

THE VOICE OF ETHICS

A Publication of the Ohio Ethics Commission

2023 Quarter 1



John Bryan State Park
Greene County

The Ethics Commission Looks Back on 2022

What are your “takeaways” from the past year? Don’t take loved ones for granted? Practice gratitude? Find a life balance? Embrace change? Whatever you learned from 2022, we trust that it will edify and enhance your life and your work in this new year. Based on last year’s work and accomplishments, it appears that the Ethics Commission’s “takeaway” is to keep on keeping on when it comes to preserving integrity in public service!

Some of the Commission’s efforts and achievements in 2022 are summarized below, but for a more in-depth look at the work of the Ethics Commission last year, be sure to check out our [online Annual Report!](#)

A Note from the Executive Director

As reported in this newsletter, 2022 was a productive year from the Commission and staff. The Commission is tasked with advising and educating public officials and employees on how to comply with the law while also investigating and enforcing the law against those who violate it. The work of the Commission extends to all parts of the state and all levels of state and local government.

Our staff remains ready to assist in protecting the public from the misuse of taxpayer monies and the abuse of public office. We all share the goal of strengthening the public’s confidence that government business is conducted with impartiality and integrity.



**Executive Director
Paul Nick**

Advisory Opinions

The Ethics Commission is statutorily authorized to provide guidance regarding the Ohio Ethics Law to assist public employees and officials and in understanding and complying with the law. The Commission’s Advisory section helps to protect those regulated by that statute and taxpayers from wrongdoing in government. Our Advisory Attorneys had a productive 2022 as outlined below:

- 199 written requests
- More than 3,600 e-mails and
- More than 1,600 telephone inquiries.



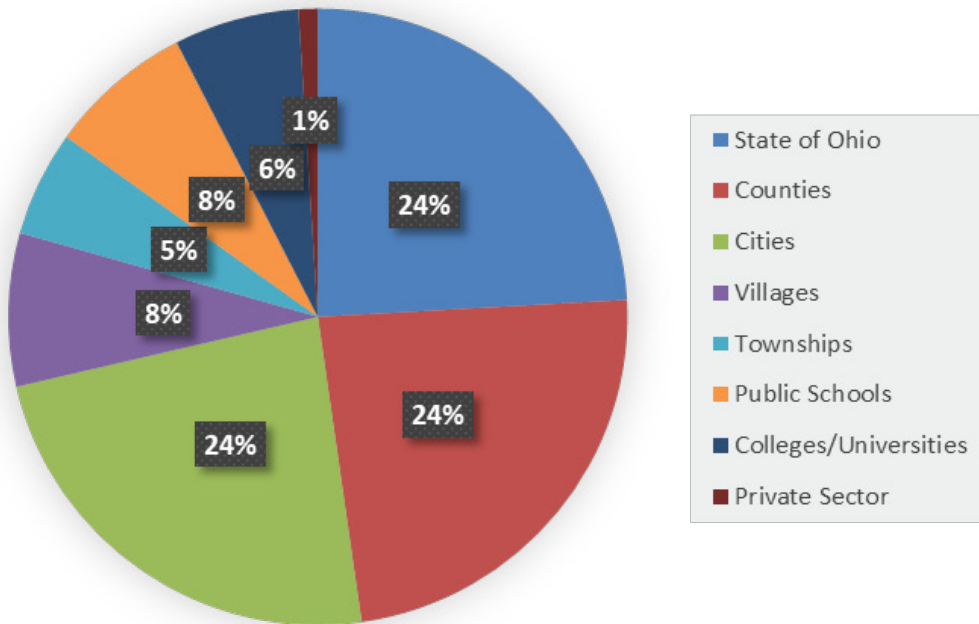


Advice was provided to both state and local government officials and employees. Common issues addressed by the Advisory Attorneys included:

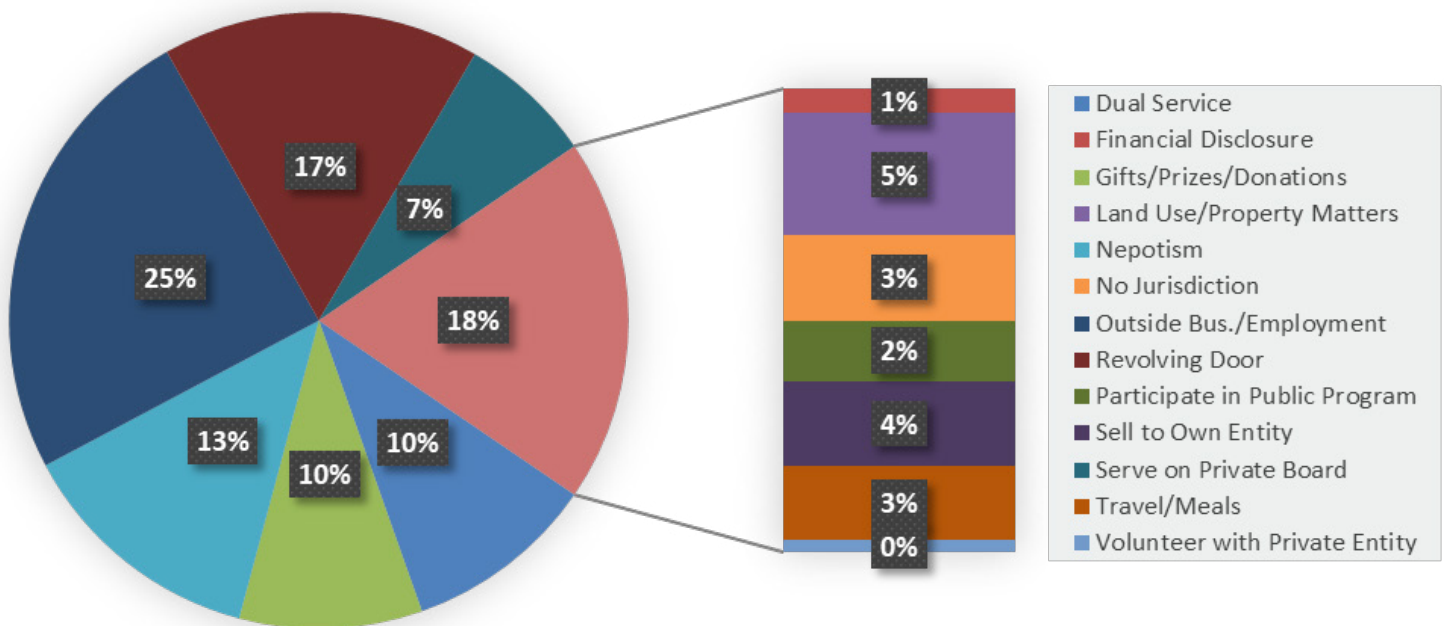
- Nepotism and Public Contract Restrictions
- Gifts, Prizes and Donations
- Private Outside Employment
- Financial Disclosure and
- Post-Employment Issues.

The charts below represent the types of questions the Commission received in writing and the types of entities requesting written advice. Once again in 2022, responses were provided promptly and thoroughly, which benefits the requestors, their public entities, and the public.

2022 Opinions Issued by Entity



2022 Opinions Issued by Topic



Should you ever have questions under the Ohio Ethics Law, please don't hesitate to contact us or visit the [Advisory Page](#) of the Commission's website.

Ethics Education

The Commission's Education and Training program provides information about the Ethics Law in readily-available and easy-to-understand formats. Our toolkit includes in-person speeches, live webinars, recorded on-demand classes, Continuing Legal Education classes, fact sheets, and newsletters. For information on training opportunities in 2023, keep reading this newsletter! If you would ever like to discuss training options for you or your office, please email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov.

Some of the feedback we received in 2022 included the following comments:

In-person Classes

- I wanted to extend my gratitude for the amazing presentation you provided. It was truly an amazing presentation and so very engaging. Who knew someone could make ethics such an exciting topic?
- It is obvious that you truly enjoy educating others on the importance of ethics in the workplace. Your energy is contagious! We cannot thank you enough.

Webinars

- I just wanted to say thanks again for your presentation today! Your presentation was very informative, and you do a great job keeping the material engaging. I was getting texts during the event about how impressed folks were with your presentation.
- The person leading the training clearly knows her stuff and maintains (what I would consider) perfect energy for a presentation like this. Her speech unwavering and she appears to project with very little effort. The training was paced well and very concise.

E-Course

- I find it strange to say that I enjoyed the opportunity to take mandated training. But it was a pleasure to see the latest from the Ethics Commission, looking forward to the next season!
- Just a quick email to let you know the Ethics e-learning module was fantastic. You all are so creative and innovative. Thanks for taking what could be dry content and turning it into material that's engaging and educational with humor sprinkled throughout.

CLE Classes

- This is hands down the best Ethics CLE I have come across.
- This is my favorite CLE every year because it is entertaining while providing substantive legal analysis. I always try to attend, even when I don't need the CLE.



Newsletters

- This is very a helpful, informative, and timely newsletter. It really helps me do my job as Chief Ethics officer for my agency.
- Thank you for these informative (and fun!) newsletters, I sincerely enjoy reading them! These topics can be difficult, but the enthusiasm that you and your team take in preparing educational information is evident!

Investigations

Another important statutory duty of the Ohio Ethics Commission is investigating alleged violations of the Ethics Law. The Commission's Investigative team conducts professional and confidential investigations and refers cases supported by substantial evidence for prosecution or alternative resolution.

In 2022, Investigative Staff responded to 1,122 telephone investigative inquiries and processed hundreds of information requests or allegations of wrongdoing. Last year, the Commission pursued 157 active investigations and closed 49 investigative cases which included settlements and censures.

Common investigations included violations of:

- Conflicts of Interest, Including Securing Things of Value
- Outside Business/Employment
- Nepotism
- Gifts/Prizes/Donations
- Property Matters



Financial Disclosure

Another statutory responsibility of the Ohio Ethics Commission is administering the financial disclosure program. Financial disclosure statements (FDS) are an important step in assisting some public servants, such as certain elected officials and high-ranking state employees, in identifying potential conflicts of interest and providing transparency to Ohio citizens.

Our FDS team was busy in 2022 as the Commission received 10,100 statements with 95 percent of these filers using the Commission's convenient and highly professional online filing system.

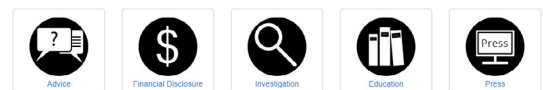
If you are new to financial disclosure filing or want additional information regarding this program, please visit the [Financial Disclosure page](#) of our web site or check out our [FDS FAQ!](#)

Closing the Books on 2022

If the Ethics Commission could provide you with a “give-away” for 2023, it would be to offer our assistance once again.

You can [find educational resources](#) on our website, [contact our advisory attorneys](#) for guidance, or [report allegations of wrongdoing](#) to our investigative staff.

Please don't hesitate to contact us this year if we can assist you or your agency in your pursuit of effective and ethical public service.



Frequently Asked Questions

Quick Links

Upcoming Events

How do I file a complaint?

The Ohio Ethics Law E-Course

Ohio Ethics Law Webinar: The Refresher Course

2023: A Forward Look!

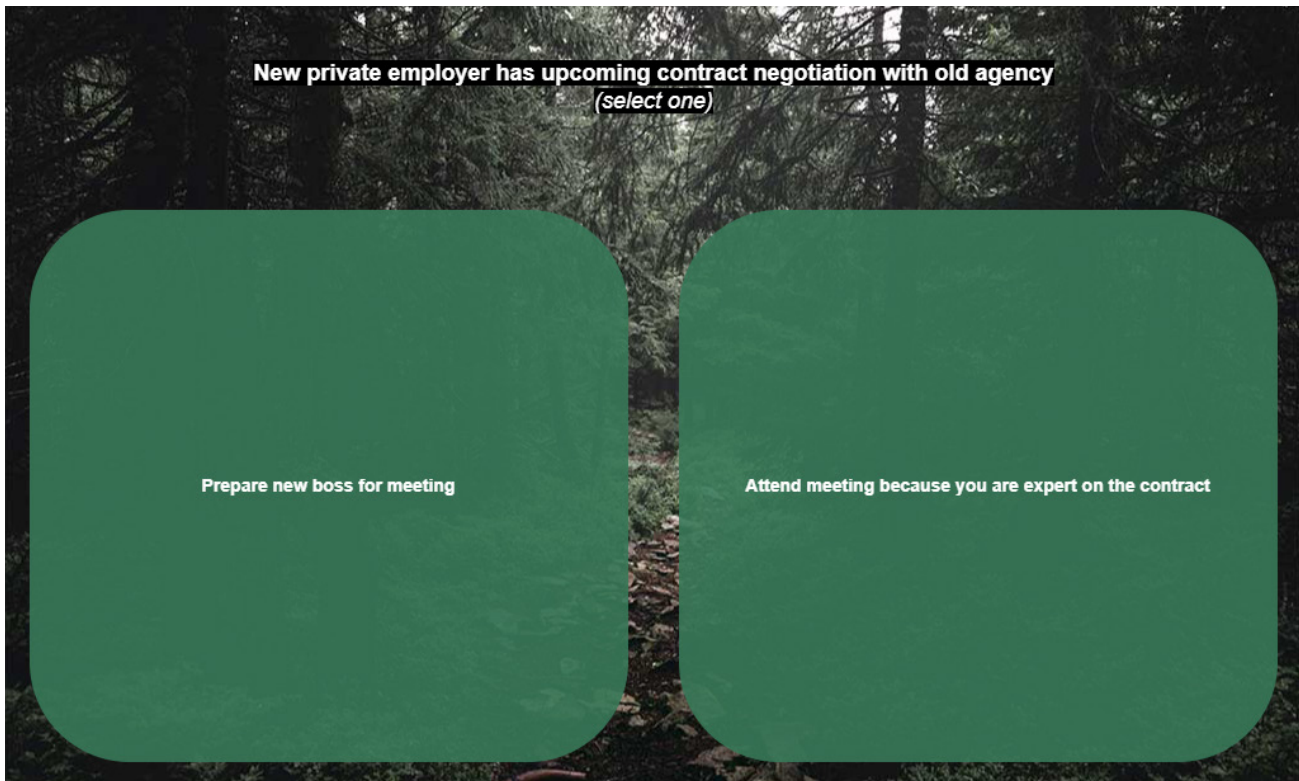
The Ohio Ethics Commission's Training Section foresees a productive 2023 as we strive to provide training on the Ohio Ethics Law that is convenient, informative, and even entertaining! We have numerous options so learners can choose the training path that works best for personal schedules and learning styles. Training choices include on-site "live" sessions, general webinars, advanced webinar, customized webinars for individual offices, as well as an on-demand e-course. See below for more information or email me at susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov.

E-Course: The Ohio Ethics Law 2023: Following the Right Path

The [2023 Ohio Ethics Law e-course](#) has been unveiled and will take you down the right paths of ethical public service! This year's online training explores interesting investigations from around the country and will assist the learner in applying lessons learned to public service in our state. So, put on your hiking shoes and let's hit the trail of understanding and complying with the Ohio Ethics Law!

Note for state officials and employees: The e-course fulfills the Ohio Ethics Law training requirement under Executive Order 2019-11D for state officials and employees (including financial disclosure filers).

Note for attorneys: The 2023 e-course has been approved for one hour of general Continuing Legal Education credit.



Webinars

While the Ohio Ethics Commission has offered webinars for numerous years, these free one-hour classes became especially popular during 2020 and 2021. The webinars are live, interactive and provide a helpful overview of the Ohio Ethics Law.

Last year, the Commission introduced the “Deeper Study” webinar to allow those who already have a solid understanding of the statute to dig a bit deeper into the Ethics Law through the study of specific advisory opinions.

Take a look below to determine which webinar is right for you! Once registered, you will receive an email confirming your registration with information you need to join the webinar.

Webinar Option #1: The Ohio Ethics Law: The Refresher Course

This one-hour webinar provides an overview of the Ohio Ethics Law with a focus on conflicts of interest, gift restrictions, public contract prohibitions, nepotism, and post-employment. This webinar is an excellent choice for those who seek a solid foundation regarding the Ethics Law or need a “refresher” course. This webinar is also an excellent option for those who may be new (or returning) to public service. These webinars will occur on the following dates:

February 9	10:00 - 11:00 AM
March 15	10:00 - 11:00 AM
April 11	2:00 - 3:00 PM
May 5	10:00 - 11:00 AM
June 12	1:00 - 2:00 PM
July 13	10:00 - 11:00 AM
August 14	1:00 - 2:00 PM
September 29	10:00 - 11:00 AM
October 11	2:00 - 3:00 PM
November 14	10:00 - 11:00 AM
December 14	10:00 - 11:00 AM



Click [here](#) to register for the webinar
The Ohio Ethics Law: The Refresher Course

Webinar Option #2: The Ohio Ethics Law: A Deeper Study

For those who have participated in our trainings for numerous years, this fresh approach to the Ethics Law might be for you! This webinar is one-hour long and will also cover all primary areas of the Ethics Law but will focus on specific applications of the law. Each area of the law will be studied in correlation with germane legal advisory opinions previously issued by the Ethics Commission. Anyone is welcome to this webinar, but those who already have a solid understanding of the statute will likely find this one especially stimulating and thought-provoking. The schedule for this webinar is listed below:

April 26	10:00 - 11:00 AM
June 22	1:00 - 2:00 PM
August 8	10:00 - 11:00 AM
October 18	1:00 - 2:00 PM
November 9	10:00 - 11:00 AM



[Click here to register for the webinar](#)
The Ohio Ethics Law: A Deeper Study

Note for state officials and employees: Both webinars fulfill the Ohio Ethics Law training requirement under Executive Order 2019-11D for state officials and employees (including financial disclosure filers).

Note for attorneys: Both types of webinars have been approved for one hour of general Continuing Legal Education credit.

Continuing Legal Education

The Ohio Ethics Commission and the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct have teamed up once again to provide three Continuing Legal Education (CLE) courses for public practice attorneys. The 2023 CLE classes are free of charge and have been approved for 2.5 hours of attorney professional conduct instruction.

The June 8 and November 13 classes will be webcast sessions with live Q&A. The September 27 class will be in-person at the BWC Auditorium in downtown Columbus.

Two classes will be webcast sessions with live Q&A and one is scheduled an “in-person” CLE at the Bureau of Workers’ Compensation Auditorium. If you sign up for the in-person class, we will notify you should we be required to convert it to an online class.

- June 8, 2023 - webcast with live Q&A
- September 27, 2023 - in-person class at BWC Auditorium
- November 13, 2022 - webcast with live Q&A

For dates and registration information
click [here](#) for our CLE Seminars webpage

You will receive electronic handouts prior to the CLE classes. If you register for either of the virtual classes, you will also receive instructions prior to the session on how to log-in for the CLE webinar.

If you do not already receive our electronic notifications regarding CLE classes and would like your email to be included in that list, please email susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov with “CLE” in the subject line.



Overview on Commission Processes by Chairman Merom Brachman

Along with monthly meetings, the Commission has valued response and consistency (re statutory procedures) for its duties under Ohio's Ethics Law, enacted in 1974. Now in 2023, we are providing feedback for recently introduced General Assembly initiatives to expand elements of the Commission's authority, including more work with the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and also for more focus on personal Financial Disclosure requirements for officials and employees. (Filings are approx. 10,000/year, reviewed by staff for any necessary Commission action.)

Historically, the Commission has reported a high degree of overall compliance with the Law, though with some notable occurrences of improprieties it has sent to the Courts or publicly settled to stop violations. The results from ongoing actions of our continuing bipartisan membership year-to-year have given Ohio a high rank in affirmative performance of honest services among the many State and local offices serving taxpayers and communities.

Outcomes are from nonpartisan decisions or investigations (including complaints or referrals), and from public identity of practices that aim to assure integrity (in our 88 counties and State authorities) in duties of elected and appointed officials in administrative capacities. That process has benefitted from widespread awareness of the rules to follow, using modern systems of training and seminars, plus attention to frequent Commission Opinions on observance of the Law. This comes from steady continuity of staff and prompt responses to the many specific requests arriving weekly.



**Chairman
Merom Brachman**

Hope smiles from the threshold of the year
to come, whispering, "It will be happier."
- Alfred Lord Tennyson



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