

## Board of Ethics Complaint – Mayor Brandon Johnson

January 9, 2025

William F. Conlon, Chair, Board of Ethics

Steve Berlin, Executive Director, Board of Ethics Email:

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Or report to:

Office of the Inspector General [Report](#)

[Fraud, Waste, Abuse](#)

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### To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding multiple ethical violations that may have been committed by Mayor Brandon Johnson. These violations, if they occurred, not only undermine the principles outlined in the **GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS ORDINANCE, CHAPTER 2-156, MUNICIPAL CODE OF CHICAGO**, but also represent a serious betrayal of the trust placed in him by the people of Chicago.

#### 1. Mayor Johnson’s Union Leave and Conflict of Interest

Mayor Johnson’s continued “union leave” status with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), despite his departure from teaching in 2011, is a glaring conflict of interest. Under CPS policy, Johnson — or any CPS employee who leaves to work for the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) — accrues seniority during their leave and retains the guarantee of a job with full salary upon return. This arrangement, coupled with his former role as a union leader and current position as mayor, creates significant ethical concerns as the CPS contracts are being negotiated with CTU.

Reports suggest Mayor Johnson sought the removal of CPS CEO Pedro Martinez due to Martinez’s opposition to a \$300 million high-interest loan proposal backed by CTU leadership. These actions appear to contravene provisions of the **GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS ORDINANCE**, including:

- **Section 2-156-005(a):** Public officials must place loyalty to laws and ethical principles above private gain or interest and potentially other sections.

Furthermore, Mayor Johnson’s pension, valued at an estimated \$3.8 million after just four years as a CPS teacher and one term as mayor, highlights the systemic advantage he may have leveraged at the expense of public trust.

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#### 2. Improper Contributions from Restricted Donors

Mayor Johnson’s campaign fund reportedly accepted a contribution from the CEO of Hyde Park Hospitality, a city contractor. This raises serious concerns about compliance with an ethics order enacted in 2011 under then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel, which prohibits:

"City contractors, owners of city contractors, spouses or domestic partners of owners of city contractors, subcontractors to a city contractor on a city contract, owners of subcontractors to a city contractor on a city contract, and spouses or domestic partners of owners of subcontractors to a city contractor on a city contract from making contributions of any amount to the mayor," and possibly other sections of the **GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS ORDINANCE**.

Despite repeated inquiries, neither City Hall nor the mayor's campaign has provided transparency regarding whether this contribution violated the ethics order. This lack of accountability calls into question the mayor's commitment to ethical governance and further erodes the confidence of Chicago residents.

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### **3. Sexual Misconduct Allegations Against Former Press Secretary**

The allegations against Mayor Johnson's former press secretary, Ronnie Reese, involving sexual misconduct, racism, and intimidation, raise yet another grave concern. Reports indicate that these behaviors persisted for months and were known to senior officials before Reese's eventual dismissal. If Mayor Johnson had prior knowledge of these allegations and failed to act promptly, he would have violated:

- **Section 2-156-149:** Prohibiting elected officials from engaging in, encouraging, or permitting behavior constituting sexual harassment and other sections.

These allegations demand an immediate investigation to determine whether the mayor knowingly allowed such behavior to persist within his administration, further betraying the public trust.

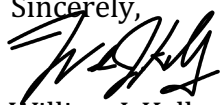
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### **Conclusion**

The ethical violations outlined above demonstrate a clear pattern of self-serving actions, disregard for the **GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS ORDINANCE**, and an alarming breach of public trust. Chicagoans deserve leaders who prioritize the city's interests above their own financial gain or political expediency. Mayor Johnson's repeated failures to uphold ethical principles have deeply damaged his credibility and the integrity of his office.

I urge the Board of Ethics and the Office of the Inspector General to investigate these matters swiftly and ensure accountability for these violations. Chicago deserves transparent, ethical, and accountable leadership.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,  
  
William J. Kelly