

To: Senate Appropriations Committee  
From: Paul Erlbaum, Chair, Vermont State Ethics Commission  
Testimony date: February 17, 2026

Thank you for inviting me to address the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The Governor's proposed budget for the Ethics Commission is \$250,540--a 12.1% increase due almost exclusively to an increase in the cost of health insurance benefits.

The Commission seeks an additional appropriation of \$351,382 to hire two attorneys to fulfill the mandates of 2024's Act 171. We seek one general counsel to provide State government services and conduct investigations, and one staff attorney to provide ethics advice and training to municipal officials. Breaking out the additional appropriation costs: \$139,131 for staff attorney salary and benefits; \$163,251 for general counsel salary and benefits; \$49,000 for additional operating costs due to additional staff and duties (e.g., office space, office equipment, computers, mileage expenses, etc.) Total Ethics Commission proposed budget: \$601,922.

Comparing Ethics Commission staffing with other small offices of the State of Vermont:

- > Human Rights Commission – nine staff positions
- > Office of Racial Equity – seven staff positions
- > Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission – seven paid commissioner and staff positions
- > Vermont Ethics Commission – two half-time staff positions

In a 2024 signing statement regarding Act 171, Governor Scott stated he would allow the bill to become law without his signature, explaining:

[W]ith the addition of municipal compliance, the Legislature did not fund reporting, investigations or the salary of a full-time [Ethics Commission] Executive Director. These amount to another unfunded mandate, which could add to the municipal tax burden, and will add to the workload of municipal officials...

Governor Scott expressed "hope" the Legislature would devote time during the 2025 session to fix this issue. Although the Legislature did not fulfill Governor Scott's "hope" in 2025, we hope the Legislature does so in its 2026 session. Without additional staffing, the Ethics Commission will be unable to fulfill the mandates of Act 171. The Commission is "treading water" and may go down without sufficient staffing.

Please tell me if additional information would be helpful for your deliberations.