



Orange County Board of Ethics

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2016 Annual Report

Mission Statement for Board of Ethics: The Board is comprised of seven members, each of whom serves 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.

2016 began with a revised, more detailed Orange County Ethics and Disclosure Law (Local Law No. 5 of 2015) which necessitated the County to provide training to those employees and officers required to file financial disclosure forms. Members of the Orange County Board of Ethics attended a training session on March 23, 2016.

A new Ethics Board was appointed, with five members from the previous Board and two new members. The Board also approved two hearing officers as required by law. Our new counsel also began in 2016.

With a total budget of \$33,519, the Board sent out 238 disclosure forms to those who hold positions in Orange County government and 106 forms to County Board members prior to March 1, 2016 to be completed and returned by May 1, 2016. The Board agreed that they would be lenient with the deadline since this was a new form. The Board reviewed each of the forms over a period of time and sent delinquent notices to the non-filers.

With questions from designated county employees and board members received by the Legislature and Board of Ethics, it was decided to clarify some sections in the present local law and form. Legislative committee meetings began in August, 2016 to address these issues with members of the Ethics Board and counsel attending.

In August and early September, interviews were set up for the position of secretary to the Ethics Board. The position was filled and commenced working on October 4, 2016. A contractual position since 1990, a request from the Department of Human Resources is for this position to be a county employee by 2017.

Waiver and Foil forms were approved by the members as required by the new Ethics Local Law.

A recommendation by the Orange County Ethics Board, after an inquiry from Commissioner Steve Gross of the Human Resources Department regarding setting the criteria for who will file Financial Disclosure Statements, is that it is not within the jurisdiction of the Board of Ethics and the Legislature should set the criteria and then Human Resources would determine which positions should be filing.

The Board of Ethics scheduled eleven meetings and three work sessions and finalized the following in 2016:

- 15 Requests for Advisory Opinions
- 344 Disclosure Forms reviewed.
- 13 Disclosure letters reviewed.
- 1 Foil Requests

The Orange County Ethics Board recognized, with the expanded Ethics Code and financial disclosure form, along with the mandated training, a definite increase of awareness regarding possible conflicts of interest by the employees and officers of the County of Orange. The Board will continue to meet these greater responsibilities to further the important work of the Ethics Board and its positive impact throughout County government.