

A Statement on Ethics Reform for the Government of Louisiana

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of our State of Louisiana I wish to express our support for Governor Bobby Jindal's plans to improve ethics in the government of Louisiana.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it...as with any ethical obligation, the participation of all in realizing the common good calls for a continually renewed conversion of the social partners. Fraud and other subterfuges, by which some people evade the constraints of the law and the prescriptions of societal obligation, must be firmly condemned because they are incompatible with the requirements of justice...it is incumbent on those who exercise authority to strengthen the values that inspire the confidence of the members of the group and encourage them to put themselves at the service of others."

Currently state law (R.S. 42:1101) sets forth four policy goals in the code of governmental ethics:

1. Ensure public confidence in the integrity of government.
2. Ensure the independence and impartiality of elected officials and public employees.
3. Ensure that governmental decisions and policy are made in the proper channel of the government structure.
4. Ensure that public office and employment are not used for private gain.

Unfortunately, Louisiana has a sad history of corruption at all levels of government. This is harming the common good in various ways. First, it discourages our citizens from participating in the political process itself. Secondly, it convinces out-of-state business interests that it would be a mistake for them to invest in our state. Thus good paying jobs for our citizens, and the attendant taxes they, and the businesses employing them, would pay never come to Louisiana. Thirdly, this in turn negatively impacts our government's ability to meet the legitimate educational, health, and other social needs of our people.

We urge the new state Legislature to work with Governor Jindal to pass legislation that provides improved clarity in the way state government operates. The public needs to see this occur in three areas: (1) personal finance disclosure by public officials, (2) campaign finance disclosure, and (3) spending by lobbyists. All of this needs to be done in order to convince all observers that there is no conflict of interest in the actions of our elected public officials.

There also needs to be a significant increase in the staffing and funding of the Louisiana Board of Ethics. Without those monies there is no way of providing assurance that ethics reform measures will be monitored for the sake of the common good.

Most Reverend Alfred C. Hughes
Archbishop of New Orleans
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