

Office of State Ethics



At a Glance

CAROL CARSON, Executive Director

Established - July 1, 2005

Statutory authority – Chapter 10, CGS 1-79 et. seq., as amended by CGS 1-300 et. seq.

Central office - 18-20 Trinity Street, Suite 205, Hartford, CT 06106; 860-263-2400

Number of full-time employees - 15

Recurring operating expenses - \$1,484,630 for Fiscal Year 2015

Organizational structure - Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board, Executive Director, Legal Division, Enforcement Division.

Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board Members:

Charles Chiusano (Chair), term ending September 30, 2017; Herbert Grant (Vice-Chair), term ending September 30, 2015; Mary Bigelow, term ending September 30, 2017; Susan Gruen, term ending September 30, 2015; Reverend Tommie Jackson, term ending September 30, 2016; Roger Kemp, term ending September 30, 2015; Daniel Young, term ending September 30, 2016; Kevin Johnston, term ending September 30, 2018; and Dena Castricone, term ending September 30, 2018.

The Connecticut Office of State Ethics is charged with administering and enforcing the Connecticut Codes of Ethics. The Office accomplishes its mission to ensure honesty, integrity and accountability in state government through educating and providing guidance to those covered by the Ethics Codes; interpreting the Ethics Codes; investigating and enforcing violations of the Ethics Codes; and providing information to the public.

Mission

The Office of State Ethics (OSE), an independent division of the Office of Governmental Accountability, administers Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 10, Part I for Public Officials and Part II for Lobbyists, and Part IV, Ethical Considerations concerning Bidding and State Contracts. The mission of the Office of State Ethics is to practice and promote the highest ethical standards and accountability in state government by providing education and legal advice, ensuring disclosure, and impartially enforcing the Codes of Ethics.

Statutory Responsibility

The statutory responsibilities of the Office of State Ethics (OSE) are broken down into four main categories: education, interpretation, enforcement and disclosure. The OSE is charged with providing education, guidance and advice to state employees, public officials, lobbyists and legislators on the Codes of Ethics. The Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board (CEAB) is responsible for adjudicating cases brought under the ethics codes and making findings of violations as well as issuing advisory opinions – interpretations of the codes as they apply to specific situations. All investigation and prosecution matters are the responsibility of the Ethics Enforcement Officer. The OSE is also statutorily obligated to administer all lobbyist financial reports along with Statements of Financial Interests (SFIs) filed by public official and state employee.

Public Service

The Office of State Ethics is committed to carrying out its mission in the most user-friendly and transparent manner possible. To this end, the OSE continues to update and improve its website by adding new and historical material as well as continually improving and updating the online filing systems utilized by lobbyists and public officials. It is important to note that these systems are also utilized by members of the public and the media for information and research.

Improvements/Achievements 2014-15

Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board

- In order to best serve Connecticut, the OSE concluded its strategic plan which incorporated the OSE's mission, vision and values in determining priorities for 2012 to 2015, when OSE celebrates its 10 year anniversary. A new three-year strategic plan is in progress.

Education/Communications

- Provided a full range of communication and education services to ensure high ethical standards among our public servants, including 115 in-person trainings in FY 2015, significantly greater than the sessions conducted in the previous year.
- Initiated a systematic training outreach program to offer in-person training to each state agency.
- Sent monthly liaison letters to all state agencies.
- Responded to hundreds of media inquiries, and provided timely information with a focus on preserving public trust through accurate disclosure and transparency.
- Issued press releases and e-alerts for the adoption of Advisory Board Opinions, Declaratory Rulings and enforcement action resolutions.

- Continued to update trainings for public officials, state employees and lobbyists. In addition to increasing in-person training, the OSE established partnerships with state agencies, boards and commissions and private entities, updated its training video and created new interactive e-learning programs.

Advisory Opinions and Other Legal Division Achievements

- With assistance from the OSE's legal division staff, the CEAB issued eight Legal Opinions (five Advisory Opinions and three Declaratory Ruling). Summaries as well as the full text of all opinions and rulings are available on the OSE's website.
- The legal division staff responded to approximately 1,056 requests for advice about the application of the Codes of Ethics; approximately 379 written staff opinions were completed during the reporting period, and legal advice via the telephone or in person was provided on 669 occasions, with an average of 24 calls answered per day.

Enforcement

- The Enforcement Division conducted a total of 132 reviews of potential violations of the Code of Ethics during 2015.
- Eighty-three matters were settled publicly, a third more than the previous year. A total of \$48,991 in penalties, 3.5 times more than the previous year, were collected. Eleven of these cases involved alleged violations of the Code of Ethics including conflicts of interest and impermissible use of office for financial gain, and 72 cases were settled as UAPA matters. All penalties collected go directly into Connecticut's General Fund.
- The OSE completed, and the CEAB approved, 14 audits of registered client and communicator lobbyists.
- The Enforcement Division randomly selected ten percent of the 2014 Statement of Financial Interests that were filed by May 1, 2015 to be audited. An audit report detailing the finding will be posted on the OSE website. All State Marshal 2014 Statements of Income that were filed by May 1, 2015, will also be audited.

Records: Public Access and Maintenance

- The OSE handled over 2,715 public official Statements of Financial Interests in paper and electronic form, with 98 percent of required filers meeting the May 1, 2015 filing deadline and 93 percent of those – one percent more than the previous year – utilized the online filing system.
- The OSE received 212 State Marshal Annual Statements of Income.
- 75 FOI requests were completed.

Conclusion

The Office of State Ethics promotes integrity in government by providing advice, guidance and education to public officials, state employees and lobbyists; by sensibly interpreting and, when necessary, fairly and impartially enforcing the applicable laws; by administering the lobbyist and financial disclosure filing systems; and by providing the public with access to certain public information. The OSE's principles are reflected in its logo: honesty, integrity and accountability. The Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board and OSE staff will continue to strive for innovation and progress that result in cost-savings and efficiency in the agency's core areas, such as increasing the percentage of financial disclosure filers who file online. The OSE will also

continue to reach out to the larger community to foster a culture of ethics in the state, and an environment of public trust in which the citizens of Connecticut will have ethical state government.