

Commission On Ethics

The Florida Commission on Ethics is a 9-member body created by the Legislature as required by the Florida Constitution. Five members are appointed by the Governor, subject to Senate confirmation. Two members are appointed by the Senate President and two by the Speaker of the House. Neither the President nor the Speaker may appoint more than one person from the same political party and the Governor may not appoint more than three members from the same party. No more than five members of the Commission may be from the same political party at any one time. The Commission is a part of the legislative branch. The Commission appoints an executive director to supervise the daily administrative responsibilities.

Executive Director:

Bonnie J. Williams
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Agency Clerk:

Kaye Starling
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Executive Branch Lobbyist Registration Office:

The Pepper Building, Room G-68
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Phone: (850) 922-4990

Hours of Operation:

8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday - Friday

General Counsel:

Philip C. Claypool
Philip C. Claypool has been the Commission's General Counsel and Deputy Executive Director since 1987. Phil was a philosophy major at Purdue and received his J.D. from Florida State University. Most anyone who has been in government any length of time has partaken of the invaluable services Phil and his staff of four lawyers provide in guiding us and our clients through the often-confusing maze of ethics laws. Phil can be reached at P. O. Drawer 15709, Tallahassee, FL 32317-7709, 850-488-7864, claypool.phil@leg.state.fl.us.

The role of the Commission on Ethics is to render opinions and give advice on how to comply with the ethics laws, educate public officers, employees, and others about the

requirements of the ethics laws; to render opinions and give advice on how to comply with ethics laws; and to promulgate, receive, and maintain financial disclosure reports. This legislative agency is made subject to Chapter 120 and its rules are found in Chapter 34 of the Florida Administrative Code. The Ethics Commission's rules apply to virtually all of us in government and it's a good idea to download the Code of Ethics for Public Officers and Employees (Part III, Chapter 112, Fla. Stat.), as well as Rule Chapter 34 for a handy desk reference. The Commission's website www.ethics.state.fl.us contains much valuable information and provides a user-friendly research capability for ethics opinions and cases.

Cases involving violations of the Code of Ethics are handled pursuant to Chapter 120, as are the smattering of other administrative matters committed to the agency. (See, e.g., PSC (ss. 350.031-350.043); state agencies' use of motor vehicles and aircraft (ss. 287.17-187.175, Fla. Stat); and agencies' use of public funds to lobby the legislative or executive branches (s. 11.062(2), Fla. Stat.)). The Commission is, of course, involved in the court system when it comes to challenges to the constitutionality of ethics laws and appeals of final orders.

Phil says the best part of serving as General Counsel for the Commission is to have the trust of the Commission members—9 citizens with varied backgrounds from all around the state who have volunteered to make the hard decisions. His best tip is to contact the Commission “early and often.” Commission attorneys have over 780 years of combined experience with the ethics laws and, Phil adds, “we would much rather advise public officers and employees how to comply with the law than investigate them ... although that can be fun, too!”