



Orange County Board of Ethics

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2014 Annual Report

Mission Statement for Board of Ethics: The Board is responsible for ensuring full compliance with the Orange County Code of Ethics and disclosures. 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 \$10,766, the Board sent out 274 disclosure forms to those who hold positions in Orange County government or boards as designated by County local law be completed and returned by January 31, 2014. At the January meeting, members commenced reviewing the disclosure forms received.

In February a grand jury was empanelled to investigate certain allegations of a county employee. As a result of this investigation the Chair and Board Attorney gave testimony to the grand jury. After deliberating for two months, the grand jury found no will-full or criminal intent, although certain recommendations were submitted regarding the present ethics law.

After the grand jury investigation, the legislative statutory committee on Rules, Enactments and Intergovernmental Relations scheduled monthly meetings to review the present ethics local law, disclosure form and regulations for adjudicatory proceedings. From June until December, various members of the Ethics Board and their Board Attorney attended these meetings and gave input to the Committee when requested.

In April, a FOIL request was received requesting copies for 37 disclosure forms (elected officials, various department heads and managers, and members of Ethics Board.) The Ethics Board provided an opportunity for a review of, but not copies of, such forms, pursuant to the current Ethics Local Law No. 2 of 1994. An appeal of this decision was forwarded to County Attorney Chapman, as the County's FOIL appeals officer. Mr. Chapman's determination was to allow the forms to be disclosed, after redaction, and placed on the county web site.

Perhaps due to the publicity of the grand jury investigation, the Board received substantially more requests for advisory opinions than they had ever received in the past. In July, a supplemental appropriation of \$8,188 for legal services was

requested by the Board of Ethics due to the substantial increase in the review and response to these requests for advisory opinions. The supplemental appropriation was approved by the Legislature.

The Board of Ethic scheduled fourteen meetings and finalized 10 major issues in 2014:

2 formal Complaints against filers

7 Requests for Opinion, resulting in 5 decisions (We had no jurisdiction in two of the matters.)

1 Consent Determination

In comparison, there were only five issues in 2013 and three in 2012, all demanding lesser effort.

In December, the present disclosure form was sent to all designated employees, as the new Ethics Law and form have not been approved by the County Legislature at this time.