



**Vermont State Ethics Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
December 18, 2024 (unapproved)  
Remote Attendance\***

**1. Call to Order:** The regular meeting, held remotely via Zoom, was called to order by Chair Paul Erlbaum at 10:15 a.m. Also in attendance were Commission members Jack Kennelly, Michele Eid, Sara Butson, Executive Director Christina Sivret and Administrative Assistant Peggy Delaney. Commissioner Chris Davis was absent.

**2. Approval of Minutes:** On the motion of Jack Kennelly, the meeting minutes from November 6<sup>th</sup> were approved. Minutes from the October 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting were not approved due to a lack of a quorum of members who were present at the October meeting.

**3. Public Comment:** None

**4. Executive Director's Report:**

**COGEL Conference:** Executive Director Sivret, Chair Erlbaum, and Commissioner Kennelly recently attended the annual Council on Government Ethics Laws (COGEL) conference, which was held in Los Angeles this year. Executive Director Sivret spoke on the panel, "I Will Survive: How Ethics Commissions Combat Existential Threats from Lawmakers, Lawyers, and More", sponsored by the Campaign Legal Center. The other panelists were the Ethics Officer for Atlanta, and the Executive Director of the Alabama Ethics Commission. Vermont was invited to participate as a positive example of a state where ethics laws have been moving forward. Overall, Executive Director Sivret thought the conference wasn't as relevant to the work of the Commission as it has been in past years. Commissioner Kennelly mentioned that his takeaway from the conference was that it is clear we are underfunded and understaffed, especially considering the increase in cases we are seeing and the addition of the Municipal Code of Ethics to the Commission's workload. The average number of staff members around the country seems to be 12-15. The conference will be in Atlanta next year.

**Municipal Ethics Update:** Executive Director Sivret let the commissioners know that the Municipal Code of Ethics training is done and will be on the Commission's website soon. Tyler Tech has set it up so that people who take the training will automatically receive notification of training

completion and the Commission will not have to manually create certificates. Tyler Tech will add the same functionality to the State Code of Ethics training. Approximately 25 municipalities have sent us the names of their ethics liaisons, and more are coming in every day. Several municipalities have chosen select board members as their liaisons, rather than municipal employees. Because providing municipalities with a model complaint procedure would be outside the scope of the Commission's authority, Executive Director Sivret is working on a general resource document on complaint investigation.

**Financial Disclosures:** Emails went out this week to everyone who is required to file a financial disclosure statement with the Ethics Commission by January 15, 2025, and we have started to receive some. Commissioner Eid said that if you add an entry by mistake, the system does not seem to give you the option to delete it, thereby preventing you from submitting the form. Executive Director Sivret said she will find out if there is a way to fix it.

**5. Executive Session:** At 10:41 a.m., on the motion of Michele Eid, seconded by Sarah Butson, the Commission went into Executive Session. Executive Director Chris Sivret reported on complaints and requests for Guidance that had come in since the last Commission meeting. At 11:07 Michele Eid moved to leave Executive session, seconded by Paul Erlbaum

**6. Other business:** Executive Director Sivret announced that we have a new commissioner, Will Stevens, appointed by the Senate Committee on Committees. He is a former legislator and has served in various capacities as a municipal official. He is out of the country now but will hopefully be at the January meeting. We have not heard from the Speaker of the House yet on her appointment. We will have a student volunteer, Heather Rockwell, for the month of January. She is a student at Oberlin College and will help with the Annual Report, among other projects. Administrative Assistant Delaney talked briefly about her research on a possible pilot mediation program, which has been under discussion by the Commission for the last few months. It was agreed that we will most likely outsource mediation services, but we need to do more research on affordable options. Commissioner Kennelly suggested reaching out to VBA to learn more about their mediation assistance panel. Chair Erlbaum asked if we should consider blocking two hours off for each meeting, especially given the increase in complaints and guidance that need to be discussed. The commissioners agreed this would be a good idea.

**7. Adjournment** At 11:30 Chair Erlbaum moved to leave the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Kennelly.

