Dear Chief Justice Roberts:

We, the undersigned legal ethics scholars, write to urge the Court to complete and adopt a Code of Conduct for the Supreme Court of the United States.

We were encouraged when, nearly three years ago, Justice Elena Kagan told a House Appropriations Subcommittee that you were “studying the question of whether to have a Code of Judicial Conduct that’s applicable only to the United States Supreme Court” and that it’s “something that’s being thought very seriously about.” To our knowledge, though, this project remains unfinished.

We do not question the integrity of any justice; nor do we write in response to any single speech, interview or other extrajudicial activity undertaken by any of the justices in recent years. We simply believe that a written Code, even if primarily aspirational, would have a broad salutary impact, assisting current and future members of the Court to transparently address potential conflicts and other issues in a way that builds public trust in the institution.

We agree, as you wrote in your 2011 Year-End Report on the Federal Judiciary, that the lower courts’ Code of Conduct for United States Judges does “not adequately answer some of the ethical considerations unique to the Supreme Court,” so simply adopting it, as some have suggested, would not suffice. And although there remain efforts in Congress to impose a formal Code for the Court, we acknowledge the view, articulated in your 2021 Year-End Report, that there is a “need for the Judiciary to manage its internal affairs, both to promote informed administration and to ensure independence of the Branch.” We prefer that the Supreme Court draft a Code of Conduct and avoid the weighty questions that might arise if Congress imposed one.

Finally, there is no question that every justice who serves on the Supreme Court faces their share of ethics challenges. We believe that in the vast majority of cases, the justices have made the right call. But at a time when public institutions are redoubling their efforts to improve the public’s trust, we maintain that a formal, written Code, offering a uniform set of principles that justices and the public alike would look to for guidance, would benefit the Court and the nation.

Sincerely,*

Richard L. Abel
Connell Distinguished Professor of Law Emeritus and Distinguished Research Professor
UCLA School of Law

Swethaa S. Ballakrishnen
Assistant Professor of Law and Faculty Co-Director, Center for Empirical Research on the Legal Profession
University of California Irvine School of Law

Scott Cummings
Robert Henigson Professor of Legal Ethics
UCLA School of Law

Angela J. Davis
Distinguished Professor of Law
American University Washington College of Law

Nora Freeman Engstrom
Ernest W. McFarland Professor of Law and Co-Director, Stanford Center on the Legal Profession
Stanford Law School

Susan Fortney
University Professor and Director, Program for the Advancement of Legal Ethics
Texas A&M University School of Law
Amanda Frost
*Bronfman Professor of Law & Government*
American University Washington College of Law

Bennett L. Gershman
*Distinguished Professor of Law*
Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University

Charles Gardner Geyh
*Distinguished Professor and John F. Kimberling Professor of Law*
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Stephen Gillers
*Elihu Root Professor of Law*
NYU School of Law

Lissa Griffin
*Professor of Law*
Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University

Peter A. Joy
*Henry Hitchcock Professor of Law*
Washington University in St. Louis

Renee Knake Jefferson
*Doherty Chair in Legal Ethics & Professor of Law*
University of Houston Law Center

Sung Hui Kim
*Professor of Law*
UCLA School of Law

Leslie C. Levin
*Hugh Macgill Professor of Law*
University of Connecticut School of Law

David J. Luban
*University Professor*
Georgetown University Law Center

Steven Lubet
*Williams Memorial Professor*
Northwestern University Pritzker School of Law

Nancy J. Moore
*Professor of Law and Nancy E. Barton Scholar*
Boston University School of Law

Ellen Murphy
*Professor of the Practice*
Wake Forest University School of Law

Richard W. Painter
*S. Walter Richey Professor of Corporate Law*
University of Minnesota Law School

Russell G. Pearce
*Edward & Marilyn Bellet Chair in Legal Ethics, Morality, and Religion*
Fordham University School of Law

Abbe Smith
*Scott K. Ginsburg Professor of Law*
Georgetown University Law Center

Laurel S. Terry
*H. Laddie Montague Jr. Chair in Law, Emerita and Professor of Law, Emerita*
Penn State Dickinson Law

W. Bradley Wendel
*Edwin H. Woodruff Professor of Law*
Cornell Law School

Ellen C. Yaroshefsky
*Howard Lichtenstein Distinguished Professor of Legal Ethics*
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University

*Institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only*