

As Cincinnati City Councilman, Greg Landsman was the subject of a two-year investigation which resulted in Landsman admitting he had broken Ohio law by illegally conducting public business in secret. Taxpayers ended up paying \$170,000 for the illegal activity and a presiding judge said that he essentially lied to the people, should resign and that no city voter should ever vote for him again.

A two-year investigation took place to investigate the five Cincinnati City Council members, including Greg Landsman, after they privately texted about city business, and in total, the scandal cost the city \$172,588:

- A two-year investigation took place to investigate the five Cincinnati City Council members after they privately texted about city business. “Patrick Hanley, the attorney hired to investigate five former Cincinnati City Council members who texted each other about city business outside of public meetings, has sent his bill to the city of Cincinnati. Hanley charged the city \$71,587.50 for 286.35 hours of work between Dec. 19, 2019, and Dec. 1, 2021, a \$250 per hour rate.” (Chris Wetterich, “Special prosecutor bills city for investigation of 5 former council members,” [Cincinnati Business Courier](#), 2/24/22)
 - Greg Landsman was included in the five. “The five Democrats - P.G. Sittenfeld, Greg Landsman, Tamaya Dennard, Chris Seelbach and Wendell Young - admit violating Ohio’s Open Meeting Act by conducting public business in private text messages and emails with each other.” (WCPO Staff, “Cincinnati City Council ‘Gang of Five’ admits breaking the law in text messaging scandal,” [ABC 9 WCPO Cincinnati](#), 3/4/19)
- In total, the scandal cost the city \$172,588. “With Hanley’s bill, the total cost to the city of the text messaging affair stands at \$172,588.” (Chris Wetterich, “Special prosecutor bills city for investigation of 5 former council members,” [Cincinnati Business Courier](#), 2/24/22)

In 2018, Greg Landsman, along with 4 other Democrat city council members, was accused of violating Ohio law by “holding illegal, secret meetings via text and email” to discuss the resignation of the mayor:

- In 2018, Greg Landsman, along with 4 other Democrat city council members, exchanged text messages in which they discussed “how to keep the city manager and potentially regain power from the mayor.” “Five Democrat council members: Wendell Young, Tamaya Dennard, P.G. Sittenfeld, Chris Seelbach and Greg Landsman, exchange text messages discussing how to keep the city manager and potentially regain power from the mayor. Young writes in one: ‘Amen! We’re the new gang of five. I pray we stay strong and continue to trust each other. We have the power to move this forward.’ Sittenfeld texts in response: ‘I’m game to make it a gang of 7 even! I know Mann and Pastor must be lonely over there!’” (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline,” [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)
 - The five council members released a statement in which they declared they didn’t support firing the city manager, which made anti-tax activist Mark Miller wonder when the group met to discuss their decision. “The ‘Gang of Five’ put out a news release saying they don’t support firing the city manager, which gains the attention of Mark Miller, an anti-tax activist and treasurer of the Coalition Opposed to Additional Spending and Taxes (COAST). He wonders when they

publicly met to decide this since there had been no public meetings about the city manager. He suspects they violated Ohio's Open Meetings Act by conferring privately to decide public business. A public records request is filed for their text messages, emails and other communications." (Jennifer Edwards Baker, "Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline," [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

- **Miller determined that the five council members violated Ohio law by "holding illegal, secret meetings via text and email" to discuss the resignation of the mayor.** "Miller sues when six weeks go by without the city releasing the records. The lawsuit describes the Democrats as a 'cabal of five rogue members' of council holding illegal, secret meetings via text and email to discuss the mayor asking Black to resign in violation of the state's Sunshine law and Cincinnati's city charter. The city contends texts and emails sent from council members' personal phones are not public records." (Jennifer Edwards Baker, "Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline," [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

The lawmakers were ordered to turn their texts over, and Landsman obliged:

- **The lawmakers were ordered to turn their texts over, and Landsman obliged.** "Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters tells FOX19 NOW a grand jury investigation is underway into destroyed text messages. The five council members receive subpoenas to turn their phones over and the prosecutor's office has copies, or clones, made of the phones, to retrieve the texts. Landsman, Sittenfeld and Seelbach preserved their messages and turned them over, prosecutors say." (Jennifer Edwards Baker, "Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline," [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

Per the released text messages, Landsman even "ponders whether it is legal:"

- **Per the released text messages, Landsman even "ponders whether it is legal."** "Thousands of text messages are released. These messages are more candid than ones connected to the case that already were released in 2018. Those texts were on a group string among the five. The latest ones are between smaller groups, and one-on-one. They are more personal, with eye-raising insults, name-calling ('psychotic salty whiny nut'), plots and just plain gossip. At one point in all the private back-and-forth, Landsman ponders whether it is legal." (Jennifer Edwards Baker, "Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline," [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

In February 2019, a \$101,000 settlement was arranged "in which the city admits council members violated Ohio's Open Meetings Act twice," and in March 2019, the judge approved the settlement:

- **In February 2019, a \$101,000 settlement was arranged "in which the city admits council members violated Ohio's Open Meetings Act twice."** "February 2019. A \$101,000 settlement is arranged in which the city admits council members violated Ohio's Open Meetings Act twice and Young deleted his texts. This includes \$1,000 for two Open Meeting Act violations and \$10,000 for Young destroying the texts." (Jennifer Edwards Baker, "Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline," [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)
- **In March 2019, the judge approved the settlement, and determined that the five council members, including Landsman, should step down.** "March 2019. Judge

Ruehlman approves the settlement, telling the five council members in his courtroom they should step down.” (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline,” [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

The city of Cincinnati paid the \$101,000 settlement, which brought the question of why taxpayers were “on the hook” for the criminal behavior of Landsman and his colleagues:

- **“City taxpayers will shell out \$101,000 to settle a lawsuit over secret text messages and emails exchanged by five council members in violation of Ohio’s Open Meetings Act, according to city records released Monday.”** (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five: Cincinnati taxpayers to pay \$101K in settlement over secret council texts,” [Fox19 Now](#), 3/4/19)
- **Vice Mayor Christopher Smitherman questioned why taxpayers were “on the hook” for the criminal behavior of Landsman and his colleagues.** “Vice Mayor Christopher Smitherman called the entire episode ‘a waste of money.’ It’s not over yet, he warned. ‘They are north of \$200,000. Because this is criminal, it’s unclear why the taxpayer needs to pay the bill. That’s the question. The question is why are we on the hook for their criminal behavior?’” (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five: Cincinnati taxpayers to pay \$101K in settlement over secret council texts,” [Fox19 Now](#), 3/4/19)

All five members of the Gang of Five admitted to breaking the law, although Landsman said he had no plans to step down:

- **All five members of the Gang of Five admitted to breaking the law.** “Five Cincinnati City Council members have admitted breaking the law and the city has agreed to pay \$101,000 to settle a lawsuit against them in the “Gang of Five” text messaging scandal. The five Democrats - P.G. Sittenfeld, Greg Landsman, Tamaya Dennard, Chris Seelbach and Wendell Young – admit violating Ohio’s Open Meeting Act by conducting public business in private text messages and emails with each other. Furthermore, Young admits deleting text messages from his cell phone in violation of Judge Robert Ruehlman’s order.” (WCPO Staff, “Cincinnati City Council ‘Gang of Five’ admits breaking the law in text messaging scandal,” [ABC 9 WCPO Cincinnati](#), 3/4/19)
 - **“The five council members – Wendell Young, P.G. Sittenfeld, Chris Seelbach, Tamaya Dennard and Greg Landsman – all admitted as part of a settlement agreement that they broke Ohio open meetings law by secretly discussing public business in a string of group text messages.”** (Dan Horn and Sharon Coolidge, “Judge tells City Council’s ‘Gang of Five’ they should apologize and resign over secret texts,” [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 3/7/19)
- **“Landsman said he has no plans to step down.”** “Outside the courtroom after the hearing, Landsman said he has no plans to step down. ‘You have to take responsibility for your actions,’ he said, referring to the texts. ‘I’ve said they were a mistake from the beginning.’” (Dan Horn and Sharon Coolidge, “Judge tells City Council’s ‘Gang of Five’ they should apologize and resign over secret texts,” [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 3/7/19)

The judge determined that the five Council members, including Landsman, should resign, as they “essentially lied to the people of the city,” “the trust is gone,” and he said that “no city voter should ever vote for them again:”

- **“You essentially lied to the people of the city. The trust is gone,’ he says.”** (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline,” [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

- **“Judge Robert Ruehlman in March 2018 said the five council members should resign and reimburse what the city spent on their behalf.”** (Jay Hanselman, “No Criminal Charges For Council’s ‘Gang Of Five,’” [91.7 WVXU News](#), 9/20/20)
- **The judge determined that “no city voter should ever vote for them again.”** “I really believe the five City Council members should resign,’ Ruehlman said. ‘No city voter should ever vote for them again.” (Dan Horn and Sharon Coolidge, “Judge tells City Council’s ‘Gang of Five’ they should apologize and resign over secret texts,” [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 3/7/19)

In December 2019, an Ohio Auditor recommended “that the five council member face the misdemeanor criminal charge of dereliction of duty in connection with the texting scandal:”

- **In December 2019, an Ohio Auditor recommended “that the five council member face the misdemeanor criminal charge of dereliction of duty in connection with the texting scandal.”** “December 2019. Ohio Auditor Keith Faber makes a recommendation to the city that the five council member face the misdemeanor criminal charge of dereliction of duty in connection with the texting scandal.” (Jennifer Edwards Baker, “Gang of Five special prosecution: Timeline,” [Fox19 Now](#), updated 4/15/21)

***Editor’s Note:** In September 2020, the special prosecutor “recommended the members not be criminally charged with dereliction of duty,” however, he also determined that the investigation was still ongoing.*

As Vice Mayor, Christopher Smitherman criticized Landsman and his colleagues and determined that he hoped “the public will not reward them with a vote:”

- **“Vice Mayor Christopher Smitherman has been critical of the five members of council ever since the texts came to light. He said this decision sets a bad precedent.”** (Sharon Coolidge, “Special prosecutor: No dereliction of duty charges for Cincinnati City Council ‘Gang of 5,’” [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 9/28/20)
- **Smitherman determined that “this is what justice looks like for the powerful,” and that he hoped “the public will not reward them with a vote.”** “It will be open season for ‘secret meetings’ across the state of Ohio,’ he said. ‘The ‘Gang of 5’ are walking away with \$176,000 of taxpayer money with zero accountability. This is what justice looks like for the powerful. I hope the public will not reward them with a vote.” (Sharon Coolidge, “Special prosecutor: No dereliction of duty charges for Cincinnati City Council ‘Gang of 5,’” [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 9/28/20)