



FROM THE OFFICE OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

**LENA A. GONZALEZ**

SENATOR 33<sup>RD</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## **SB 521 (Gonzalez) Accountability for Local Governments**

### **SUMMARY**

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Senate Bill (SB) 521 would add a felony conflict of interest conviction to the existing list of felonies that trigger a five year prohibition on public employment.

SB 521 would also prevent city managers and city attorneys who violate the public trust from cycling through new cities by prohibiting those who commit serious felonies from being employed by a public agency in a similar role.

### **EXISTING LAW**

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Elected officials and public employees are prohibited from having a financial interest in contracts that appear before them (Government Code 1090).

Elected officials convicted of bribery are permanently disqualified from holding any office in California (Penal Code 88).

AB 1654 (Cook, Chapter 54, Statutes of 2012) disqualifies public employees from public employment for five years following conviction for certain felonies involving their official duties.

SB 1439 (Glazer, Chapter 848, Statutes of 2022) expanded existing ethics laws to include local government officials, creating restrictions on accepting political donations from entities with business before the local agency.

### **BACKGROUND/PROBLEM**

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As stewards of public dollars, public officials and employees must meet a high standard of ethical care and have a responsibility to the public to avoid conflicts of interest.

Existing law prohibits a public employee from any public employment for a five year period if they are convicted of certain felony crimes, such as bribery or embezzlement that are done as a part of the official duties. This prohibition, however, does not include convictions for felony conflict of interest violations.

Conflict of interest charges are typically brought against public employees who seek to personally benefit from decisions made as part of their official duties to the public. A felony conflict of interest is also among the types of charges that can be brought against public officials.<sup>1,2</sup>

Additionally, senior-level staff such as city managers and city attorneys hold substantial responsibility over local government decision-making and government funds.

When these officials betray public trust and commit crimes<sup>3</sup> it undermines public trust in government, and the 5 year prohibition for convictions will not restore that trust.

City managers or City attorneys who violate our states ethics laws and are convicted of a felony should not be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://plumassun.org/2025/03/25/county-hr-director-nancy-selvage-criminal-trial-coverage/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/local/education/charter-schools/la-me-edu-he-built-an-empire-charter-schools-faces-felony-charge-20160125-story.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/former-commerce-city-manager-and-former-baldwin-park-city-attorney-bribery-guilty>

able to move on to the same position at a new city and take on the same oversight and responsibilities in managing public funds, contracts, and services. Holding senior-level staff to a higher standard when they commit crimes that violate public trust is essential to reduce the cycles of corruption.

#### **SOLUTION**

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SB 521 will enhance public confidence in local government by deterring corrupt activities. This bill will help ensure that individuals who have demonstrated serious illegal behavior are prohibited from future public service in those same roles.

SB 521 does not expand or create a new crime, it simply ensures that city managers, and city attorneys who are convicted of felonies in their capacity as public servants, do not have an opportunity to move on to new city and take up the same responsibilities they previously abandoned.

#### **CONTACT**

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