

Vermont State Ethics Commission

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House Passes H.875

Montpelier – Yesterday the Vermont House of Representatives passed House bill No. 875 (H.875), an act relating to the State Ethics Commission and the State Code of Ethics. The bill, introduced by the Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, seeks to establish a municipal code of ethics that sets minimum statewide ethics standards and allows the State Ethics Commission to provide free advisory and training services to municipalities.

What does it do?

The bill, which applies to municipal officers, proposes to:

- Establish a statewide municipal code of ethics that sets minimum ethics standards while still allowing municipalities to set even higher standards and adopt supplemental ethics policies.
- Require municipal officials to take training every three years on government ethics, open meeting laws, and the Public Records Act.
- Allow the State Ethics Commission, upon request, to provide free services to municipalities, including confidential advisory services and ethics training.
- Require municipalities to have a process in place to receive and investigate ethics complaints and maintain records of those complaints.
- Offer whistleblower protections to municipal public servants or members of the public who file a written ethics complaint with a municipality, the State Ethics Commission, Attorney General, or other relevant body.
- Identify an existing official in each municipality to serve as a liaison to the Ethics Commission to facilitate the exchange of information.

The bill does not:

- Give the Ethics Commission the authority to investigate municipal complaints or oversee municipalities.
- Require municipalities to hire additional staff or create new positions.

What happens next? H.875 will now move to the Senate Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs for further consideration. The Ethics Commission frequently hears from municipal officials and members of the public seeking ethics advice and avenues for accountability. We believe the passage of this bill is an important step towards establishing a municipal ethics framework for Vermont and hope to see it pass quickly through the next stages of the legislative process.