

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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May 30, 2025

The Honorable Ed Martin
Pardon Attorney
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Pardon Attorney Martin:

I write to ask you to explain the criteria and process you are now using as the United States Pardon Attorney to recommend individuals for a presidential pardon.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the mission of the Office of the Pardon Attorney is to “support second chances through clemency” by reviewing all applications from convicted offenders and making recommendations to the President that are consistent, unbiased, and uphold the “interests of justice.”¹

Alas, it at least appears that you are using the Office of the Pardon Attorney to dole out pardons as favors to the President’s loyal political followers and most generous donors, completely ignoring and abandoning the thousands of individual applications for clemency. These Americans depend on your office for a fair shot at a second chance in a process that has some real integrity.

The signs are troubling. During your short tenure as Interim U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, you described yourself and the office’s career prosecutors as “President Trumps’ [sic] lawyers.” You used your office to place the President’s allies convicted of political violence and other crimes above the law and to target his imagined enemies, thus endangering public safety in our Nation’s Capital.²

As Interim U.S. Attorney, you fired over a dozen career federal prosecutors assigned to prosecute violent crimes in Washington, D.C., simply because they had worked on the investigations of the massive violent attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Meantime, you, along with some of your fellow U.S. attorneys, have taken the absurd position that President Trump’s pardons of January 6th rioters and insurrectionists covered totally unrelated criminal

¹ Office of the Pardon Attorney, *About the Office*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE, <https://www.justice.gov/pardon/about-office> (last visited May 27, 2025).

² U.S. Attorney DC (@USAO_DC), X (Feb. 24, 2025, 3:18 pm), https://x.com/USAO_DC/status/1894119675786621225.

offenses, like drug dealing and illegal gun possession, which these offenders committed on other dates and in different locations.³ You also used that office to threaten to investigate and prosecute political critics of the Administration, including journalists, attorneys, peaceful protesters, and Members of Congress, in blatantly ridiculous violation of the First Amendment.⁴ And you even ordered an attorney to illegally freeze the bank accounts of non-profit organizations that received grants for climate and clean-energy projects, leading to the emphatic resignation of the Office's career chief of the criminal section.⁵

Now, after Senate Republicans joined Democrats in opposing your confirmation as U.S. Attorney for suppressing your extensive involvement with Russian propaganda networks like RT and repeatedly praising a known antisemite and Hitler enthusiast, you seem to be using your new position, which is not subject to Senate confirmation, simply to promote pardons for persons who pledge their political loyalty to President Trump or have enough money to essentially purchase his mercy.⁶ In doing so, you are ignoring and betraying the nearly 8,000 applicants who have followed the lawful process and submitted petitions that are sitting on your desk waiting for fair and objective consideration.⁷

You owe it to thousands of legitimate pardon applicants—and to the principles of due process and equal treatment under the law, which the Department of Justice (DOJ) is designed to serve—to explain the formal criteria and process that your office now uses to evaluate Americans' pardon applications.

It is plain that your office has jettisoned DOJ's long-established standards for recommending a pardon to the president, as set forth in meticulous federal regulations and Department policy. The traditional standards require that the individual seeking a pardon "has accepted responsibility for his or her criminal conduct and made restitution to its victims" and that five years have passed since they were convicted.⁸ The other traditional factors include: the disparity or undue severity of the criminal sentence; the existence of critical illness or old age; meritorious service to the government that has not been adequately recognized or rewarded by other official actions; the seriousness of the offense of criminal conviction; the applicant's overall criminal record; the nature of their adjustment to prison supervision; the length of time

³ Alan Feuer, *Judge Pushes Back on Justice Dept.'s Broad View of Jan. 6 Pardons*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/14/us/politics/justice-department-trump-jan-6-pardons.html>.

⁴ Spencer S. Hsu & Perry Stein, *Top House Judiciary Democrat Seeks IG Probe of D.C. U.S. Attorney Martin*, WASH. POST (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/03/13/raskin-martin-usattorney-trump-investigation/>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Spencer S. Hsu & Aaron Schaffer, *Trump's D.C. U.S. Attorney Pick Appeared on Russian State Media Over 150 Times*, WASH. POST (Apr. 16, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/04/16/ed-martin-rt-sputnik-usattorney/>; Tom Dreisbach, *Trump Nominee Gives Misleading Testimony about Ties to Alleged 'Nazi Sympathizer'*, NPR (May 1, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/01/nx-s1-5380933/ed-martin-trump-hale-cusanelli-antisemitic>; Seung Min Kim & Michael Kunzelman, *Trump Pulls the Nomination of Ed Martin for DC US Attorney After Concerns of Partisanship*, ASSOC. PRESS (May 8, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-ed-martin-white-house-justice-department-thom-tillis-cccf801799faa2b56fd1bb4fac48379e>.

⁷ Office of the Pardon Attorney, *Pending Applications*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, <http://justice.gov/pardon> (last visited May 27, 2025).

⁸ U.S. Attorneys' Manual § 1-2.113 – Standards for Considering Commutation Petitions (2018), U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, <https://www.justice.gov/jm/jm-9-140000-pardonattorney>; 28 C.F.R. § 1-2.

already served; the availability of other remedies; and candor in the commutation application itself.⁹

None of the cases you have recommended to date appears to have satisfied these standards. Instead, it appears the Administration has abruptly changed the criteria for granting presidential pardons and commutations. The new criteria for granting pardons appear to be: showing absolute personal and political loyalty to President Trump; giving substantial financial contributions to MAGA and the President's political network; and engaging in forms of political corruption and violence that promote MAGA power and authoritarianism.

Are these indeed the new criteria? Please advise and spell them out clearly.

In the first case announced after you assumed the role as Pardon Attorney, you helped secure the pardon of Culpeper County, Virginia, Sheriff Scott Jenkins, an ardent Trump loyalist. Sheriff Jenkins was just convicted in December 2024 on numerous federal bribery and fraud charges and subsequently sentenced to ten years in prison for operating a “cash-for-badges” scheme which netted him personally more than \$75,000.¹⁰ In the words of his sentencing judge, Sheriff Jenkins “sold badges to wealthy men [...] who thought they were above the law.”¹¹ Now, thanks to you and President Trump, this corrupt sheriff will never spend a day in prison for selling government appointments to the highest bidders.

The following day, President Trump announced that he would pardon reality TV stars Todd and Julie Chrisley who were convicted in 2022 for funding their lavish lifestyle through tax evasion and bank fraud.¹² The Chrisleys claim, without any evidence, that they were unfairly targeted for their “conservative” beliefs. Their adult daughter spoke at the Republican National Convention last July, arguing that her parents were victims of an outrageous political prosecution—conveniently ignoring the fact that they were indicted by the DOJ during the first Trump Administration.¹³

On May 28, another 20 dubious pardons were announced, including that of New York Congressman Michael Grimm who pleaded guilty to tax fraud in 2014, admitting to having concealed nearly \$1 million in income and hundreds of thousands of dollars in employee wages,

⁹ U.S. Attorneys' Manual § 9-140.113 – Standards for Considering Commutation Petitions (2018), U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, <https://www.justice.gov/jm/jm-9-140000-pardonattorney>.

¹⁰ Martha Bellisle, *Trump Says He's Pardoning a Virginia Sheriff Convicted on Bribery Charges*, WASH. POST (May 26, 2025), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/2025/05/26/sheriff-bribery-conviction-trump-pardon/f20aa184-3a83-11f0-912d-d5f4792db3e4_story.html; Bart Jansen, *Trump Pardons Virginia Ex-Sheriff Convicted in Bribery Scheme*, USA TODAY (May 27, 2025), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/05/27/trump-pardons-scott-jenkins-virginia-sheriff-bribery-conviction/83873359007/>.

¹¹ Ted Oberg, Rick Yarborough, & Jeff Piper, *Trump Pardons Former Culpepper County Sheriff Found Guilty in Bribes-for-Badges Scheme*, NBC NEWS4 (May 27, 2025), <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/northern-virginia/trump-pardons-former-culpeper-county-sheriff-found-guilty-in-bribes-for-badges-scheme/3922046/>.

¹² Rachel Treisman, *Trump is Pardoning Todd and Julie Chrisley, the Reality TV Couple Convicted of Fraud*, NPR (May 28, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/05/28/nx-s1-5414091/todd-julie-chrisley-pardon-trump>.

¹³ *Id.*

and later, while a Member of Congress, having lied under oath in a deposition.¹⁴ Of course, my colleagues in Congress might better remember Mr. Grimm from the time in 2014 when he threatened a reporter who asked about an ongoing campaign finance probe, telling the reporter: “Let me be clear to you, you ever do that to me again I’ll throw you off this f——g balcony.”¹⁵

Also on May 28, President Trump pardoned the former general president of the International Union of Operating Engineers, James Callahan, who pled guilty to filing false reports with the Department of Labor to conceal more than \$300,000 in tickets to sporting events and concerts he received as gifts from an advertising firm that did business with the union.¹⁶ The pardon came on the eve of Mr. Callahan’s sentencing, where prior to the news of the pardon, prosecutors planned to argue that “Callahan’s spree of pricey entertainments—a lifestyle his substantial salary could easily accommodate—is especially condemning.”¹⁷

President Trump also commuted the life sentence of infamous Chicago gang leader Larry Hoover, founder of the Gangster Disciples.¹⁸ Under Mr. Hoover’s command, the Gangster Disciples ran a sophisticated and violence-filled multi-state narcotics ring.¹⁹ While Mr. Hoover’s federal sentence was commuted, he will continue to serve a 200-year sentence on state charges in Illinois for a 1973 murder.²⁰ It is telling that the President is happy to commute the sentence of a convicted murderer and street gang leader, while refusing to comply with a judicial order to facilitate the return, from a dangerous prison in El Salvador, of a man the Administration has admitted it wrongfully deported over the President’s unproven and dubious allegations that he was a gang member.²¹

News reports suggest that, at the request of Peter Ticktin, a lawyer and former classmate of President Trump, you are now looking into a pardon for former Arkansas State Senator Jonathan Woods, who was indicted in early 2017 on federal bribery charges by the now-gutted

¹⁴ Jennifer Jacobs (@JenniferJJacobs), X (May 28, 2025, 5:11 pm), <https://x.com/JenniferJJacobs/status/1927835029121519911>; Kevin Frey, *First on NY1: Trump Pardons Former Staten Island Rep. Michael Grimm*, NY1 (May 28, 2025), <https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2025/05/28/trump-pardons-former-staten-island-rep--michael-grimm>; Press Release, *United States Congressman Michael Grimm Pleads Guilty to Causing the Filing of a False and Fraudulent Tax Return*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE (Dec. 23, 2014), available at <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/united-states-congressman-michael-grimm-pleads-guilty-causing-filing-false-and-fraudulent-tax>.

¹⁵ Dylan Byers & John Bresnahan, *Grimm Clashes with Reporter*, POLITICO (Jan. 29, 2014), <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/01/michael-grimm-michael-scotto-reporter-102785>.

¹⁶ Michael Kunzelman, *Trump Pardons Labor Union Leader on the Eve of Sentencing for Failing to Report Gifts*, ASSOC. PRESS (May 28, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/james-callahan-union-trump-pardon-9caa702512cf98fc9274c2bfea8e5b5e>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Jason Meisner, Caroline Kubzansky, & Sam Charles, *Trump Commutes Federal Life Sentence of Founding Gangster Disciples Kingpin Larry Hoover*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE (May 28, 2025), <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/05/28/trump-commutes-federal-sentence-larry-hoover/>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Jacob Rosen & Camilo Montoya-Galvez, *Trump ICE Official Admits “Administration Error” in Deporting Man to El Salvador Prison*, CBS NEWS (Apr. 1, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-administrative-error-deporting-man-el-salvador-prison/>.

Public Integrity Section and later sentenced to 18 years in prison.²² Mr. Woods abused his position as State Senator by soliciting and accepting cash bribes and other favors from two private, non-profit entities in return for appropriating and then directing state funding to them.²³

You have also pledged to take a “hard look” at pardoning two of the dangerous criminals who conspired to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and deploy a weapon of mass destruction in the process.²⁴ Astonishingly, you declared on national television that these two individuals, sentenced to 16 and 19 years in prison, are “victims just like January 6.” Yet these two felons promised violence, planned and participated in trainings to facilitate the kidnapping—that would involve handcuffs and a hood to cover her head—and private “trial” of a sitting Governor of Michigan, and endeavored to launch a civil war in our country.²⁵ They regularly took scouting and reconnaissance trips to Governor Whitmer’s second home as part of their deadly serious plot.²⁶

According to published reports, you are even exploring full pardons for several of the January 6th “seditious conspiracists” whose conduct was so egregious that—unlike the more than 1,600 others who also participated in the violent attack on the Capitol and received full pardons—President Trump dared only give them a commutation of their sentences.²⁷

These violent extremists now seeking full pardons include the leaders of the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys, ringleaders who planned and directed the assault on the Capitol that violently injured at least 140 law enforcement officers, who were beaten with pipes, baseball bats, American flags and their own police shields, in the worst mob violence attack on the United States Congress and Capitol Police in American history.²⁸ These extremists include Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who was sentenced to 18 years in prison for seditious conspiracy for plotting to violently stop the certification of the 2020 election results and was

²² Daniel Barnes, *Ed Martin Personally Reviewed Pardon Application for Jan. 6 Ringleader Stewart Rhodes*, POLITICO (May 27, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/27/ed-martin-stewart-rhodes-jan-6-pardon-00371222>.

²³ Press Release, *Former Ark. State Senator Sentenced to More Than 18 Years in Prison for Bribery Scheme*, U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE (Sept. 5, 2018), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/former-arkansas-state-senator-sentenced-more-18-years-prison-bribery-scheme>.

²⁴ Ed White, *U.S. Justice Dep’t Pardon Lawyer Pledges ‘Hard Look’ at Plot to Kidnap Michigan Governor*, DETROIT NEWS (May 23, 2025), <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2025/05/23/justice-department-michigan-governor-whitmer-kidnapping-plot/83825764007/>; Jacob Knutson, *Jury Finds 2 Men Guilty of Conspiring to Kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer*, AXIOS (Aug. 23, 2022), <https://www.axios.com/2022/08/23/2-men-guilty-conspiring-kidnap-gov-whitmer>.

²⁵ Ed White, *Court Affirms Convictions of 2 Key People in Plot to Kidnap Michigan’s Governor*, ASSOC. PRESS (Apr. 1, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/michigan-whitmer-kidnapping-plot-convictions-042227f68a3fcc49ea91126388cd91de#>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Daniel Barnes, *Ed Martin Personally Reviewed Pardon Application for Jan. 6 Ringleader Stewart Rhodes*, POLITICO (May 27, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/27/ed-martin-stewart-rhodes-jan-6-pardon-00371222>.

²⁸ Michael S. Schmidt & Luke Broadwater, *Officers’ Injuries, Including Concussions, Show Scope of Violence at Capital Riot*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 11, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/us/politics/capitol-riot-police-officer-injuries.html>.

planning for civil war.²⁹ During Mr. Rhodes' sentencing hearing, the federal judge in the case called him "an ongoing threat and a peril to this country, to the republic and to the very fabric of our democracy."³⁰

Extremists being considered for a full pardon also include the self-described "sergeant of arms" for the Proud Boys, Ethan Nordean, who was serving an 18-year sentence before President Trump commuted his sentence.³¹ Mr. Nordean, whom prosecutors said was the "undisputed leader on the ground" of the anti-government assault on January 6th, coordinated the Proud Boys' violent attacks on the police and storming of the Capitol in the failed effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, which Joe Biden won by more than seven million votes and 306-232 in the Electoral College.³²

Your job, as Pardon Attorney, is not to reward convicted defendants who have been politically or financially loyal to the President. It is to do the hard work of reviewing the nearly 8,000 pending petitions of individuals who have actually followed the rules and waited their turn.³³ These are people who are depending on your independent and apolitical review for a second chance and relying on your office for a fair shot at securing a presidential pardon. I urge you not to let them—and the American people—down by corrupting the important and unique mission of the Office of the Pardon Attorney.

I await your reply and clarification of your process and criteria.

Sincerely,


Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Jim Jordan, Chairman

²⁹ Daniel Barnes, *Ed Martin Personally Reviewed Pardon Application for Jan. 6 Ringleader Stewart Rhodes*, POLITICO (May 27, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/27/ed-martin-stewart-rhodes-jan-6-pardon-00371222>; Sarah N. Lynch & Chris Gallagher, *Oath Keeper Leader Spoke of 'Civil War' Ahead of Jan. 6 Capitol Attack-U.S. Prosecutors*, REUTERS (Oct. 3, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/legal/oath-keepers-founder-goes-trial-over-us-capitol-riots-2022-10-03/>.

³⁰ Kyle Cheney, *Judge Says a Pardon of Oath Keepers Founder Stewart Rhodes Would Be 'Frightening'*, POLITICO (Dec. 18, 2024), <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/12/18/oath-keepers-pardon-rhodes-001632>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² Jaclyn Diaz, *A Proud Boy Pleaded for Leniency from a Judge, Then Yelled 'Trump Won' on His Way Out*, NPR (Sept. 1, 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/01/1197186891/proud-boys-member-dominic-pezzola-sentenced-to-10-years-in-jan-6-riot-case>; Caroline Linton, *All 538 Electors Have Voted, Formalizing Biden's 306-232 Win. Here's How the Electoral College Works*, CBS NEWS (Dec. 15, 2020), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/electoral-college-votes-joe-biden-victory/>.

³³ Office of the Pardon Attorney, *Pending Applications*, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, <http://justice.gov/pardon> (last visited May 27, 2025).