

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



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Paul M. Nick
Executive Director

OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 15, 2025

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

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

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Ohio Ethics Commission was called to order at 1:14 p.m. in Room 1 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, Mr. Stickan, 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 Attorney Molly Bruns; Investigative Assistant Shana Kaplan; and Assistant Attorney General Brittany Collins. Joining the meeting after Executive Session was Advisory Attorney Melissa Riggins.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION by Mr. Vander Laan, seconded by Ms. Kelley, 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 1:16 p.m.

The Commission returned to open session at 1:30 p.m.

PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

The Commission reviewed the draft minutes from the September 12, 2025, Commission meeting.

MOTION by Mr. Vander Laan, seconded by Ms. Tracy, that the Commission approve the minutes of the September 12, 2025, Commission meeting. Ms. Kelley, Ms. Ross-Dolen, Ms. Tracy, Mr. Vander Laan, and Mr. Brachman voted yes. Mr. Stickan abstained. The motion was approved.

ADVISORY OPINIONS AND STATISTICS

Mr. Nick introduced the Advisory Statistics and Activity Report.

Mr. Brachman inquired about the Staff Opinion issued to Adam Ares. Mr. Woeste and Ms. Riggins responded and offered to send a copy of the opinion to Mr. Brachman. Mr. Brachman also asked about the guidance letters staff issues when a staff advisory opinion is not issued. Mr. Woeste explained that staff provides relevant information about the Ethics Law to ensure good customer service. Mr. Nick added that staff tries to provide as much guidance on the law as it can.

Ms. Ross-Dolen asked about the formatting of the first column of the Activity Report and why certain names appeared in parenthesis. Mr. Woeste explained that when two names appear in the first column, the top name is the representative submitting the request on behalf of the requester, whose name is listed in parentheses. Mr. Woeste stated that this was an effort to make the report more concise and that staff verifies that the requester is aware of and has asked the representative to submit the question. Mr. Nick provided the example of the request from David Cutri on behalf of Eddie George.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Nick updated the Commission on the Commission's advisory opinion request to the Attorney General's Office regarding community schools. Mr. Brachman inquired about the potential timeline for a response and Mr. Nick reported that he has been in touch with the Attorney General's office and will follow up again after the meeting. Mr. Vander Laan suggested that the Commission should await a response from the Attorney General before pursuing further action to require financial disclosures by the governing boards, sponsors, or operators of community schools.

Mr. Nick provided information regarding challenges in collecting overdue fines and reported that Lexis Nexis provides social security numbers that will allow staff to pursue the fines. Ms. Ross-Dolen wondered if retroactive collection was feasible, and Mr. Nick affirmed that it is. Ms. Bruns informed the Commission that as an agency designed to prevent fraud, the Commission can access the social security numbers, which is otherwise not permissible for the general public.

Mr. Nick updated the Commission regarding the hiring process in backfilling the vacant advisory attorney position. Mr. Vander Laan inquired if compensation was a concern in retaining advisory attorneys long-term. Mr. Nick expressed his frustration with what appears to be an inconsistent use of the position classification system by other state agencies which is affecting recruitment and retention of staff.

Finally, Mr. Nick asked Mr. Hood for a report regarding staff's review of several administrative rules. Mr. Hood explained that the recently reviewed rules (CPI and complaint procedures) do not require rule revisions at this time. Mr. Hood will attend the JCAAR hearing regarding the rule review. Mr. Brachman asked if current rules provide adequate tools for investigators to perform their duties, and Mr. Hood reported that they

do. Currently, the rules allow the public to make allegations to staff who then determine whether to bring the allegation to the Commission for further determination.

LEGISLATION UPDATE

Mr. Hood reviewed the legislative report and explained that the asterisk next to legislative activity signifies an update since the last Commission packet while an asterisk next to a bill number indicates new legislation that may be of interest to the Commission. He invited the Commission to notify him if there were any other bills about which they would like to regularly receive updates.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Ms. Willeke reviewed the material as seen in the packet and reported on that morning's CLE class and invited any commissioners who may still need CLE credit to join her on the online CLE in November. She also praised staff member, Nick Rohrbaugh, for his hard work, creativity, and professionalism in creating the annual e-course each year. Once again, staff received an email (this time, from a large cabinet-level agency) inquiring about the "third party vendor" we pay to create our professional-looking e-courses. Ms. Willeke noted that Mr. Rohrbaugh creates all of the Commission's e-course work. Mr. Nick echoed Ms. Willeke's praise and noted that under Ms. Willeke's direction, the Commission's education program stands as a model for other ethics commissions across the country. Mr. Stickan noted that he recently listened to all three podcasts, and he was impressed by them.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATISTICS REPORT/COMPLAINT REPORT

Mr. Ring reviewed the material as seen in the packet and noted that we are approaching the 10,000-filer mark. The Commission meeting took place on the write-in candidate deadline with only 33 filers remaining. Mr. Ring expects the number of non-compliant filers to drop drastically in the next few weeks as filers receive their reminder letters from staff.

MOTIONS

Late Fee Waivers:

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

Complaint Approvals:

MOTION by Ms. Tracy, seconded by Ms. Kelley, to authorize staff to file the financial disclosure complaints against the individuals listed in the packet report for knowingly failing to timely file their required financial disclosure statements. The motion passed unanimously.

Referrals to Ohio Attorney General's Office for Collections:

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

DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Commission scheduled its next meeting for Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at noon, with the Investigative Committee meeting at 11 a.m. The Commission also tentatively scheduled a meeting for January 22, 2026, at noon.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

These minutes are respectfully submitted by:

/s/ Paul M. Nick

Paul M. Nick
Executive Director