

Office of State Ethics



At a Glance

Peter Lewandowski, Executive Director

Established - July 1, 2005

Statutory authority – Chapter 10, CGS 1-79 et seq.

Central office – 165 Capitol Avenue, Suite 1200, Hartford, CT 06106; 860-263-2400

Number of full-time employees - 14

Recurring operating expenses - \$1,610,143 for Fiscal Year 2021

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

Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board Members:

Dena Castricone (Chair), term ending September 30, 2022; Jason K. Farrell (Vice-Chair), term ending September 30, 2024; Mary Bigelow, term ending September 30, 2021; Charles Chiusano, term ending September 30, 2021; Karen Christiana, term ending September 30, 2023; Kevin P. Johnston, term ending September 30, 2022; Cheryl Lipson, term ending September 30, 2023; Nichelle Mullins, term ending September 30, 2023; and Laura A. Schuyler, term ending September 30, 2024

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 Codes of Ethics; public officials, state employees, lobbyists and state contractors.

Mission

The Office of State Ethics practices and promotes 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 Office of State Ethics (OSE) administers Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 10, Part I for Public Officials, Part II for Lobbyists, and Part IV, Ethical Considerations Concerning Bidding and State Contracts.

The statutory responsibilities of the 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 Codes of Ethics 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 officials and state employees.

Public Service

The OSE 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 2020-21

Education and Communications Outreach

In accordance with § 1-81c of the Connecticut General Statutes, the OSE administers a program of mandatory training for all members of the General Assembly every four years and upon first election.



- In FY 2020-2021 the OSE conducted Code of Ethics trainings for newly elected members of the General Assembly, Public Officials, State Employees, Lobbyists and Contractors, and offered trainings that would meet agency-specific needs.
- Due to COVID-19 most of our in-person trainings were for employees that did not have individual access to technology, e.g., Department of Transportation maintenance employees.
- The OSE continued to offer self-service on-line training, limited in-person trainings and utilized Teams, Zoom and GotoMeeting options to conduct engaging training during COVID-19 to each state agency that requested training. We believe that this flexibility allowed the OSE to continue to effectively meet its mandate to provide yearly training to all state employees. Since training drives compliance through requests for advice and filing of complaints, more training sessions are expected to result in greater compliance.
- Our monthly electronic newsletter was distributed to all agency ethics liaisons and compliance officers.
- In FY 2021 we provided a full range of communication and education services to ensure high ethical standards among our public servants. We continued our Top Ten Ethics Rules format and completed 59 trainings.
- An updated “Ethics 101” on-line course for public officials and state employees was released to all state agencies.
- We issued press releases and e-alerts for the adoption of Advisory Board Opinions, Declaratory Rulings and enforcement action settlements.

Advisory Opinions

- With assistance from the OSE's Legal Division staff, the CEAB issued two Legal Opinions. Summaries of these, 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 647 requests for advice concerning the application of the Codes of Ethics; approximately 422 written staff opinions were completed during the reporting period, and legal advice via the telephone or in person was provided on 225 occasions.

Enforcement

- The Enforcement Division received or opened a total of thirty-five (35) confidential investigations of potential violations of the Code of Ethics.
- The Enforcement Division opened one hundred ninety-seven (197) enforcement matters for violations of the filing requirements of the Code of Ethics.
- One hundred thirty-three (133) matters were settled publicly. A total of \$51,414.00 in penalties were received. Two (2) of the resolved matters resulted from confidential investigations, and involved a range of violations. One hundred thirty-one (131) matters were resolved as Uniform Administrative Procedures Act matters and involved the failure to file forms in the manner required by the law. All penalties go directly into Connecticut's General Fund.
- The OSE completed, and the CEAB approved, ten (10) audits of registered client and communicator lobbyists.

Audit Process Review

- In 2020, the CEAB formed the Audit Process Review Subcommittee ("Subcommittee") in order to examine the random audit program. The Subcommittee ultimately implemented ways to improve awareness by the lobbyist community of the random lobbyist audit process; lobbyist recordkeeping obligations; and, potential penalties for failing to maintain required records.
- The Subcommittee put into practice measures to educate the lobbyist community, including but not limited to:
 - ❖ Designing a Lobbyist Audit Corner – OSE website;
 - ❖ Developing a standard information presentation for auditees;
 - ❖ Amending lobbyist certifications and communications to include key lobbyist requirements;
 - ❖ Creating and improving agency documents to focus on the audit process; and
 - ❖ Inserting an audit protocol component to lobbyist trainings.

Lobbyist Filings and Disclosure

During FY 2020-2021 the OSE processed, via its electronic filing system, thousands of financial reports filed by business organizations (firms that employ communicator lobbyists), client lobbyists, and in-house communicator lobbyists.

The 2,017 biennial lobbyist registrations for 2021 generated \$863,000 in fees, collected by the OSE and deposited into the state's General Fund.

Statements of Financial Interests

- On May 3, 2021, 99% of the required filers were in compliance with the 2020 Statements of Financial Interests filing deadline and filed electronically. The OSE handled 2,482 SFIs, of which only 20 were submitted in paper form. This year 82% of our Agencies, Offices, Commissions and Quasi-Public Agencies achieved 100% timely compliance. Fifty-five agencies or 86% of those agencies earned the distinction of not only achieving 100% timely compliance but also had 100% submit filings electronically.

Legislative Updates to the Codes of Ethics

During 2021 Legislative Session, by way of Public Act No. 21-164, several changes were made to the state codes of ethics for public officials and lobbyists, key among them:

- ❖ adding the Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Authority to the list of quasi-public agencies subject to the ethics code for public officials;
- ❖ defining confidential information for the law's purposes as similarly defined in regulations;
- ❖ authorizing the OSE's ethics enforcement officer to represent the office in certain matters before the Superior Court;
- ❖ requiring public officials and state employees who must file statements of financial interests with OSE to file them electronically using software the office creates;
- ❖ exempting certain gifts from the codes' gift prohibition and clarifies who must report certain expenditures to a beneficiary public official or state employee;
- ❖ requiring certain state regulatory agencies, in consultation with OSE, to annually submit a statement designating the agency positions which are subject to the code's revolving door provisions;
- ❖ extending the prohibited activities that apply to state-hired consultants and independent contractors to include persons they employ;
- ❖ exempting students in higher education serving as public officials from certain code provisions;
- ❖ extending the CEAB deadline for final hearing decisions on violations; and
- ❖ clarifying that both individuals employing lobbyists and those employed as lobbyists are subject to the Code of Ethics for Lobbyists' prohibition on contingency fee lobbying.

Miscellaneous

Twenty-seven (27) Freedom of Information requests were processed.

Conclusion

The OSE 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 principles are reflected in its logo: honesty, integrity and accountability. The CEAB and the OSE staff will continue to strive for innovation and progress that result in cost-savings and efficiency. 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.