



Orange County Board of Ethics

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2015 Annual Report

Mission Statement for Board of Ethics: The Board is comprised of seven members, each of whom serve without compensation. The Board is responsible for ensuring full compliance with the Orange County Code of Ethics, including mandated financial disclosures by certain County employees and officials. The citizens of New York State and Orange County are entitled to be assured that persons in positions of governmental responsibility act in the discharge of their duties according to the highest standards of ethical conduct.

With a total budget of \$35,920, the Board sent out 360 disclosure forms to those who hold positions in Orange County government or boards as designated by the Ethics law to be completed and returned by January 31, 2015. Although only 199 forms were timely received, by March, 326 forms were received. The Board reviewed each of the forms over a period of time and sent delinquent notices to the non-filers. The last delinquent form was received on June 10, 2016.

With assistance from the Law Department, the Board prepared Requests for Proposals for legal services to the Board of Ethics. Four proposals were received and interviews conducted. The Board selected James Towne as the Board's legal counsel with services to begin in 2016.

The Board was in need of both a copier and fax machine, but was able to obtain them from the County's General Services Department at no cost, which was most appreciative by the Board, avoiding the need to appropriate monies for these items in the 2016 Budget.

The Board also initiated the process to obtain secure email addresses to allow for protected requests from County employees and officials regarding the Ethics Law.

In reviewing a particular disclosure form it became apparent that although there is a County policy in place regarding nepotism (direct line of supervision of immediate family working in the same department), there is no similar protective policy for indirect line of supervision of related employees. Although the situation was resolved as to the particular filer, the Board agreed to send a letter to the County Executive and the Chairman of the Legislature expressing their concern for future situations and the potential need for an expanded policy.

2015 also brought resumed work sessions of the County Legislature regarding the amendment of the Ethics Code Law, including amendment of the financial disclosure form. Members of the Ethics Board and counsel attended and participated with suggestions and comments in several of these sessions. Ultimately, the Orange County Legislature enacted a substantially revised Ethics Code and financial disclosure form in November of 2015, effective as of January 1, 2016. Training for the required disclosure form filers will commence in 2016, allowing County employees to better understand the new ethics local law and disclosure form.

The Board of Ethic scheduled fourteen meetings and finalized 8 issues in 2015:

- 7 Requests for Advisory Opinions, resulting in 4 decisions (the Board had no jurisdiction in two of the matters and the third request was eventually withdrawn.)
- 1 Nepotism Issue was resolved (a letter was sent to the Chairman of the Legislature and County Executive regarding Board's concern for future situations.)

In comparison, there were 10 issues in 2014 and 5 in 2013.

The Board also handled two Freedom of Information requests in 2015.

With the enactment of the revised Ethics Code and financial disclosure form, the responsibilities of the Ethics Board were greatly expanded. The Board looks forward to meeting these greater responsibilities so as to further the important work of the Ethics Board and its positive impact throughout County government.