

Request for Statewide Review of Beyond Your Base Referendum Work

To: Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul

Eileen O'Neill Burke, Cook County State's Attorney

Robert B. Berlin, DuPage County State's Attorney

Eric F. Rinehart, Lake County State's Attorney

James W. Glasgow, Will County State's Attorney

From: Brian Costin, Deputy State Director, Americans for Prosperity – Illinois

Contact: bcostin@afphq.org | 847-513-4326

Date: October 4, 2026

Re: Request for immediate public guidance and review of referendum-related consultant activity

Request for immediate statewide review

I request an immediate, coordinated investigation into whether Illinois local governments have used, or are now using, taxpayer money, public employees, government communications, and other public resources to influence tax-hike referendums.

On Beyond Your Base's website, 24 senior officials from local governments across Illinois—including school superintendents, fire chiefs, park district executives, and a library director—credited the consultant with helping pass tax and bond referendums.

Illinois law prohibits local governments from spending public funds to urge voters to approve a referendum, including hiring a consultant to do so. Calling a taxpayer-funded campaign strategy “public information” does not make it lawful.

The complaints and materials submitted here raise a broader concern: this may be a widespread, large-scale practice sustained by a near-total failure of state and local authorities to enforce the [Election Code's prohibition on publicly funded referendum advocacy](#) and the [ethics rules governing political activity](#).

Of 24 testimonials found on the Beyond Your Base's website, several describe building support, analyzing voters, or turning public support into votes. Their statements raise urgent questions about who paid for the work, whether public employees helped on compensated time, and whether services presented as public information became voter persuasion. As a result of this discovery, we have filed new ethics complaints concerning 24 local governments, in addition to our earlier complaint concerning Community Consolidated School District 15.

For example, the following selection of quotes raises deep questions about the nature of Beyond Your Base's relationships with local governments across Illinois. This letter explains the legal concerns, the need for a statewide review, and the Attorney General's role, then reproduces all 24 testimonials in full.

“Beyond Your Base partnered with the Tri-State Fire Protection District to successfully pass a \$38.1 million bond referendum with 64% and 56% support in the two counties we service.” — Tri-State Fire Protection District (Cook and DuPage Counties)

“Through the tireless, top-notch efforts of Beyond Your Base, our \$89 million bond referendum passed with 64% support.” — Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 (Cook County)

“Beyond Your Base was instrumental in helping us successfully pass our \$13.86 million referendum with 74% support.” — Park District of La Grange (Cook County)

Taken together, these testimonials read like frank admissions by current and former high-ranking public officials that their public bodies engaged Beyond Your Base to convince voters to pass tax-increasing referendums. That is deeply troubling. If taxpayer money paid for the persuasion they describe, the work may

have crossed the line into prohibited election activity. The testimonials do not disclose who paid each invoice or the full scope of services; those are the facts an investigation must establish.

I ask Attorney General Raoul and the affected county State's Attorneys to secure contracts, invoices, scopes of work, polling, messages, and communications; determine who authorized and paid for each service; and identify the office responsible for independent review of each complaint. Please act before further public resources are spent on election activity. The testimonials alone do not prove a violation. They provide a compelling reason to obtain records that can answer the question.

The governing law

These testimonials are attributed to high-ranking public officials speaking about referendums in their own districts. On their face, several appear to describe using a consultant to achieve an election result.

Illinois law prohibits spending public funds to urge voters to vote for or against a ballot proposition or engaging in prohibited political activity. A first violation of this Election Code provision is a Class B misdemeanor; a second or subsequent violation by a person is a Class A misdemeanor. 10 ILCS 5/9-25.1(a)-(c).

The State Officials and Employees Ethics Act defines prohibited political activity to include referendum-related public-opinion polling, gathering information from voters to predict the outcome, soliciting votes, preparing campaign material, and campaigning for or against a referendum. 5 ILCS 430/1-5. Section 5-15 restricts such activity on compensated time and the misuse of public resources for State employees; an intentional violation of that section is a Class A misdemeanor under Section 50-5(a). For the local officials named here, Section 70-5 requires their governments and school districts to adopt political-activity rules no less restrictive than Section 5-15, and Section 70-10 permits similar local penalties. 5 ILCS 430/5-15; 5 ILCS 430/50-5(a); 5 ILCS 430/70-5; 5 ILCS 430/70-10.

Official misconduct is a separate potential felony. A public officer or employee acting in an official capacity commits that offense if the person knowingly performs an act that the person knows is forbidden by law. The offense is a Class 3 felony and carries forfeiture of the office or employment upon conviction. If records show that a public official knowingly authorized or directed a legally forbidden use of public funds, the appropriate State's Attorney should assess whether the elements of official misconduct can be proved. 720 ILCS 5/33-3(a)(2), (c).

Attorney General powers and responsibilities

Section 4 of the Attorney General Act supplies specific powers for a coordinated response. Its Fourth duty directs the Attorney General to consult with and advise State's Attorneys on their duties and to assist in criminal prosecutions when the Attorney General judges the public interest requires it. The Attorney General may investigate and prosecute an Election Code violation at the request of a State's Attorney or the State Board of Elections. The office may also ask a State's Attorney in writing to initiate Election Code proceedings and, after a written refusal or 60 days without action or a written response, initiate those proceedings concurrently or independently. 15 ILCS 205/4.

The Fifth duty calls for the Attorney General to investigate alleged violations of statutes the office has a duty to enforce and to conduct other investigations in connection with assisting a criminal prosecution at a State's Attorney's request. The Public Integrity Bureau describes its work as investigating misuse of public resources and prosecuting public corruption within the office's authority. The General Assembly also assigned the Attorney General the task of developing model local ethics ordinances and advising governmental entities on their contents and adoption; the office's guidance describes a mechanism for resolving local ethics complaints. 15 ILCS 205/4; 5 ILCS 430/70-5.

This request asks for review of possible Election Code and Ethics Act misdemeanors, state and local ethics violations, and potential felony official misconduct where evidence supports it.

I ask Attorney General Raoul to have the Public Integrity Bureau review the evidence within its authority, confer promptly with the Cook, DuPage, Lake, and Will County State's Attorneys, and identify the appropriate investigative or prosecutorial route for each matter. I ask each State's Attorney to review the complaints in that county and request Attorney General assistance where warranted. If the office concludes that a particular allegation belongs with a local ethics body or another prosecutor, please identify that body and explain the referral after examining the evidence and applicable law. The November election makes prompt guidance and preservation of records especially important.

A systemic oversight problem in Illinois

Beyond Your Base is part of a wider Illinois market for referendum services. Firms serving public bodies advertise surveys, strategic messaging, community engagement, and communications tied to successful ballot measures. A contract described as a "public information campaign" may still require scrutiny of its actual work. Investigators should determine which services a public body funded, which a separate campaign committee paid for, and whether any public resources were used to influence voters.

Other firms offering referendum services

1. **Creative Entourage / Discovery Works Collaborative** [Source](#)
2. **EO Sullivan Consulting** [Source](#)
3. **Cor Strategies** [Source](#)
4. **aQity Research & Insights** [Source](#)
5. **Captivate Media + Consulting** [Source](#)
6. **Donovan Group** [Source](#)
7. **ARCON Associates** [Source](#)
8. **DLR Group** [Source](#)
9. **Cordogan Clark & Associates** [Source](#)
10. **Kings Financial Consulting** [Source](#)

These sources show a statewide market for referendum services and a systemic need for clear oversight. They do not establish that every firm used taxpayer funds for persuasion or violated Illinois law. The Attorney General and county State's Attorneys should examine contracts, invoices, funding sources, surveys, draft and final messages, campaign-committee payments, and communications that may connect publicly funded work with election advocacy. Guidance should apply across Illinois, not only to the entities named in this letter.

Why guidance is needed now

The November 3, 2026, General Election is 30 days away as of this letter. It is incumbent on the relevant county State's Attorneys and Attorney General Kwame Raoul, as a matter of public accountability, to give school districts and other public bodies prompt, clear guidance on the boundary between factual referendum information and taxpayer-funded advocacy. Districts may currently be purchasing consultant services, preparing mailings, testing messages, and assigning staff work. Guidance after ballots are cast cannot prevent an improper use of public resources before the vote.

I ask the Attorney General and the relevant State's Attorneys to clarify how the Election Code, the State Ethics Act, and local ethics ordinances apply to publicly funded polling, voter targeting, persuasion, campaign materials, and employee participation. Please identify the records and facts that distinguish lawful factual outreach from prohibited election activity and review potential violations where the evidence supports doing so.

Complete testimonials

The following 24 statements are reproduced in full from the preserved Beyond Your Base testimonials page. They include the earlier District 15 matter and the testimonial jointly attributed to Mundelein Districts 75 and 120, whose separate complaints bring the new local government count to 24. Each quotation is shown once.

1. Deerfield Public Schools District 109 (Lake County)

Michael Simeck | Superintendent

Beyond Your Base comes with a well-deserved reputation for insight and accuracy, and those strengths were on full display for the community, board, and administration as we navigated our way through a generational moment in Deerfield 109's history. That work culminated in a successful \$87.8 million referendum, approved by a 64%-36% margin. At the outset, Beyond Your Base projected voter turnout of 5,982, an estimate that proved to be less than one-half of one percent off. But precision is only part of what Beyond Your Base provides. Their approach is confident and direct, whether working with the board of education, task force committees, or internal groups shaping strategy, they bring the same level of insight and accuracy to those conversations. It's hard to overstate how impressed we are with Beyond Your Base.

2. Tri-State Fire Protection District (Cook and DuPage Counties)

Patrick Brenn | Fire Chief

Beyond Your Base partnered with the Tri-State Fire Protection District to successfully pass a \$38.1 million bond referendum with 64% and 56% support in the two counties we service. Navigating the complexities of a referendum can often feel daunting, but throughout each stage, Paul Hanley and Skylar White provided support and guidance. Thanks to their expertise and commitment, what initially seemed overwhelming became a far more manageable experience. Their presence at every juncture helped streamline the process, surpassing my expectations for how smoothly everything unfolded. The Fire District is now able to modernize its fire stations focusing on firefighter wellness and improving response times.

3. Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 (Cook County)

Dr. Ben Collins | Superintendent

Through the tireless, top-notch efforts of Beyond Your Base, our \$89 million bond referendum passed with 64% support. There's no better firm when it comes to the development of referenda that meet the needs of both taxpayers and the public entity. In fact, community trust in our school district has grown exponentially as a result of the taxpayer-focused public engagement process that Beyond Your Base helped us develop and implement. I truly believe they are the best!

4. Lake Forest Community High School District 115 (Lake County)

Dr. Matthew Montgomery | Superintendent

Paul Hanley is a force. Data-driven, keenly thoughtful, and singularly focused on building strong public support, Paul and his team at Beyond Your Base helped us educate and inform a deeply divided electorate. Drawing upon his 30-plus years of referendum-related experience, Paul gave us the insights, strategic guidance, and confidence we needed to deliver a winning \$105.7 million bond to address the aging infrastructure of our 88-year-old high school. No one knows this kind of work better than Paul Hanley.

5. Mt. Prospect Park District (Cook County)

Jim Jarog | Executive Director

Beyond Your Base guided Mt. Prospect Park District through an extensive public engagement process, resulting in the District's first approved bond referendum in over five decades. Their time-tested process delivered a community-driven proposal that will allow us to better serve our residents for years to come.

6. Indian Prairie School District 204 (DuPage and Will Counties)

Dr. Adrian Talley | Superintendent

The passage of our \$420 million bond referendum would not have been possible without Beyond Your Base's strategies focused on carefully listening to our taxpayers over many months of public engagement. They provided exemplary support and guidance in helping to make a herculean task more manageable and doable. The professionals at BYB, led by Paul Hanley, take what is difficult and make it simple for all to understand. It was the right choice to go with Beyond Your Base. We are grateful for their support.

7. Park District of La Grange (Cook County)

Jenny Bechtold, CPRE | Executive Director

Beyond Your Base was instrumental in helping us successfully pass our \$13.86 million referendum with 74% support. BYB listened carefully to our staff, board, and residents, and provided expert advice and support in navigating the pre-referendum process. They were highly responsive, easy to work with, and always professional. We could not have achieved this success without their dedication and expertise. I highly recommend Paul Hanley and Beyond Your Base!

8. Community Consolidated School District 46 (Lake County)

Lynn Glickman, Ed.D. | Superintendent

When we were considering referendum consultants, we were told by colleagues who had successfully passed referendums: 'Hire Paul Hanley, and then do exactly everything that he says!' I'm pleased to say that we followed that great advice, and now I'm passing it on to others. We trusted Paul every step of the way. He has a strong process, and always has another way to get at a problem.

9. Joliet Public Schools District 86 (Will County)

Dr. Theresa R. Rouse | Superintendent

Paul Hanley and the Beyond Your Base team helped us achieve 71% support for a \$99.5 million referendum in April 2023. With a clear understanding of our voter base, Paul and his team developed materials that communicated the district's need to improve its aging facilities. Feedback from BYB's public opinion research then helped us outline a community-driven path toward success. Paul's wisdom and guidance made all the difference.

10. Downers Grove Grade School District 58 (DuPage County)

Dr. Kevin Russell | Superintendent of Schools

District 58 faced several daunting challenges regarding its facilities. The 13 schools were in need of critical repairs totaling \$179 million. The last successful referendum in the District was 30 years ago and the last comprehensive referendum that addressed all facilities passed in 1950. To put it mildly, passing any type of upgrades to the schools was extremely challenging in our community. Paul Hanley and the team from Beyond Your Base helped us engage our entire community and finalize a plan that had widespread support. The ballot measure passed by a wide margin with approximately 68% support.

11. Community Consolidated School District 15 (Cook County)

Dr. Laurie Heinz, Ed.D. | Superintendent of Schools

Paul Hanley and Beyond Your Base played a critical role in helping our large and diverse district pass a successful referendum measure in November 2022. Paul brings decades worth of successful partnerships with school districts from across the country to the work he does with and for you. He draws from an incredible depth of knowledge surrounding the very complex referendum process, shares lessons learned in order to help guide the work of your district's pre-referendum campaign, while also serving as a no-nonsense sounding board throughout all aspects of work prior to and after the Board adopts a referendum measure. I recommend any district serious about putting together a comprehensive and successful campaign strongly consider hiring Paul Hanley and Beyond Your Base.

12. Glencoe Park District (Cook County)

Lisa Sheppard, CPRP | Executive Director

Beyond Your Base adeptly defined our project scope, crafted compelling messaging, and devised a strategic communication plan to inform and engage our community. Their insightful voter analysis and deep understanding of the electorate truly set them apart. BYB's unwavering guidance, responsiveness, and grace under pressure were invaluable. Thanks to their expertise, we passed a successful referendum with 70% voter approval! We highly recommend Beyond Your Base for their strategic guidance, execution, and exceptional teamwork.

13. Mundelein School Districts 75 and 120 (Lake County)

Dr. Kevin Myers | Superintendent

Beyond Your Base was instrumental in shaping the information campaign that led to the passage of our \$149.5 million referendum in November 2024. Their use of taxpayer-focused strategies and public affairs expertise created a roadmap to success. They were able to simplify complex issues, analyze voter tendencies, and provide clear and consistent direction to turn community support into voter action.

14. North Shore School District 112 (Lake County)

Michael Lubelfeld, Ed.D. | Superintendent of Schools

Our 2022 bond referendum for \$114,400,000 was successful because we followed the steps outlined by Paul Hanley of Beyond Your Base. North Shore School District 112 passed its bond measure with 72% 'yes' votes. This mandate and community support can be attributed to the Board & administration's work with Paul Hanley and Beyond Your Base. The District last successfully passed a bond measure 25 years ago, and a brutal failed referendum effort in 2016 nearly broke the community apart. Paul Hanley's expertise helped restore the community's faith in the Board of Education.

15. Park Ridge Park District (Cook County)

Gayle Mountcastle | Former Executive Director

Paul Hanley led us through the public engagement process on a \$33.4 million referendum ballot measure to renovate our existing ice rink, add a new studio rink and indoor turf field, and provide park improvements. Part of the process included working with a Citizen Task Force to test and approve the project. Paul was very effective in providing an independent voice to the group while asserting his expertise in a respectful manner. In November 2022, despite the volatile economic climate, we successfully passed the referendum with a 56% success. I would highly recommend Paul Hanley.

16. The Winnetka Public Schools, District 36 (Cook County)

Dr. Kelly Tess | Superintendent of Schools

The Winnetka Public Schools directly benefited from the extensive expertise of Paul Hanley and the team at Beyond Your Base. As we navigated a second attempt at a referendum effort that was more representative of the community's priorities and needs, Paul's thoughtful guidance was evident in every step in the process. As a result of Paul Hanley's partnership, the ballot measure passed with over 60% support, allowing our school district to make necessary repairs and improvements given a \$59.4 million dollar project approval.

17. Northbrook/Glenview School District 30 (Cook County)

Dr. Brian K. Wegley | Former Superintendent

Our bond measure passed with 76% support. Why? Because we asked our community what they wanted to do with their schools. Paul Hanley and his team guided authentic stakeholder engagement that generated our community's plan. People support what they help to create.

18. West Chicago Park District (DuPage County)

Gary Major | Former Executive Director

Paul Hanley assisted our district in building strong public support for a new community recreation center. His approach was focused on involving taxpayers throughout the planning process, which was precisely what was needed to deliver success at the polls.

19. Maine Township High School District 207 (Cook County)

Dr. Ken Wallace | Former Superintendent

As school districts consider referendums to modernize and improve their school buildings, it is imperative that the process include skilled and expert advice, which is precisely what Paul Hanley provides. Paul has helped many districts, including ours, run successful campaigns. He is one of the nation's very best referendum consultants, and districts that want to get it right the first time can count on Paul and his team to give them the best chance of success.

20. Community High School District 99 (DuPage County)

Dr. Hank Thiele | Superintendent

Paul Hanley's approach is about connecting, listening, and understanding the community. His efforts helped us determine what our taxpayers valued and his work was essential in passing a \$136.6 million bond issue with strong support. As our construction is underway, I am continually complimented on the process of securing support for the project as a key part of the product. The two are inseparable to our residents.

21. New Trier Township High School District 203 (Cook County)

Dr. Linda Yonke | Former Superintendent

New Trier Township High School District 203 retained Paul Hanley to help us develop and implement a comprehensive public outreach program. In the end, our district was successful in obtaining 65 percent support for an \$89 million bond issue. I was extremely impressed with Mr. Hanley's knowledge, expertise, guidance and responsiveness to our needs.

22. Mount Prospect School District 57 (Cook County)

Elaine Aumiller, Ed. D. | Former Superintendent

I can't speak highly enough of Paul Hanley and the job he did in leading our district to a successful Education Fund referendum. He adeptly led us through the entire process including the voices of all key stakeholders. We passed our referendum with 76% support and that's greatly due to the leadership of Paul.

23. Glenview School District 34 (Cook County)

Dane A. Delli, Ph.D. | Superintendent

Beyond Your Base provided Glenview School District 34 with a comprehensive approach to educating the public, assessing its wishes, and involving community stakeholders. Our successful \$119M referendum is evidence of a well-informed community that understood the need for and the benefits of the improvements and the positive impact this will have for decades into the future.

24. White Oak Library District (Will County)

Scott E. Pointon | Director

With Paul Hanley's guidance, the White Oak Library District passed a \$23 million building bond issue in a very fiscally conservative area and during a recession. He is that good.

Sources

[Beyond Your Base testimonials page](#)

[10 ILCS 5/9-25.1, Election interference](#)

[5 ILCS 430/1-5, definitions](#)

[5 ILCS 430/5-15, prohibited political activities](#)

[5 ILCS 430/50-5, penalties](#)

[5 ILCS 430/70-5, local ethics rules](#)

[5 ILCS 430/70-10, local penalties](#)

[720 ILCS 5/33-3, official misconduct](#)

[15 ILCS 205/4, Attorney General duties and Election Code authority](#)

[Attorney General description of its statutory duties](#)

[Attorney General Public Integrity Bureau](#)

[Attorney General Model Ethics Ordinance and implementation guide](#)

[Attorney General official opinions](#)

[Illinois State Board of Elections, election schedule](#)