



The Voice of Ethics Podcast Transcript

June 2026 Episode

Barking Up the Wrong Tree

Susan:

Hello, ethical people! I'm Susan Willeke of the Ohio Ethics Commission welcoming you to The Voice of Ethics, the podcast where we dive into stories about ethics in government!

You know, one of the most frustrating things in public life, it's not always the huge scandals. Sometimes it's those smaller moments that reveal how a person sees power, and whether they think the rules apply to them.

So, there's a story out of a Florida community, involving a councilperson that really struck me for that very reason. Now, I will tell you up front — this story involves a dog bite, but please know everyone ends up safe and well by the end of the story. So, this story will include a little girl and a sweet puppy who had a "ruff day," but it will have a happy ending, I promise you. So, hold your a-paws until I tell you the story!

dog bark/howl sound effect

OK here we go. According to police reports, and there was local news coverage, this councilperson had dogs. Sadly — this is the sad part — these dogs got out somehow and they did attack, unfortunately, a 13-year-old girl and her family's puppy while they were out walking. The little girl, apparently, did suffer a bite wound, and the puppy was injured enough that they had to take it to an emergency veterinarian care clinic.

Now, in all fairness, dogs getting loose can happen, even to good responsible pet owners. It doesn't always mean that someone did something evil; sometimes unintended mistakes happen. Most people understand that. What really caught public attention about this story in Florida, though, was what allegedly happened afterward.

According to the police report, while officers were taking statements inside the family's home — right, the little girl runs home with the puppy, understandably, after, you know, she gets free from the dogs — the councilwoman repeatedly entered and then kept trying to enter the house demanded to see the police reports, wanting to question whether the little girl's injury was "really" a bite or not, trying to dictate how the police report was written, etc..

But here's my favorite part, everyone! OK, hold your horses, here we go. I think of myself as a fairly upbeat person and I think I generally give people the benefit of doubt. But there is one thing that someone in public service can say to me that pretty much guarantees we're not going to be friends. You know what that statement is? Here we go, you ready, here we go: "Do you know who I am?"

dog grumbling and whining sound effect

I have to tell you guys, when that happens to me in speeches, my internal voice immediately says in my head, "Yep, you're someone who just lost all kinds of potential sympathy!"

Anyway, that's apparently what this councilperson said to the police officer and reportedly kept threatening to call the police chief.

I gotta tell ya, that sentence, that phrase — “Do you know who I am?” — I think that might be one of the most revealing sentences about certain people in public service.

Because public service is supposed to mean greater accountability, not special treatment!

It's not only a violation of the public's trust when someone in public service tries to throw their weight around for personal benefit. It's also a violation of the good name of the vast majority of us in public service who do our jobs well, with integrity, who emulate calmness, responsibility, humility, and a respect for civic processes.

And that's the real issue in this story. It's not just about dogs. It's not even just about one heated neighborhood dispute. It's about public trust, transparency, and objectivity. So, when an elected official like this councilperson appears to leverage their status during a police investigation, even casually, it reinforces every cynical belief that may already (and often unfairly) exist about public servants.

The encouraging part, though, is that laws and rules like the Ohio Ethics Law, here in our state, it holds people accountable when public positions are abused. In that case, that Florida case, the Florida Commission on Ethics did find probable cause that the councilperson had abused her position in trying to influence the handling of the incident. The councilperson acknowledged she had violated two ethics laws in their state, admitted to abusing her public position for personal gain, and agreed to pay a \$5,000 fine.

And – as I promised – the little girl and her puppy are healthy and well today, hopefully having a great summer chasing tails, fetching tennis balls, and maybe even the occasional swim off the Florida coast. The puppy is all grown up which makes us happy, right? I mean, we like big mutts and we cannot lie, yes?

dog howling sound effect

mysterious whistled tune

Nick:

Hey Susan, hey ethical people it's Nick back with my top secret Eth-X Files and I have a doozy for you. You know me I'm tuned into things that most people just can't perceive, I've got a sense for the imperceptible, the unsensible, the nonsensical.

I've been out in the field again, Susan, chasing down the latest ethical oddities of the modern world, and my investigations have brought me to an entirely new kind of culprit. It's...huh, another four legged one... What the heck is that about? Wasn't that raccoon in my dreams warning me about catching mange again...? It's all so fuzzy...

Anyway, Susan... we've got ourselves a smol porch-pirate pup committin' a heckin' felony.

mysterious whistled tune

Just like the hapless county employee caught delivering Amazon packages on county time in a county car wearing his county badge in our Side Hustle Main Event episode, Lord Barkington here was caught by the all-seeing Big Brother of the cul-de-sac, the Ring camera.

A viral video has been circulating of a dog swiping an Uber Eats meal from a front porch. See, after the customer's food had been dropped off he got a second notification that, again someone was at his front door. When he looked to see who it was he saw a little dog dashing away with his dinner!

Ultimately the delivery driver tracked the dog down and returned the food to the porch.

Honestly, compared to human porch pirates, this feels like a little of an upgrade, at least the dog doesn't try to resell your lo mein on Facebook Marketplace.

Some dogs protec, some dogs attac, some dogs steal the snac.

The truth is out there - WAY out there! Susan, back to you!

mysterious whistled tune

Susan:

Alright, alright, I'll wind this episode down for now. All in all, I have to say this - I think this was a dog-gone good episode, wasn't it?

dog grumbling and whining sound effect

Everybody? You with me? Have I lost you yet?

dog grumbling and whining sound effect

Alright, anyway.

Thank you SO much for once again joining us on this brief version of The Voice of Ethics. I hope you will tune in to our next episode, but in the meantime, does anybody out there know the best thing is to give to a dog who has a fever? Mustard – it's the best thing for a hot dog!

dog grumbling and whining sound effect

Alright, take care, everyone! Be ethical! Bye!