

February 25, 2025

To: Matt Birong, Chair House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs

From: Christina Sivret, Executive Director, Vermont State Ethics Commission

**Re: Vermont State Ethics Commission FY26 Budget – Request for Additional Staffing**

Dear Committee:

The State Ethics Commission requests the support of the House Committee on Government & Military Affairs regarding its FY26 budget request for funding for two additional staff members - one legal counsel and one staff attorney. The legal counsel will primarily provide State government services, and the staff attorney will primarily provide ethics advice and training to municipal officials. These positions are necessary so that the Ethics Commission can meet the increasing demand for its services associated with the passage of the State Code of Ethics in 2022, and Act 171 in 2024. This request is a carry-over request from FY25.

**Current Ethics Commission Staffing and Responsibilities**

As it stands, the Ethics Commission is severely under-resourced, with one part-time Executive Director and one part-time administrative assistant. The staffing of the Ethics Commission has remained the same since 2021, despite a dramatic increase in its statutory responsibilities in 2022, and again in 2024. The Commission is now required to provide ethics advice and training services to approximately 15,000+ public servants; provide complaint services to all State and municipal officials and members of the public; and handle annual financial disclosures for all Executive Officers, and, starting next year, county officials. Also starting next year, the Ethics Commission will have to track and enforce monetary penalties for the non-filing of both candidate and Executive Officer financial disclosures, which will involve developing a system for online payments, and collecting those payments.

The above is in addition to the Commission's other responsibilities, which include, but are not limited to, the research and development of the proposed municipal ethics framework for Vermont in 2023; monthly Commission meetings; the preparation of a detailed annual report, which now includes data collection from multiple government entities; the development and maintenance of online financial disclosure and training databases; legislative advocacy, and routine administrative work.

**Increasing Demand for Services**

**State Government Services**

In addition to increased statutory responsibilities, the Commission is seeing a continually increasing demand for its services. The below numbers reflect the increased demand for State-level services between 2022 and 2024, after the passage of the State Code of Ethics in 2022. The numbers do not reflect the current demand for municipal services since the statewide Municipal Code of Ethics went into effect on January 1, 2025.



Complaints	Complaint Inquiries	Guidance Requests	Advisory Opinion Requests
<b>44%</b> increase 2023 v. 2024	<b>34%</b> increase 2023 v. 2024	<b>44%</b> increase 2023 v. 2024	<b>80%</b> decrease 2023 v. 2024
<b>400%</b> increase 2022 v. 2023	<b>163%</b> increase 2022 v. 2023	<b>19%</b> increase 2022 v. 2023	<b>100%</b> increase 2022 v. 2023

**Municipal Services**

In the seven weeks since the statewide Municipal Code of Ethics took effect, the Ethics Commission has seen demand for its services primarily come from municipal officials, and primarily from municipal officials in small towns. Since January 1, 2025, the Ethics Commission has provided online ethics training to 730+ municipal officials and responded to 23 requests for municipal ethics advice (this doesn't include questions related to the implementation of Act 171, or questions from members of the public). Demand for municipal services is only expected to increase as more officials take the municipal ethics training, which is currently happening at a pace of over 100 per week.

Year	Complaints	Complaint Inquiries	Guidance Requests	Advisory Opinion Requests
2024	23	47	37	1
YTD 2025 (7 weeks)	6	18	25	2

To compare, the Rhode Island Ethics Commission, which has similar responsibilities to the Vermont State Ethics Commission, has a staff of twelve. In 2022, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Commission testified before the Senate Committee on Government Operations, that they received approximately 33 complaints per year. The Vermont Ethics Commission is operating at a similar level, but with 1/12 the staffing. In this context, we feel that our request for two additional staff members, one to focus on State responsibilities and one to focus on municipal responsibilities, is both necessary and reasonable.

Thank you for your consideration.

/s/ Christina Sivret

Christina Sivret  
Executive Director, State Ethics Commission