump*, CNN (May 14, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/05/14/politics/todd-blanche-recusal-trump-investigations-brennan>.

previously served as a prosecutor investigating January 6 Capitol riot defendants, a top career lawyer and ethics expert warned in a memo to then-Attorney General Pam Bondi his leadership of the administration's "Weaponization Working Group" violated foundational DOJ impartiality standards.<sup>9</sup> Rather than heeding this guidance, the administration swiftly pushed out the career ethics attorney who authored the memo and Mr. Bove continued to oversee the "Weaponization Working Group."<sup>10</sup>

Though Mr. Bove left the Department last year to assume a lifetime appointment as a federal appellate judge, the gravity of his subversion of agency ethics standards while at the Department presents a pressing question as to whether his misconduct creates a "widespread lowering of public confidence in the courts"—making it a necessary subject of scrutiny for both congressional oversight and the Judicial Council under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act.<sup>11</sup>

The concerns that Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee raised during Mr. Blanche's confirmation hearing and in subsequent inquiries are reflective of the broad disregard this Administration has shown for the ethical boundaries that have long safeguarded the independence of the Department of Justice. Since last year, the Department has systematically dismantled the agency's internal guardrails, gutting both the career ethics staff and the Office of Professional Responsibility, and has refused to provide any answers to Congress about these egregious actions.<sup>12</sup> The agency even went so far as to assign political appointees to senior agency roles responsible for making final determinations on "adverse personnel actions and bar referral matters," ethics recusals and waivers, nominee financial disclosures, and other matters concerning ethics and employee discipline.<sup>13</sup>

To better inform the Senate's legislative and oversight responsibilities, and ensure necessary transparency of DOJ activities, please respond to the following no later than May 29, 2026:

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364; Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings, Vol. 2 (Mar. 12, 2019), <https://www.uscourts.gov/file/25751/download>. The Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings acknowledge that pre-appointment misconduct is relevant in a complaint filed under 28 U.S.C. § 351 if the misconduct is "reasonably likely to have a prejudicial effect on the administration of the business of the courts, including a substantial and widespread lowering of public confidence in the courts among reasonable people."

<sup>12</sup> Sam Levine, *A top DoJ official trained Pam Bondi on ethics rules in the department. Then he was fired*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 3, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/03/pam-bondi-doj-joseph-tirell-fired>; Perry Stein, Shayna Jacobs, Carol D. Leonnig and Ann E. Marimow, *Several top career officials ousted at Justice Department*, WASHINGTON POST (Mar. 7, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/07/justice-department-trump-firings/>; Letter from Ranking Member Durbin and Nine Senate Judiciary Democrats to the Honorable Pamela Bondi, Attorney General (Feb. 20, 2025), available at <https://www.durbin.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-judiciary-democrats-slam-doj-decision-to-replace-apolitical-ethics-official-with-inexperienced-political-appointees>.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Penn, *Trump DOJ Assigns Sensitive Ethics Powers to Political Aides*, BLOOMBERG LAW (Feb. 16, 2025), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/business-and-practice/trump-doj-delegates-sensitive-ethics-powers-to-political-aides>.

1. What is the last date that Mr. Blanche provided personal legal advice to Donald Trump or served as his personal attorney?
2. Have any DOJ officials sought your advice since January 2025 regarding Mr. Blanche's responsibility to recuse himself from any past or ongoing investigations and matters?
3. When was the last time Mr. Blanche sought ethics guidance from your office or otherwise?
4. Did you or any senior DOJ officials consult with the Office of Government Ethics regarding any investigations or matters from which Mr. Blanche should recuse himself? Please preserve and provide all DOJ records and correspondence – internally or seeking external ethics guidance – on the matter.
5. Has Mr. Blanche recused himself from any lawsuits filed by President Trump against the administration? If not, did Mr. Blanche seek or receive any ethics advice on whether he could participate in lawsuits where President Trump is seeking personal financial compensation from taxpayers? Does the advised one-year moratorium on involvement in matters involving a former client allow Mr. Blanche to subsequently join active DOJ matters once that time period elapses?
6. Please provide a detailed and complete list of all past or ongoing investigations and matters from which Mr. Blanche is currently recused.
7. Please provide the specific legal justification, if any, allowing Mr. Blanche's continued work on any past or ongoing investigations and matters involving his former client, President Trump, from which he did not recuse himself.
8. Please preserve and provide all existing records, communications, and materials involving DOJ personnel regarding the scope, execution, or modification of Mr. Blanche's recusal obligations.
9. In his capacity as Acting Deputy Attorney General, did Mr. Bove continue to direct personnel decisions, including any firings, or prosecutorial decisions within the "Weaponization Working Group" after receiving formal notification of his potential conflict of interest?
10. Did you or any senior DOJ officials consult with the Office of Government Ethics regarding any investigations or matters from which Mr. Bove should recuse himself?

Please preserve and provide all DOJ records and correspondence – internally or seeking external ethics guidance – on the matter.

11. Please preserve and provide a copy of the early 2025 memorandum concerning Mr. Bove’s potential conflicts of interest, as well as all records relating to an administrative or legal justification for removing the career ethics attorney who authored it.
12. Please preserve and provide all existing records, communications, and materials involving DOJ personnel regarding the scope, execution, or modification of Mr. Bove’s recusal obligations.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator