

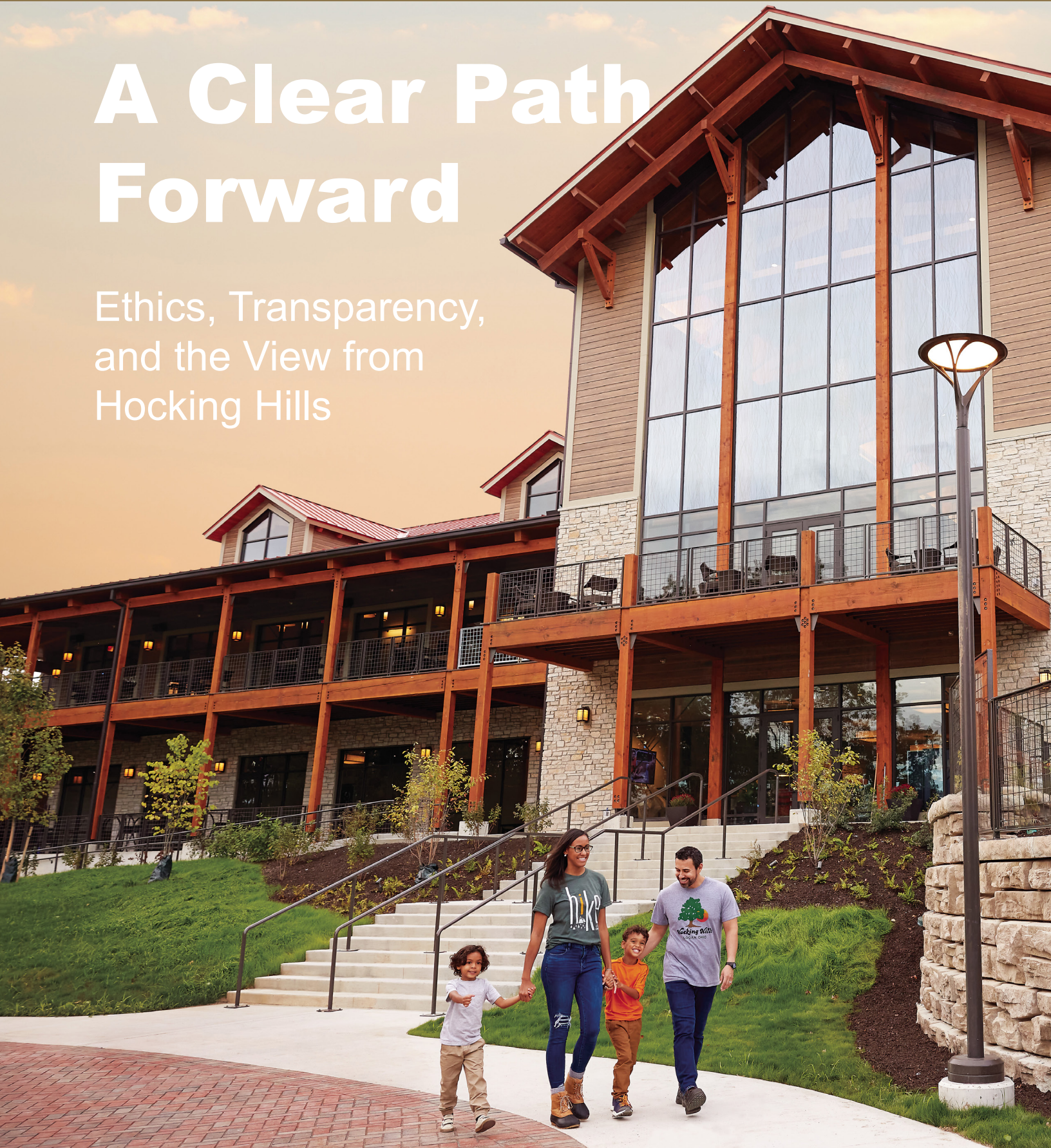
# THE VOICE OF ETHICS

A Publication of the Ohio Ethics Commission

2026 Quarter 1

## A Clear Path Forward

Ethics, Transparency,  
and the View from  
Hocking Hills



# 2025

## A Year in Review at the Ohio Ethics Commission



In 2025, the Ohio Ethics Commission continued its mission to promote integrity, transparency, and public trust in government. Through advisory guidance, ethics education, investigations, and financial disclosure oversight, the Commission supported public officials and employees across the state in understanding and complying with the Ohio Ethics Law. From responding to thousands of advisory inquiries and training tens of thousands of learners, to conducting confidential investigations and overseeing nearly 9,000 financial disclosure filings, the Commission’s work in 2025 reinforced ethical governance and accountability for Ohio taxpayers.

### Advice

The Ohio Ethics Commission is statutorily authorized to provide guidance on the Ohio Ethics Law to help public officials and employees understand and comply with their legal obligations. The Commission’s Advisory Section plays a critical role in preventing wrongdoing in government and protecting both those subject to the law and Ohio taxpayers.

In 2025, Advisory Attorneys had a productive year, responding to 194 written advisory requests and addressing thousands of additional inquiries by email and telephone. The most common questions involved post-employment restrictions, outside business or employment activities, and dual public service. Advice was provided to both state and local officials and employees on a wide range of issues, including conflicts of interest, dual public service, and the acceptance of gifts, prizes, and donations. Notably, the Commission issued two Advisory Opinions in 2025:



[Advisory Opinion No. 2025-01](#) clarified that the term “family” includes a domestic partner for purposes of public contracts and emphasized required recusal from all aspects of the public contract process - including hiring decisions - that could impact family members.



[Advisory Opinion No. 2025-02](#) confirmed that public officials and employees may use frequent flyer miles earned during official travel for personal travel, provided the miles were earned under the same conditions available to the general public and at no additional cost to their public agency.

If you have questions about the Ohio Ethics Law, please contact the Commission or visit the [Advisory page](#) on our website for additional guidance.

# Investigations

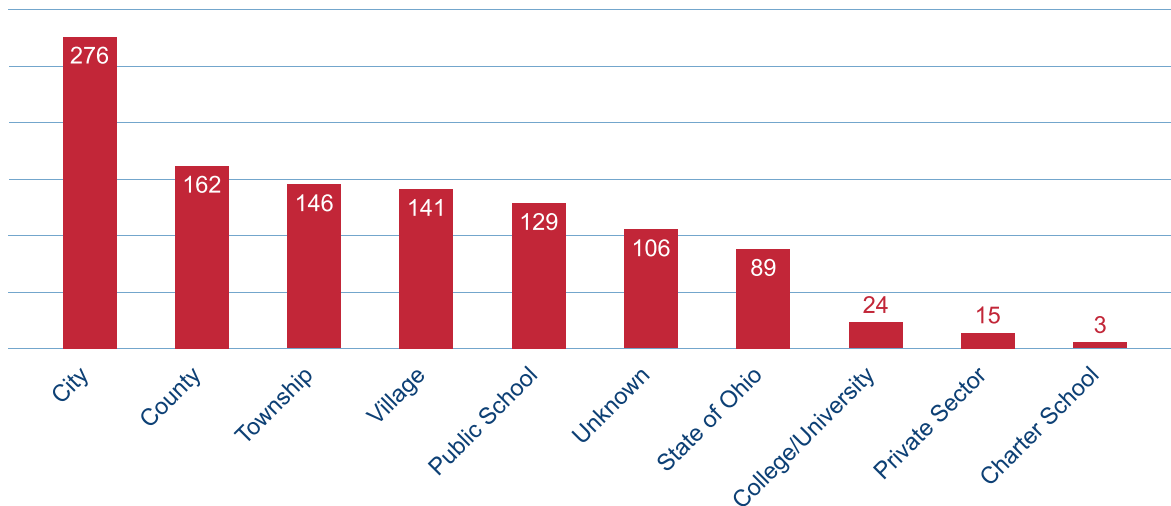
Investigating alleged violations of the Ohio Ethics Law is another core statutory responsibility of the Commission. The Investigations Team conducts professional, confidential investigations and refers matters supported by substantial evidence for prosecution or alternative resolution.

During 2025, Investigative Staff responded to more than 1,091 telephone inquiries and processed hundreds of information requests and allegations of wrongdoing. Staff presented 151 matters to the Commission, closing 85 cases by year's end while 66 investigations remained active.

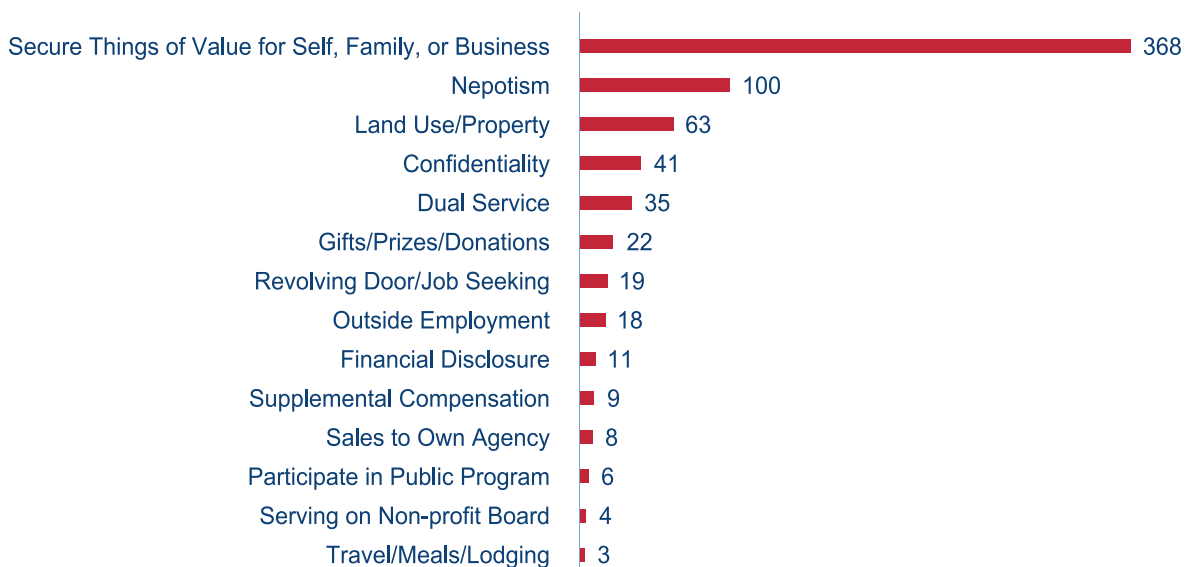
The Commission resolved 22 investigations through its public settlement agreement process and closed 59 Notices of Potential Violation. This process allows the Commission to address less severe violations efficiently and without dedicating extensive investigative resources.

For more information about the investigative process or to speak with a Special Investigator, please visit the [Investigations page](#) on our website.

## 2025 Investigations by Entity Type



## 2025 Investigations by Topic



## Education

The Commission's Education and Training Program provides practical, easy-to-understand information about the Ohio Ethics Law through a variety of accessible formats. Educational offerings include in-person presentations, live webinars, recorded on-demand courses, Continuing Legal Education (CLE) classes, fact sheets, and newsletters.

In 2025, the Commission conducted 149 in-person training sessions, reaching more than 13,000 participants. Additionally, nearly 74,000 learners utilized the Commission's on-demand online training resources.

To learn more about training opportunities in 2026, visit the [Training page](#) on our website or email [susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov](mailto:susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov).



**13,000+**

149 in-person sessions  
13,000+ participants



**2,700+**

31 webinars  
2,700+ attendees



**74,000+**

2025 e-course  
74,000+ learners

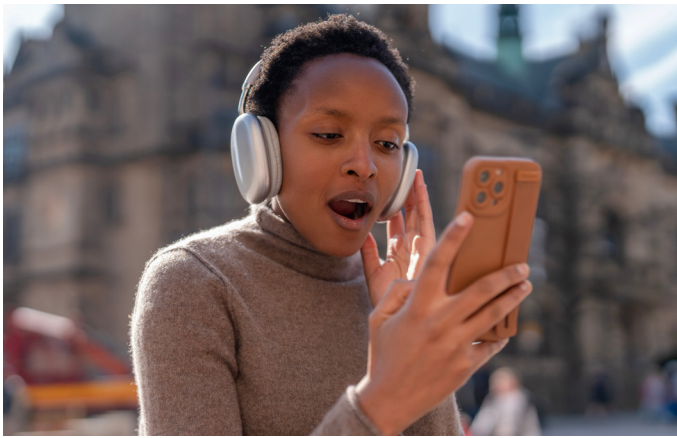
## Financial Disclosure

The administration of the financial disclosure program is another important responsibility of the Ohio Ethics Commission. Financial Disclosure Statements (FDS) help certain public officials and high-ranking employees identify potential conflicts of interest while promoting transparency for Ohio citizens.

In 2025, the Commission had more than 10,000 filers, with 99 percent of filers using the Commission's secure and user-friendly online filing system.

If you are new to financial disclosure filing or would like additional information, please visit the FDS page on the Commission's website or review the [FDS FAQ](#).





## *Press Play on Ethics:* The Voice of Ethics

If you love a good true-crime vibe and want to sharpen your ethics IQ, we've got a reminder for you. Last fall, the Ohio Ethics Commission dropped its own podcast, [The Voice of Ethics](#) - and it's not your typical policy deep dive.

This podcast leans into storytelling, using [real-world scenarios](#) and case-style narratives to bring the Ohio Ethics Law to life. Think compelling stories, clear takeaways, and practical insights that help demystify how the Ohio Ethics Law actually works in [everyday situations](#).

Whether you're an ethics nerd, a podcast junkie, or just curious about how ethical decisions play out in the [real world](#), The Voice of Ethics makes learning engaging, accessible, and surprisingly binge-worthy.

If you haven't tuned in yet, now's a great time to hit play and hear ethics from [a whole new angle](#).

### Press Play!



Our Executive Director shares his story of a mentor with a "helpful" opportunity (*helpful for whom??*) in [MLM Mentor](#)



Meet a public servant with a secret stash of Elmer T. Lee and Pappy Van Winkle in [Ethics on the Rocks](#)

Visit [ethics.ohio.gov/ethicslaw/podcast.html](https://ethics.ohio.gov/ethicslaw/podcast.html), or find The Voice of Ethics on [Spotify](#), [YouTube Music](#), [Amazon Music](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or wherever you listen.

*Take care, be ethical!*

# 2026 Ohio Ethics Law Training Options



Each year, the Ohio Ethics Commission refreshes our training lineup to keep it current, practical, and - yes - actually interesting. We also know calendars are packed and time is precious, so we've designed flexible options that fit real lives and real schedules. Think of this as your 2026 Ethics Training Menu - pick what works best for you!

## Learn on your own time



Check out our on-demand e-course, [The Ohio Ethics Law: Top 10 True Crimes](#) Ethics education but make it binge-worthy!

## Join us live (from anywhere)



Our [2026 webinars](#) bring interactive training straight to your office or home. Choose an intro, take a deeper dive, or request a customized session for your team.

## Face-to-face energy!



We offer in-person sessions too! Email [susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov](mailto:susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov) to explore scheduling a training at your public office.

## Calling all attorneys



We've secured one hour of general CLE credit for our e-course and both webinar formats.

Ethics isn't just about following the rules - it's about building trust, confidence, and a strong foundation for public service. As we head into 2026, we're excited to keep supporting you with engaging training that empowers smart decisions and ethical leadership. Here's to a year of learning, integrity, and doing the right thing - together.



## A (Perfectly Legal) Gift to Attorneys!

If you are an attorney who concluded 2025 frantically trying to complete your CLE requirements, your new year's resolution may be to ban CLE procrastination - and the Ohio Ethics Commission is here to help!

Our [CLE webpage](#) is chockful of free classes approved for 2.5 attorney conduct hours. All three classes are open to all government attorneys, are co-presented by the Ohio Ethics Commission and the Ohio Board of Professional Conduct and are customized for attorneys who serve the public. Two sessions are virtual, and one will take place in-person in downtown Columbus. Register for a class today and start off 2026 ethically and proactively. It's our gift to you!

## Legal Defense Funds Advisory Opinion Issued



At its meeting on January 22, 2026, the Ohio Ethics Commission approved [Formal Advisory Opinion 2026-01](#), which addresses what conditions apply to public officials or employees who solicit or accept donations to a legal defense fund in civil cases. This opinion expanded on an earlier Commission opinion and clarified that the same standards apply to legal defense funds in criminal and civil cases.

The opinion states that a public official or employee may not solicit or accept contributions for a legal defense fund from any individual or entity that is doing business with, seeking to do business with, regulated by, or is interested in matters before the public agency the official or employee serves. The opinion provides six examples. These include fundraisers on crowdfunding platforms started by an agency general counsel, and defense funds created by a collaborative organization of current and future retirees that have matters pending before a retirement system.

The opinion also addresses financial disclosure requirements and reciprocal restrictions that apply to third parties who solicit or provide such donations.

Finally, the opinion notes that a public official is not prohibited from using his or her official title in connection with a solicitation for legal defense funds, provided that the solicitation does not suggest that the public agency endorses or sanctions the defense fund. This includes prohibitions on using a public agency's seal, letterhead, or other official insignia in connection with such solicitations.



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