



Vermont State Ethics Commission

May 11, 2022

Finally, a Code of Ethics for Vermont

On May 3rd, Vermont's first uniform State Code of Ethics was signed into law by Governor Scott. Fittingly, for legislation meant to promote public trust in government, the Code of Ethics passed both the House and Senate unanimously.

The Code addresses important basics of governmental ethics: it defines and prohibits conflicts of interest; details acceptable and unacceptable gifts to public servants; prohibits the misuse of government resources; gives "whistleblower" protection for public servants who report waste, fraud, abuse of authority, or violations of law; and requires ethics training for all State public servants. It covers all public servants in the three branches of government, including elected and appointed state officials, legislators, State employees, members of State Boards and Commissions, and anyone else authorized to act on behalf of the State of Vermont. It does not apply to town, city, or county employees.

While this is a moment to celebrate, it doesn't mean the work is done. The Code is modest compared to the complex codes of many other states, and it does not include an enforcement mechanism. Kickstarted in 2015 after Vermont was given an "F" by the Center for Public Integrity for ethics enforcement and Executive, Legislative, and Judicial accountability, the journey to a statutory Code of Ethics was long, and not without controversy. However, Vermonters now have a strong foundation to grow the governmental ethics framework in Vermont. This foundation is based on broad agreement on several key principles, including the principle that the Code of Ethics should be applied equally across all three branches of government and to all professional classes – no branch of government or individual should get preferential treatment when it comes to the duty of ethical conduct owed to the public, or to each other.

We know most Vermonters want to play by rules of fairness. The Code makes it easier to do so by clarifying those rules. The Ethics Commission will return to the State House to request lawmakers take the next step, which is to establish an enforcement protocol. As public servants, we seek to earn and maintain the trust of all Vermonters. Government best serves the people when its citizens are confident their public servants have the public's interest at heart. The Ethics Commission believes

establishing and enforcing basic rules of ethics for everyone affiliated with State government is essential to ensure public trust in government.

To learn more about the Code of Ethics, please give us a call at 802-828-7187 or email us at ethicscommission@vermont.gov.

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