

Merom Brachman, *Chairman*
Mark A. Vander Laan, *Vice Chairman*
Megan C. Kelley
Mary M. Ross-Dolen
Elizabeth E. Tracy

Paul M. Nick
Executive Director



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OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 12, 2025

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Merom Brachman	Megan C. Kelley	Elizabeth E. Tracy
Mary M. Ross-Dolen	Mark A. Vander Laan	

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Ohio Ethics Commission was called to order at 12:05 p.m. in Room 2 on Level 2 of the William Green Building, at 30 West Spring Street, in Columbus, Ohio.

ROLL CALL

The following Commission Members were present: Mr. Brachman, Ms. Kelley, Ms. Ross-Dolen, Ms. Tracy, and Mr. Vander Laan. Staff present: Executive Director Paul M. Nick; Deputy Director/General Counsel Jed Hood; Education and Communications Administrator Susan Willeke; IT and Financial Disclosure Administrator Brian Ring; HR & Fiscal Manager Alan Carlson; Chief Advisory Attorney Chris Woeste; Investigative Attorneys Molly Bruns and Nicole Candelora-Norman; Investigative Assistant Shana Kaplan; Special Investigator David Sturman, and Assistant Attorney General Brittany Collins. Joining the meeting after Executive Session were Advisory Attorneys Katie Saks and Melissa Riggins.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION by Ms. Kelley, seconded by Mr. Vander Laan, to go into Executive Session to discuss matters that are statutorily confidential, including pending litigation, updates on investigations and complaints, and the confidential financial disclosure report. Ms. Kelley, Ms. Ross-Dolen, Ms. Tracy, Mr. Vander Laan, and Mr. Brachman voted "yes." The motion was approved, and the Commission, pursuant to Section 102.06 and 121.22 of the Revised Code, went into Executive Session at 12:06 p.m.

The Commission returned to open session at 12:30 p.m.

PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the August 4, 2025, Commission meeting.

MOTION by Ms. Tracy, seconded by Ms. Ross-Dolen, that the Commission approve the minutes of the August 4, 2025, Commission meeting. Ms. Kelley, Ms. Ross-Dolen, Ms. Tracy, Mr. Vander Laan, and Mr. Brachman voted yes. The motion was approved.

ADVISORY OPINIONS AND STATISTICS

Mr. Nick introduced the Advisory Statistics and Activity Report. He noted that there has been a noticeable downward trend in the number of nepotism or family hire advisory requests and opened investigations compared with prior years.

Mr. Brachman inquired about the Staff Opinion issued to Melissa Schiffel. Mr. Woeste stated that Prosecutor Schiffel personally sent the request, and she wanted clarification in writing regarding access to the county's wellness benefits as they pertain to the county prosecutor. He stated that because these benefits are not an in-term increase, she is not prohibited from participating in these benefits.

Mr. Woeste discussed the Memorandum regarding including digital assets and cryptocurrency on a financial disclosure statement. He thanked Ms. Saks and Ms. Riggins for their help on the Memorandum. He also thanked Mr. Ring for his assistance in understanding the topic. Mr. Woeste and Mr. Ring met with several experts for clarification of this difficult topic. Mr. Woeste explained that staff recommended to include information in the FAQ section of the Commission's website instead of in a formal opinion because the field is so rapidly changing. Mr. Nick explained that the FAQ section can be easily changed if necessary.

Mr. Brachman asked if the Memorandum will be readily available on the website. Mr. Nick answered that it is a public record and that the last page with the FAQs would be posted online. Mr. Brachman cautioned on what is put on the website due to pending federal law changes. Ms. Ross-Dolen asked whether cryptocurrency and digital assets would have its own section on the FDS form. Mr. Ring answered that cryptocurrency would be addressed in the income, investment, and gifts sections of the form. Mr. Brachman asked about the federal Office of Government Ethics' legal advisories on this issue. Mr. Woeste explained that he was aware of two legal advisories regarding FDS disclosure under federal law issued in 2018 and 2022, respectively. He also stated that federal law regarding disclosure has a different standard than Ohio law.

Mr. Vander Laan complimented Mr. Woeste on the quality and thoroughness of the Memorandum.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Nick reviewed the information in the packet, including details about staff reaching out to the Attorney General's Office to seek an opinion related to the topic of community schools. The Attorney General issues formal and informal advisory opinions, and the latter is an expedited process that allows us to waive attorney-client confidentiality if we choose to do so. Mr. Nick noted that the Commission is seeking guidance on whether community schools are public bodies. He stated that he will update the Commission as we hear more information. Mr. Nick noted that the Eighth District Court of Appeals recently decided that community schools are subject to the Public Records Act but may not be sued in the Court of Claims.

Mr. Nick also updated the Commission on the status of collection matters that have been certified to the Attorney General's Office. These are primarily for persons who fail to file or file late disclosure statements. Mr. Nick stated that he was told that the Attorney General uses offset programs if they have the filer's social security numbers. This allows them to flag and collect debts from casino and lottery winnings, tax refunds, and unclaimed funds. They can also send the cases to private law firms and third party debt collectors. This can be problematic when one filer has numerous debts being managed by separate firms. Their last resort is a traditional "debt collector." Mr. Nick noted that the Attorney General pursues the debts regardless of the amount owed.

Finally, he noted the positive feedback received regarding Formal Opinion 2025-02 on frequent flyer miles and rewards points.

LEGISLATION UPDATE

Mr. Hood reviewed the legislative report as shown in the packet noting that HB 409 is receiving attention about free or discounted professional sporting events; Mr. Hood will monitor the bill and keep the Commission updated. Also, HB 113 is pending before the House and does not seem to be moving through the chamber quickly.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Ms. Willeke referred to the information in the packet and added that plans for 2026 are beginning, including the new e-course, annual webinars, and Continuing Legal Education classes.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATISTICS REPORT/COMPLAINT REPORT

Mr. Ring stated the filing deadline is October 6 for candidates and October 15 for write-in candidates. The deadline to register as candidate was last week; Mr. Ring and Ms. Boger will input this information for those candidates next week.

Ms. Bruns is available for questions regarding complaints should the Commission have any.

MOTIONS

Late Fee Waivers:

MOTION by Ms. Ross-Dolen, seconded by Ms. Kelley, to waive the financial disclosure statement late fees for the individuals listed in the packet report. The motion passed unanimously.

Complaints to be Dismissed:

MOTION by Ms. Tracy, seconded by Ms. Kelley, to dismiss the financial disclosure complaints filed against the individuals listed in the packet report, for good cause shown. The motion passed unanimously.

Complaints to be Referred for Prosecution:

MOTION by Mr. Vander Laan, seconded by Ms. Ross-Dolen, to adopt the recommendations of the hearing examiner and refer to the Columbus City Attorney's Office the financial disclosure complaints filed against the individuals listed in the packet report, for good cause shown. The motion passed unanimously.

Referrals to Ohio Attorney General's Office for Collections:

MOTION by Ms Kelley, seconded by Ms. Ross-Dolen, to refer to the Attorney General's Office for collections the individuals listed in the packet report. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution

The Chairman and Executive Director read aloud a resolution to commend former Commissioner Bruce Bailey and thank him for his service to the Ohio Ethics Commission.

MOTION by Mr. Vander Laan, seconded by Ms. Kelley, approving the commendation and forwarding it to Mr. Bailey. The motion passed unanimously.

DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Commission scheduled its next meeting: Wednesday, October 15, at 1 p.m. with the Investigative Committee meeting at noon.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:11 p.m.

These minutes are respectfully submitted by:

/s/ Paul M. Nick

Paul M. Nick
Executive Director