

# Summary: Alleged Ethics Violations by a Bureau Director Unsubstantiated

**Report Date: June 30, 2023**

**Report Number: 22-0282**

The OIG investigated an allegation that Elizabeth A. Klein, a Bureau Director for the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) did not comply with ethics obligations by failing to disclose former relationships with several state offices to DOI Departmental Ethics Office officials and by participating in particular matters involving former clients.<sup>1</sup> We also investigated whether Klein adhered to the terms of the ethics recusals and screening arrangement (Recusal Agreement), in which she agreed to immediately forward any matter involving former clients to a screener who would then determine whether Klein’s ethics obligations required recusal from participation in those matters. We did not substantiate any of these allegations.

We first determined that Klein disclosed the former employer and clients as required by laws and regulations pertaining to financial disclosures of executive branch employees.<sup>2</sup>

We also found that Klein did not violate the ethics regulation concerning the appearance of impartiality.<sup>3</sup> As an initial matter, Klein did not have the requisite “covered relationship” with the state offices that participated in a program managed by the former employer. In addition, Klein did not violate this ethics regulation by attending a specific meeting within the Department or in reviewing a proposed rule change because those matters were not “particular matter[s] involving specific parties” as required by the language of the regulation. Similarly, we concluded that Klein did not violate this same ethics regulation by attending a second meeting because we found her to be credible in stating that she had conducted the required impartiality analysis. Finally, we found that Klein did not violate the terms of the Recusal Agreement with respect to the second meeting because that agreement was not in effect at the relevant time.

This is a summary of a report we provided to the Chief of Staff for the Office of the Secretary for any action deemed appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> The events at issue in this matter concern her previous role in the DOI; that is, the events do not pertain to any actions taken as a Bureau Director.

<sup>2</sup> The relevant portion of the Ethics Pledge under Executive Order 13989 (Ethics Pledge)—namely section 1, paragraph 2—was not implicated here because state government agencies are excluded from the definition of “former employer” or “former clients” as that term is used in the Ethics Pledge.

<sup>3</sup> See 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502.

