

July 15, 2025

Kwame Raoul
Illinois Attorney General
500 South Second Street
Springfield, IL 62701

Eileen O'Neill Burke
Cook County State's Attorney
69 W Washington St
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: Request for Review into Actions Against Illinois Law Firms

Dear Attorney General Raoul and State's Attorney Burke,

We write in response to the extraordinary and unprecedented attacks launched by President Donald J. Trump and senior officials within his administration, along with his personal associates, against many national law firms, including Allen Overy Shearman Sterling LLP (A&O Shearman); Kirkland & Ellis LLP (Kirkland); Latham & Watkins LLP (Latham); Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP (Skadden); and Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP (Willkie), which have offices in Chicago. As set forth more fully below, the Administration's conduct constitutes a clear violation of Illinois criminal law that warrants the opening of a criminal investigation.

Since taking office, Trump has issued a series of executive orders that unlawfully threaten and subject certain law firms and their clients with punishing measures that include ending the firm's government contracts, revoking firm attorneys' security clearance, barring them from entering government buildings, and demanding that government contractors disclose business with these firms and subjecting their contracts to review. The executive orders have caused these law firms significant economic harm, costing them business, clients, and employees. To procure a rescission or to evade a threatened executive order, nine law firms have capitulated to Trump's demand for free legal services. Via this scheme, Trump has extracted the promise of nearly \$1 billion in legal services for his chosen causes, cases, and allies.

The extortion of free legal assistance from large law firms is a brazen abuse of power that attacks attorney independence and undermines the adversarial system that is at the heart of our country's rule of law. We applaud Attorney General Raoul's statement calling out Trump's targeting of law firms as

“unconstitutional, retaliatory and a threat to the rule of law.”¹ As Attorney General Raoul explained in his op-ed, these actions will directly impact the residents of Illinois, making it harder for them “to obtain legal services and vindicate their rights.”² We now ask that Attorney General Raoul and State’s Attorney Burke take the next step to vindicate the rights of Illinoisians by promptly launching investigations to determine whether Trump, senior officials in his administration, and other key allies have committed (or attempted to commit) theft, intimidation, or conspiracy to commit either offense, in violation of Illinois criminal law.

Background

On March 6, 2025, Donald J. Trump issued Executive Order 14230, “Addressing Risks from Perkins Coie.” In that order, he condemned the law firm for taking on cases with which he disagrees and for no other stated reason, terminated the firm’s government contracts, revoked firm attorneys’ security clearances, and barred firm employees from entering government buildings. The Executive Order also unlawfully attacked the firm’s clients by requiring all government contractors to disclose business with the firm and subjecting their contracts to agency review. The threat was clear: if a company or person is a client of Perkins Coie, they will become disfavored by the Trump administration and lose their government contracts. Perkins Coie attorneys were immediately prohibited from attending an agency meeting on behalf of their clients; became subject to an EEOC investigation; and were fired by a number of clients who were also government contractors. *See Perkins Coie LLP v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, No. CV 25-716 (BAH), 2025 WL 1276857, at *1 (D.D.C. May 2, 2025) [hereinafter *Perkins Coie*].

Perkins Coie promptly sued and won early and decisive victories to block the Executive Order from going into effect. *See id.*; *Perkins Coie LLP v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, Order No. CV 25-716 (BAH) (Mar. 12, 2025) [hereinafter *Perkins Coie TRO Order*]. In her May 2, 2025 ruling granting a permanent injunction to block the executive order, Judge Howell of the District Court of the District of Columbia, issued a sharp rebuke of Trump’s administration:

¹ Kwame Raoul, Law Firms' Capitulation to Trump Harms Illinoisans, OFF. OF ATT’Y GEN. OF ILL., Apr. 15, 2025, <https://illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/news/story/attorney-general-raoul-op-ed-law-firms-capitulation-to-trump-harms-illinoisans>.

² *Id.*

The importance of independent lawyers to ensuring the American judicial system's fair and impartial administration of justice has been recognized in this country since its founding era . . . The instant case presents an unprecedented attack on these foundational principles . . . Using the powers of the federal government to target lawyers for their representation of clients and avowed progressive employment policies in an overt attempt to suppress and punish certain viewpoints . . . is contrary to the Constitution.

Perkins Coie, 2025 WL 1276857, at *1.

Despite the court's determination that these orders are illegal and unconstitutional, Trump issued a series of four nearly identical orders against four different law firms. *See* E.O. 14237 (Addressing Risks from Paul Weiss); E.O. 14246 (Addressing Risks from Jenner & Block); E.O. 14250 (Addressing Risks from WilmerHale); E.O. 14263 (Addressing Risks from Susman Godfrey). And he has threatened to issue more orders. *See Perkins Coie*, at *61, 63. Trump is targeting firms with which he has personal grievances, that have advocated for points of view with which he disagrees, represented clients that he perceives as adversaries, hired attorneys who have carried out investigations and prosecutions that Trump dislikes, or hired a diverse pool of employees.

The orders had immediate, damaging consequences for the law firms. Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison (Paul Weiss) was the first firm to capitulate to Trump's illegal and self-serving demands. The firm promised \$40 million in free legal representation to causes and clients chosen by Trump in exchange for Trump reversing the executive order. *See* E.O. 14244 (Addressing Remedial Action by Paul Weiss). The firm's chair wrote in a memo to the firm's employees that "[t]he executive order could easily have destroyed our firm. It brought the full weight of the government down on our firm, our people, and our clients," and that even fighting the case in court would not resolve the fact that "clients perceived our firm as being persona non grata with the Administration."³

In other words, even a win in court would not make these firms whole after being subject to the unconstitutional and extortionate assault to which Trump subjected them. The only way to protect the business was to provide Trump with millions of dollars of legal services.

³ Lauren Irwin, *Paul Weiss Chair: Trump Order 'Could Easily Have Destroyed Our Firm'*, THE HILL (Mar. 24, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/5211222-paul-weiss-chair-trump-order>; *see also*, Letter from Brad Karp, Paul, Weiss Chairman to Rep. Dave Min (CA-47) et al. (May 8, 2025), available at <https://abovethelaw.com/2025/05/trumps-biglaw-bootlickers-letters-to-congress/2> ("Because so many of the matters we handle on behalf of our clients, across practice areas, require productive interaction and engagement with the federal government—and because many of our clients also value a productive relationship with the federal government and have significant commercial relationships with the federal government—we immediately understood that the effects of the executive order would destroy the firm, even if we ultimately prevailed in court.").

On March 17, 2025, under Trump's orders to look at law firm's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced investigations of twenty law firms.⁴ These investigations were far reaching; the EEOC demanded personal information about each firm's employees and job applicants, along with detailed information about each firm's clients.⁵ To preempt potentially punishing executive orders, onerous investigation processes, and the revelation of employee information to a hostile administration, eight firms agreed to give free legal services to cases or issues selected by Trump. *See Perkins Coie*, at *61, 63 (noting that the "Trump White House has publicly touted . . . that those deal-making firms have been spared, or had revoked, an Executive Order targeting them"). These firms include A&O Shearman; Kirkland; Latham; Skadden; Willkie; Milbank LLP; Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP; and Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP. In total, the firms are giving Trump nearly \$1 billion in legal services to evade the unconstitutional punitive measures that other firms still face.⁶ The firms with offices in Chicago specifically agreed to provide a total of \$575 million in "pro bono" work for Trump's evolving set of pet causes; A&O Shearman, Kirkland, and Latham promised \$125 million each while Skadden and Willkie promised \$100 million each.⁷ As a result, these firms' offices in Chicago will likely be expected to provide at least some of the resources that the firm as a whole is now obligated to provide to Trump in order to avoid being subject to punitive, unconstitutional executive orders and investigations.

Since entering into these agreements, the law firms have been subject to demands for free legal representation from a number of Trump's allies and conservative, partisan organizations. Trump has made it clear that the firms will be expected to do his bidding, including by defending police officers who are accused of

⁴ Press Release, U.S. EQUAL EMP'T OPPORTUNITY COMM'N, *EEOC Acting Chair Andrea Lucas Sends Letters to 20 Law Firms Requesting Information About DEI-Related Employment Practices* (Mar. 17, 2025), <https://www.eeoc.gov/newsroom/eeoc-acting-chair-andrea-lucas-sends-letters-20-law-firms-requesting-information-about-dei>.

⁵ Letter from William E. White and William J.F. Roll III, Co-US General Counsels of A&O Shearman, to Rep. Yassamin Ansari (AZ-03) et al. (May 8, 2025), available at <https://abovethelaw.com/2025/05/trumps-biglaw-bootlickers-letters-to-congress/2> ("The EEOC inquiry posited that prevailing historical law firm DEI practices may have violated federal anti-discrimination laws and sought extensive information related to those practices. The EEOC's demands also included detailed personal information regarding the Firm's employees and applicants for attorney roles at the Firm, as well as extensive information related to the Firm's clients.").

⁶ *See* Jeffrey Toobin, *Trump's Next Move After the Law Firms Surrender*, N.Y. TIMES (May 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/19/opinion/trump-law-firms.html>; Rebecca Beitsch, *Law firms divided over response to Trump orders*, THE HILL (Mar. 25, 2025), <https://thehill.com/regulation/court-battles/5211686-trump-administration-targets-law-firms>; Daniel Barnes, *Major law firm strikes preemptive deal with White House*, POLITICO (Mar. 28, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/28/skadden-arps-trump-law-deal-028324>.

⁷ Sam Baker, *Law firms pledge almost \$1 billion in free work to Trump*, AXIOS (Apr. 11, 2025), <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/12/big-law-pro-bono-legal-work-trump>.

abusing civilians.⁸ Firms are now also avoiding pro bono issues, clients, or advocacy positions they might have otherwise taken, for fear of further retribution from Trump.⁹ To avoid punishing sanctions, the firms have had to compromise their autonomy—their ability to choose clients, causes, and cases that they believe warrant the firm’s pro bono representation.

Trump has flaunted the success of his extortion scheme, acknowledging in a public speech that the executive order and investigation threats were baseless:

Have you noticed that lots of law firms have been signing up with Trump? \$100 million, another \$100 million for damages that they’ve done, but they give you \$100 million and then they announce that, “But we have done nothing wrong.” **And I agree they’ve done nothing wrong.** But what the hell, they give me a lot of money considering they’ve done nothing wrong and we’ll use some of those people, some of those great firms.¹⁰

It is now up to state and local officials to hold Trump and his collaborators accountable for their bold disregard for the law.

Basis for Criminal Investigation

Theft

Illinois defines theft as follows in relevant excerpt:

- (a) A person commits theft when he or she knowingly:
 - (1) Obtains or exerts unauthorized control over property of the owner; ...
 - (3) Obtains by threat control over property of the owner; ...

720 ILCS 5/16-1(a).

Illinois law defines “property” as “anything of value,” including, but not limited to, money, written instruments representing or embodying rights concerning anything of value, labor or services, or otherwise of value to the order. 720 ILCS 5/15-1. The enumerated items in the statute are considered “illustrative”

⁸ See Jessical Silver-Greenberg et al., *Trump Allies Look to Benefit from Pro Bono Promises By Elite Law Firms*, N.Y. TIMES (May 25, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/25/business/trump-law-firms-pro-bono.html>.

⁹ *Id.*; Matthew Goldstein and Jessica Silver-Greenberg, *Some Giant Law Firms Shy Away From Pro Bono Immigration Cases*, N.Y. TIMES (May 6, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/06/business/trump-law-firms-pro-bono-immigration.html>.

¹⁰ [Emphasis added.] Associated Press, *LIVE: Trump signs executive orders aimed at boosting coal*, YOUTUBE (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k66iBAeQwEk> (at 31:40).

and courts have concluded that “the legislature intended the definition of property to include not only items of tangible personal property, but also other things of value.” *People v. Perry*, 224 Ill. 2d 312, 329, 864 N.E.2d 196, 207 (2007).

Trump’s demand on each law firm for millions of dollars in “pro bono” legal work for his chosen causes is undoubtedly something “of value.” Trump also demanded that the firms disavow any “illegal” DEI hiring considerations and agree to accept clients without regard to political beliefs. These internal policies are of value to each firm, as is the right of law firms to select their employees and clients. Trump also threatened to revoke security clearances and permissions to engage with his agencies, which are valuable privileges law firms expend considerable resources obtaining and maintaining. Therefore, Trump has demanded property from the law firms under duress.

“Theft of property exceeding \$1,000,000 in value is a Class X felony.” 720 ILCS 5/16-1(b)(6.3). Trump has demanded hundreds of millions from law firms, well above the \$1,000,000 threshold to qualify for a Class X felony. A Class X felony subjects the offender to a sentence of imprisonment ranging from minimum of six years to a maximum of thirty years. 730 ILCS 5/5-4.5-25.

Intimidation

Illinois criminalizes intimidation. Pursuant to 720 ILCS 5/12-6(a), in relevant part:

A person commits intimidation when, with intent to cause another to perform or to omit the performance of any act, he or she communicates to another, directly or indirectly by any means, a threat to perform without lawful authority any of the following acts:

...

- (3) Commit a felony or Class A misdemeanor; or
- (4) Accuse any person of an offense; or
- (5) Expose any person to hatred, contempt or ridicule:...

The purpose of the intimidation statute is to prohibit the making of threats that are intended to compel a person to act against his will. *People v. Avila*, 2011 IL App (2d) 090950-U, ¶ 26; see also, *People v. Peterson*, 306 Ill. App. 3d 1091, 1099–100, 715 N.E.2d 1221, 1227 (1999). The term “threat” requires “that the expression, in its context, has a reasonable tendency to create apprehension that its originator will act according to its tenor.” *People v. Avila*, 2011 IL App (2d) 090950-U, ¶ 26 quoting *People v. Peterson*, 306 Ill. App. 3d 1091 at 1100, 715 N.E.2d 1221, 1227 (1999). “Intimidation requires specific intent to cause the victim to perform or omit to perform certain acts.” *People v. Wallace*, 90 Ill. App. 3d 960, 964, 414 N.E.2d 99, 101 (1980), citing *People v. Smith*, 78 Ill. 2d 298, 306, 399 N.E.2d 1289, 1294 (1980).

Here, Trump and his senior officials demonstrated an intent to compel these law firms to act or not to take certain actions; they sought to control the clients the firms represent, the issues they advocate for, and who they employ. Trump and his senior officials threatened to take official actions such as signing damaging executive orders (accusing the law firms of unfounded offenses and exposing them to hatred, contempt, and ridicule from Trump's political base), withholding necessary clearances and permissions from law firm employees, and launching unfounded, resource-intensive investigations. The threats were both very real and extraordinarily damaging; Trump has utilized those very weapons against law firms Perkins Coie, Paul Weiss, Jenner & Block, WilmerHale, and Susman Godfrey.

Intimidation qualifies as a Class 3 felony. Per the sentencing provision in 720 ILCS 5/12-6(b), offenders can be sentenced to at least two and no more than ten years.

Criminal Conspiracy

Illinois law defines conspiracy as follows:

A person commits the offense of conspiracy when, with intent that an offense be committed, he or she agrees with another to the commission of that offense. No person may be convicted of conspiracy to commit an offense unless an act in furtherance of that agreement is alleged and proved to have been committed by him or her or by a co-conspirator.

720 ILCS 5/8-2(a). As relevant here, where a conspiracy to commit a Class X felony of theft or a Class 3 felony of intimidation occurs, it warrants corresponding charges of Class 1 felony for conspiracy to commit theft and Class 4 felony for conspiracy to commit intimidation. 720 ILCS 5/8-2(c).

In implementing his scheme against law firms, Trump coordinated with senior administration officials, such as Andrea R. Lucas, Acting Chair of the EEOC, who sent the letters to twenty law firms initiating EEOC investigations under false pretenses. It also appears that Trump may have orchestrated these extortionist schemes against law firms with the assistance of his personal lawyer, Boris Epshteyn.¹¹ Further investigation is required to determine the extent of the conspiracy and the numerous actors likely involved across the Trump Administration and Trump's personal associates.

¹¹ Josh Dawsey and C. Ryan Barber, *Trump's \$1 Billion Law Firm Deals Are the Work of His Personal Lawyer*, WALL ST. J. (Apr. 14, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/law/trumps-1-billion-law-firm-deals-are-the-work-of-his-personal-lawyer-77bd7b8c>.

These facts provide a basis for investigating whether Trump¹² and senior Trump officials and associates committed theft and/or intimidation, conspired to commit theft and/or intimidation, and/or attempted to commit theft and/or intimidation under Illinois law.

Immunity Does Not Preclude Prosecution

The immunity available to federal officials under the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution is not available in all circumstances and does not preclude criminal investigation and prosecution here.

The Supremacy Clause “is designed to ensure that states do not ‘retard, impede, burden, or in any manner control’ the execution of federal law.” *New York v. Tanella*, 374 F.3d 141, 147 (2d Cir. 2004) (quoting *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 316, 436 (1819)). It does not, however, wholly shield federal officers from appropriate state criminal proceedings. The Supreme Court set out the appropriate standard for assessing the availability of Supremacy Clause immunity in *Cunningham v. Neagle*: a state may not exercise criminal jurisdiction over a federal agent provided that “he was authorized to [act] by the law of the United States,” and that “in doing that act, he did no more than what was necessary and proper for him to do.” 135 U.S. 1, 75 (1890); *see also Tanella*, 374 F.3d at 147; *Kentucky v. Long*, 837 F.2d 727, 744 (6th Cir. 1988) (“Under *Neagle*, a state court has no jurisdiction if (1) the federal agent was performing an act which he was authorized to do by the law of the United States and (2) in performing that authorized act, the federal agent did no more than what was necessary and proper for him to do.”). To satisfy the second prong, two conditions must be satisfied: (1) the federal officer must “subjectively [believe] that the actions were authorized”; and (2) that belief must be “objectively reasonable under the circumstances.” *Battle v. State*, 252 Md. App. 280, 258 A.3d 1009, 1021 (2021) (citing *Long*, 837 F.2d at 744).

Supremacy Clause immunity therefore does not protect federal officers who act outside the law or beyond what is subjectively and objectively necessary and proper. When they do either, they may be held criminally liable in state court for violating state laws. *See, e.g., Battle*, 252 Md. App. at 280 (rejecting Supremacy Clause immunity for a DHS officer who was prosecuted for assaulting a civilian outside the scope of his duties and beyond what was necessary and proper).

If a criminal investigation finds even one of the following—that federal officials lacked legal authority, did not believe their actions were authorized, or could not have reasonably believed so—then state prosecution may proceed. Here, neither Trump nor any other official involved in executing the executive orders had

¹² While the U.S. Supreme Court in *Trump v. United States*, 603 U.S. 593 (2024), held that presidents are entitled to at least presumptive immunity for official acts, theft, intimidation, and conspiracy to commit either cannot be defined as official acts.

legal authority to do so; nor did they have an objectively reasonable belief that the actions were authorized. Indeed, Trump continued to sign executive orders targeting law firms and to threaten law firms *after* a court enjoined his initial attack on Perkins Coie. *Compare Perkins Coie* TRO Order (filed March 12, 2025) and E.O. 14237 (Addressing Risks from Paul Weiss) (signed Mar. 14, 2025). Neither Trump nor any other official involved in the scheme can mistake theft and intimidation for a lawful enterprise.

These likely violations of Illinois state criminal laws warrant investigation and, if appropriate, prosecution. The fact that this conduct involves the President of the United States and senior officials in his administration provides no shield to appropriate investigation and prosecution for criminal acts that do not satisfy the *Neagle* test.

It is true that Trump's scheme may well violate federal criminal statutes, including the Hobbs Act. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 1951(a) (criminalizing extortion, defined as "the obtaining of property from another, with his consent, induced by wrongful use of actual or threatened force, violence, or fear, or under color of official right"). But the fact that an offense also violates federal law does not release state law enforcement from its obligations to investigate and prosecute acts that violate state criminal laws. That is particularly true here, where the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other federal law enforcement agencies have been corruptly co-opted by Trump and directly implicated in these schemes. Federal agencies are obligated to investigate federal offenses impartially, but have thus far abdicated their responsibilities in a manner that harms the safety of our people and the stability of our democratic institutions. If local and state authorities also abdicate their civil and criminal enforcement responsibilities, their citizens will be left at the mercy of the criminal whims of federal officials, including Trump and his allies.

As the state of New York demonstrated in its prosecution of Trump for falsifying business records to cover up his hush money payments to an adult film star during his 2016 campaign, *see New York v. Trump*, Verdict Sheet, Indictment No. 71543-23 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. Part 59, May 29, 2024), states have the authority and responsibility to investigate criminal abuses of power and to protect their residents and their laws, regardless of the defendants' wealth, power, prestige, or status as federal officials.

Conclusion

Attorneys and law firms across the country have been broadly targeted by Trump in order to undermine their independence as employers and advocates, undermine national efforts to hold the current Administration responsible for its many abuses of power, and unlawfully obtain nearly \$1 billion in free legal services.

Many targeted firms have had to cede their autonomy to Trump and his allies in order to avoid the significant harms that Trump has inflicted on several law firms and threatens to inflict on more. The consequences are devastating not just for the victim law firms but also for “the American judicial system’s fair and impartial administration of justice.” *Perkins Coie LLP*, 2025 WL 1276857, at *1. An immediate and thorough criminal investigation is needed to determine whether criminal charges should be brought against Trump and his associates. We ask your offices to promptly undertake this review.

Sincerely,

Suparna Reddy, Senior Counsel
John Bonifaz, President
Ben Clements, Chairman and Senior Legal Advisor
Courtney Hostetler, Legal Director
FREE SPEECH FOR PEOPLE
28 S. Main St, Suite 200
Sharon, Massachusetts 02067
(617) 244-0234 (office)
sreddy@freespeechforpeople.org