**Vermont State Ethics Commission**

**Press Release Re: Statutory Code of Ethics July 8, 2020**

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**Vermont takes a step toward a statutory code of ethics. Public Input Needed.**

Does meaningful government ethics oversight in Vermont require an Ethics Code in statute? The Vermont State Ethics Commission concluded last year that the answer to that question is most definitely yes.

The Commission is not alone. All current state-wide office holders, Gov. Phil Scott, Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman, Secretary of State Jim Condos, Attorney General T.J. Donovan, Treasurer Beth Pearce, and Auditor of Accounts Doug Hoffer publicly expressed support for adoption of a statutory Code of Ethics. In a joint letter to the Chairs of the House and Senate Government Operations Committees on February 10, 2020 they wrote, “As you know, in our public service, we must account for and address issues such as: conflicts of interest, preferential treatment, abuses of power, outside gifts, and protections for whistleblowers. A Code of Ethics embedded in Vermont law will provide public servants with direction and clarity on numerous issues they regularly face.”

Two bills introduced this last session (H.634 and S.198) asked the Ethics Commission to submit to the General Assembly a draft Code of Ethics which it will consider for adoption into law. While the arrival of COVID-19 preempted full consideration of those bills, the Ethics Commission has been asked and will send a draft Code of Ethics to the legislature this coming fall - but not before seeking public input.

**Public Input Needed:** Commission Chair Julie Hulburd explained, “It is essential that this draft code of ethics be thoroughly scrutinized. We want the legislature to be confident that issues the code raises have been fully addressed with the benefit of stakeholder and public input. We want to hear everyone’s thoughts.” Hulburd added, “Please send your comments and suggestions to the Commission.” The Commission’s website <https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/> contains the current draft code and an explanation of why statutory adoption is necessary.

**Enforcement:** The Ethics Commission has been asked, “How will this code be enforced?” The Commission believes adopting a statutory code of ethics setting ethics standards for public servants should come first - before enforcement discussions. Once a code of ethics is adopted, the immediate and most effective way to ensure code compliance will be through ethics education and ethics awareness. The Ethics Commission is a willing partner and resource for public servants.

**Comments:** The Ethics Commission strongly urges written comments. It will, however, offer an opportunity for oral comments. At 10:00 a.m. on August 12, 2020, the Ethics Commission will hold a virtual public hearing regarding its draft proposal. Details will be posted on the Ethics Commission website soon. The Commission will continue to accept written comments through August 26, 2020. It will then consider all comments and suggestions, finalize the draft, and submit it to the House and Senate Government Operations Committees where its journey into statute can begin.

The Commission is grateful for all comments it receives.

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