

October 14, 2026

Attorney General Rob Bonta
Office of the Attorney General
California Department of Justice
Attn: Public Inquiry Unit
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550

Chief Trial Attorney George Cardona
State Bar of California
Office of Chief Trial Counsel
Intake Unit
845 South Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90017

RE: Request for Investigation as to Whether Kate S. Zacharia Engaged in the Unauthorized Practice of Law

Dear Attorney General Bonta and Chief Trial Attorney Cardona:

We write to request an investigation into whether White House Press Secretary Kate (“Katie”) Zacharia engaged in the unauthorized practice of law (UPL) in violation of California Business & Professions Code §§ 6125-6126. Press Secretary Zacharia apparently held herself out as a lawyer and practiced law by, among other things, allegedly serving as the General Counsel for the nonprofit social welfare organization, Fix California, without being actively licensed by the State Bar of California.¹ Falsely holding oneself out as a lawyer is a criminal offense, punishable by fine or incarceration of up to a year in jail.

Pursuant to California Business & Professions Code § 6125: “No person shall practice law in California unless the person is an active licensee of the State Bar.” Section 6126(a) further provides that:

[a]ny person advertising or holding himself or herself out as practicing or entitled to practice law or otherwise practicing law who is not an active licensee of the State Bar, or otherwise authorized pursuant to statute or court rule to practice law in this state at the time of doing so, is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in a county jail or by a fine of up to one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or by both that fine and imprisonment.

¹ Judd Legum, *Trump’s new press secretary, Katie Zacharia, claims she’s a lawyer. Is she?*, Popular Information (Oct. 13, 2026) <https://popular.info/p/trumps-new-press-secretary-katie>.

“The prohibition against unauthorized law practice is within the state's police power and is designed to ensure that those performing legal services do so competently.”² The law aims “to afford protection against persons who are not qualified to practice the profession.”³

Zacharia is currently the White House Press Secretary. Press Secretary Zacharia lists on her LinkedIn profile that she previously served as the General Counsel for Fix California.⁴ She has also frequently held herself out to be a lawyer when making TV and radio appearances.⁵ Press Secretary Zacharia is not, however, currently listed as an active attorney on the website of the State Bar of California.⁶ Nor does it appear that she is licensed to practice in any other jurisdiction in the United States.⁷

Press Secretary Zacharia also does not appear to meet the qualifications for the registered in-house counsel program, which provides a limited exception from the active licensure requirement for an attorney who serves solely as in-house counsel to a qualifying organization.⁸ To qualify as a registered in-house counsel in California, an attorney must, among other things, “[b]e an active licensee in good standing of the bar of a United States state, jurisdiction, possession, territory, or dependency”⁹ and must provide the State Bar with a “certificate indicating that the attorney is currently an active member in good standing and eligible to practice law in at least one jurisdiction of the United States.”¹⁰ Again, there appears to be no indication that Press Secretary Zacharia is or has ever been licensed to practice in any U.S. jurisdiction, making her ineligible for the in-house counsel program.

As General Counsel for Fix California, it would be expected that Press Secretary Zacharia would have engaged in the practice of law, which for purposes of the UPL laws includes the provision of “legal advice and counsel and the preparation of legal instruments and contracts by which legal rights are secured although such matter may or may not be depending in a court.”¹¹ Because Fix California is located in California and Press Secretary Zacharia lived in California, it is more than likely that any services she performed as General Counsel would have occurred “in California” as is required under the UPL laws.¹²

² *Birbrower, Montalbano, Condon & Frank v. Superior Court*, 949 P.2d 1, 5 (Cal. 1998).

³ *Gerhard v. Stephens*, 68 Cal.2d 864, 918 (1968).

⁴ Legum, *supra* note 1.

⁵ Legum, *supra* note 1.

⁶ State Bar of California, Attorney Search,

<https://apps.calbar.ca.gov/attorney/LicenseeSearch/QuickSearch?FreeText=zacharia> (search conducted on Oct. 14, 2026).

⁷ Legum, *supra* note 1; Scott Nover, *Katie Zacharia calls herself a lawyer, Legal experts aren't sure*, The Washington Post (Oct. 13, 2026), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2026/10/13/katie-zacharia-calls-herself-lawyer-legal-experts-arent-sure/>.

⁸ Cal. Rules of the Court, Rule 9.46.

⁹ *Id.* Rule 9.46(c)(1).

¹⁰ Rules of the State Bar of California, Registered In-House Counsel Program, Rule 4(1) (last visited Oct. 14, 2026), https://www.calbar.ca.gov/sites/default/files/portals/0/documents/certification/MJP_In-House-Rules.pdf.

¹¹ *Baron v. City of Los Angeles*, 469 P.2d 353, 357 (Cal. 1970) (quoting *People v. Merchants Protective Corp.* 189 Cal. 531, 535 (1922)).

¹² *Birbrower*, 949 P.2d at 5-6, *as modified* (Feb. 25, 1998)

California's UPL laws also prohibit the "mere holding out by a lay[person] . . . that he [or she] is practicing or is entitled to practice law."¹³ Press Secretary Zacharia appears to have held herself out as practicing or entitled to practice law while in the state of California, notwithstanding that it does not appear that she was licensed to do so. That includes listing herself as General Counsel for Fix America. In addition, she has appeared on several TV and radio shows where she has described herself as a "lawyer."¹⁴ That includes during the taping of *The Story Is with Elex Michaelson* in February 2026, which is filmed in CNN's Los Angeles studio in Burbank, California.¹⁵ Creating the incorrect impression that one is authorized to practice law in the state of California violates the UPL laws.¹⁶

These revelations raise serious questions concerning whether Press Secretary Zacharia engaged in the unauthorized practice of law in violation of California Business & Professions Code §§ 6125-6126.

In addition to investigating whether Press Secretary Zacharia engaged in the unauthorized practice of law, it is also important to determine whether others relied on her assertions that she was licensed to practice to their detriment. To that end, if there is a determination that she is not authorized to practice law in California, we kindly request that the Attorney General's office further consider whether any person may have been harmed by Press Secretary Zacharia's assertions that she is an attorney. We also request that, if there is a determination that Press Secretary Zacharia violated these laws, the State Bar of California and the Attorney General take steps to prevent Press Secretary Zacharia from misrepresenting herself as an attorney until such time as she is actively licensed in the state of California.

Sincerely,

/s/

Amb. Norman L. Eisen (Ret.)
Executive Chair and Co-founder
Democracy Defenders Fund

/s/

Richard W. Painter
S. Walter Richey Professor of Corporate Law,
University of Minnesota Law School
Former Associate Counsel for George W. Bush

/s/

Virginia Canter
Chief Counsel and Director for Ethics
and Anti-corruption
Democracy Defenders Fund

/s/

Christopher Swartz
Senior Counsel and Deputy Director for Ethics and
Anti-corruption
Democracy Defenders Fund

¹³ *Farnham v. State Bar*, 552 P.2d 445, 449 (Cal. 1976).

¹⁴ Legum, *supra* note 1.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ See, e.g., *Bluestein v. State Bar*, 529 P.2d 599, 607, n. 13 (Cal. 1974) (explaining that the court viewed a suspended lawyer as having held himself out as providing services by listing his title as "Of Counsel" on firm letterhead); *Crawford v. State Bar of Cal.*, 355 P.2d 490, 494 (Cal. 1960).