# CHAPTER 6B. PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES; ETHICS; CONFLICTS OF INTEREST; FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.

## ARTICLE 1. SHORT TITLE; LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS, PURPOSES AND INTENT; CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF CHAPTER; SEVERABILITY.

### §6B-1-1. Short title.

This chapter shall be known as the "West Virginia Governmental Ethics Act."

### §6B-1-2. Legislative findings, purpose, declaration and intent.

(a) The Legislature hereby finds that the holding of a public office or public employment is a public trust. Independence and impartiality of public officials and public employees are essential for the maintenance of the confidence of our citizens in the operation of a democratic government. The decisions and actions of public officials and public employees must be made free from undue influence, favoritism or threat, at every level of government. Public officials and public employees who exercise the powers of their office or employment for personal gain beyond the lawful emoluments of their position or who seek to benefit narrow economic or political interests at the expense of the public at large undermine public confidence in the integrity of a democratic government.

(b) It is the purpose of this chapter to maintain confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the governmental process in the state of West Virginia and its political subdivisions and to aid public officials and public employees in the exercise of their official duties and employment; to define and establish minimum ethical standards for elected and appointed public officials and public employees; to eliminate actual conflicts of interest; to provide a means to define ethical standards; to provide a means of investigating and resolving ethical violations; and to provide administrative and criminal penalties for specific ethical violations herein found to be unlawful.

(c) The Legislature finds that the state government and its many public bodies and local governments have many part-time public officials and public employees serving in elected and appointed capacities; and that certain conflicts of interest are inherent in part-time service and do not, in every instance, disqualify a public official or public employee from the responsibility of voting or deciding a matter; however, when such conflict becomes personal to a particular public official or public employee, such person should seek to be excused from voting, recused from deciding, or otherwise relieved from the obligation of acting as a public representative charged with deciding or acting on a matter.

(d) It is declared that high moral and ethical standards among public officials and public employees are essential to the conduct of free government; that the Legislature believes that a code of ethics for the guidance of public officials and public employees will help them avoid conflicts between their personal interests and their public responsibilities, will improve standards of public service and will promote and strengthen the faith and confidence of the people of this state in their public officials and public employees.

(e) It is the intent of the Legislature that in its operations the West Virginia ethics commission created under this chapter shall protect to the fullest extent possible the rights of individuals affected.

### §6B-1-3. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context in which used clearly requires otherwise:

(a) "Review Board" means the Probable Cause Review Board created by section two-a, article two of this chapter.

(b) "Business" means any entity through which business for-profit is conducted including a corporation, partnership, proprietorship, franchise, association, organization or self-employed individual.

(c) "Compensation" means money, thing of value or financial benefit. The term "compensation" does not include reimbursement for actual reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of one's official duties.

(d) "Employee" means any person in the service of another under any contract of hire, whether express or implied, oral or written, where the employer or an agent of the employer or a public official has the right or power to control and direct such person in the material details of how work is to be performed and who is not responsible for the making of policy nor for recommending official action.

(e) "Ethics Commission" or "commission" means the West Virginia Ethics Commission.

(f) "Immediate family", with respect to an individual, means a spouse with whom the individual is living as husband and wife and any dependent child or children, dependent grandchild or grandchildren and dependent parent or parents.

(g) "Ministerial functions" means actions or functions performed by an individual under a given state of facts in a prescribed manner in accordance with a mandate of legal authority, without regard to, or without the exercise of, the individual's own judgment as to the propriety of the action being taken.

(h) "Person" means an individual, corporation, business entity, labor union, association, firm, partnership, limited partnership, committee, club or other organization or group of persons, irrespective of the denomination given such organization or group.

(i) "Political contribution" means and has the same definition as is given that term under the provisions of article eight, chapter three of this code.

(j) "Public employee" means any full-time or part-time employee of any state, county or municipal governmental body or any political subdivision thereof, including county school boards.

(k) "Public official" means any person who is elected or appointed to any state, county or municipal office or position and who is responsible for the making of policy or takes official action which is either ministerial or nonministerial, or both, with respect to: (1) Contracting for, or procurement of, goods or services; (2) administering or monitoring grants or subsidies; (3) planning or zoning; (4) inspecting, licensing, regulating or auditing any person; or (5) any other activity where the official action has an economic impact of greater than a de minimis nature on the interest or interests of any person.

(l) "Relative" means spouse, mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, son-in-law or daughter-in-law.

(m) "Respondent" means a person who is the subject of an investigation by the commission or against whom a complaint has been filed with the commission.

(n) "Thing of value", "other thing of value" or "anything of value" means and includes: (1) Money, bank bills or notes, United States treasury notes and other bills, bonds or notes issued by lawful authority and intended to pass and circulate as money; (2) goods and chattels; (3) promissory notes, bills of exchange, orders, drafts, warrants, checks, bonds given for the payment of money or the forbearance of money due or owing; (4) receipts given for the payment of money or other property; (5) any right or chose in action; (6) chattels real or personal or things which savor of realty and are, at the time taken, a part of a freehold, whether they are of the substance or produce thereof or affixed thereto, although there may be no interval between the severing and the taking away thereof; (7) any interest in realty, including, but not limited to, fee simple estates, life estates, estates for a term or period of time, joint tenancies, cotenancies, tenancies in common, partial interests, present or future interests, contingent or vested interests, beneficial interests, leasehold interests or any other interest or interests in realty of whatsoever nature; (8) any promise of employment, present or future; (9) donation or gift; (10) rendering of services or the payment thereof; (11) any advance or pledge; (12) a promise of present or future interest in any business or contract or other agreement; or (13) every other thing or item, whether tangible or intangible, having economic worth. "Thing of value", "other thing of value" or "anything of value" shall not include anything which is de minimis in nature nor a lawful political contribution reported as required by law.

**§6B-1-4. Remedies and penalties in addition to other applicable remedies and penalties.**

The provisions of this chapter shall be in addition to any other applicable provisions of this code and except for the immunity provided by section three, article two of this chapter shall not be deemed to be in derogation of or as a substitution for any other provisions of this code, including, but not limited to, article five-a, chapter sixty-one of this code and except for the immunity provided by section three, article two of this chapter the remedies and penalties provided in this chapter shall be in addition to any other remedies or penalties which may be applicable to any circumstances relevant to both.

**§6B-1-5. Severability.**

The provisions of subsection (cc), section ten, article two, chapter two of this code shall apply to the provisions of this chapter to the same extent as if the same were set forth in extenso herein.

**§6B-1-6. Deposit of funds.**

All moneys collected pursuant to this chapter except fines imposed pursuant to paragraph (D), subdivision (1), subsection (r), section four, article two of this chapter shall be deposited in the General Revenue Fund in the State Treasury pursuant to the provisions of section two, article two, chapter twelve of this code.

*Note: WV Code updated with legislation passed through the 2015 Regular Session*
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# CHAPTER 6B. PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES; ETHICS; CONFLICTS OF INTEREST; FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.

## ARTICLE 2. WEST VIRGINIA ETHICS COMMISSION; POWERS AND DUTIES; DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL INTEREST BY PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES; APPEARANCES BEFORE PUBLIC AGENCIES; CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES.

### §6B-2-1. West Virginia Ethics Commission created; members; appointment, term of office and oath; compensation and reimbursement for expenses; meetings and quorum.

(a) The West Virginia Ethics Commission is continued. The members of the commission shall be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate.

(b) No person may be appointed to the commission or continue to serve as a member of the commission who:

(1) Holds elected or appointed office under the government of the United States, the State of West Virginia or any of its political subdivisions;

(2) Is a candidate for any political office;

(3) Is otherwise subject to the provisions of this chapter other than by reason of his or her appointment to or service on the commission; or

(4) Holds any political party office or participates in a campaign relating to a referendum or other ballot issue: *Provided*, That a member may contribute to a political campaign.

(c) Commencing July 1, 2014, the Ethics Commission shall consist of the following nine members, appointed with staggered terms:

(1) One member who served as a member of the West Virginia Legislature;

(2) One member who served as an elected or appointed county official;

(3) One member who served as an elected or appointed municipal official;

(4) One member who served as an elected county school board member;

(5) One member from a rural area; and

(6) Four citizen members.

(d) Any commission member in office on June 30, 2014, who meets one of the categories for membership set out in subsection (c) of this section, may be reappointed. No more than five members of the commission shall be of the same political party and no more than four members shall be from the same congressional district.

(e) After the initial staggered terms, the term of office for a commission member is five years. No member shall serve more than two consecutive full or partial terms. No person may be reappointed to the commission until at least two years have elapsed after the completion of the second consecutive term. A member may continue to serve until a successor has been appointed and qualified.

(f) All appointments shall be made by the Governor in a timely manner so as not to create a vacancy for longer than sixty days.

(g) Each member must be a resident of this state during the appointment term.

(h) Five members of the commission constitutes a quorum.

(i) Each member of the commission shall take and subscribe to the oath or affirmation required pursuant to section five, article IV of the Constitution of West Virginia.

(j) A member may be removed by the Governor for substantial neglect of duty, gross misconduct in office or a violation of this chapter, after written notice and opportunity for reply.

(k) The commission, as appointed on July 1, 2014, shall meet before August 1, 2014, at a time and place to be determined by the Governor, who shall designate a member to preside at that meeting until a chairperson is elected. At the first meeting, the commission shall elect a chairperson and any other officers as are necessary. The commission shall within ninety days after the first meeting adopt rules for its procedures. The commission may use the rules in place on July 1, 2014, until those rules are amended or revoked.

(l) Members of the commission shall receive the same compensation and expense reimbursement as is paid to members of the Legislature for their interim duties as recommended by the Citizens Legislative Compensation Commission and authorized by law for each day or portion thereof engaged in the discharge of official duties: *Provided,* That to be eligible for compensation and expense reimbursement, the member must participate in a meeting or adjudicatory session: *Provided, however,* That the member is not eligible for expense reimbursement if he or she does not attend a meeting or adjudicatory session in person.

(m) The commission shall appoint an executive director to assist the commission in carrying out its functions in accordance with commission rules and with applicable law. The executive director shall be paid a salary fixed by the commission or as otherwise provided by law. The commission shall appoint and discharge counsel and employees and shall fix the compensation of employees and prescribe their duties. Counsel to the commission shall advise the commission on all legal matters and on the instruction of the commission may commence appropriate civil actions: *Provided,* That no counsel shall both advise the commission and act in a representative capacity in any proceeding.

(n) The commission may delegate authority to the chairperson or the executive director to act in the name of the commission between meetings of the commission, except that the commission shall not delegate the power to hold hearings and determine violations to the chairperson or the executive director.

(o) The principal office of the commission shall be in the seat of government, but it or its designated subcommittees may meet and exercise its power at any other place in the state. Meetings of the commission shall be public unless:

(1) They are required to be private by the provisions of this chapter relating to confidentiality; or

(2) They involve discussions of commission personnel, planned or ongoing litigation, and planned or ongoing investigations.

(p) Meetings of the commission shall be upon the call of the chairperson and may be conducted by telephonic or other electronic conferencing means: *Provided,* That telephone or other electronic conferencing, and voting are not permitted when the commission is acting as a hearing board under this article, or when the Probable Cause Review Board meets to receive an oral response as authorized by this article. Members shall be given notice of meetings held by telephone or other electronic conferencing in the same manner as meetings at which the members are required to attend in person. Telephone or other electronic conferences shall be electronically recorded and the recordings shall be retained by the commission in accordance with its record retention policy.

**§6B-2-2. Same - General powers and duties.**

(a) The Commission shall propose rules for promulgation in accordance with the provisions of chapter twenty-nine-a of this code, to carry out the purposes of this article.

(b) The Commission may initiate or receive complaints and make investigations, as provided in section four of this article, and upon complaint by an individual of an alleged violation of this article by a public official or public employee, refer the complaint to the Review Board as provided in section two-a of this article. Any person charged with a violation of this chapter is entitled to the administrative hearing process contained in section four of this article.

(c) The Commission may subpoena witnesses, compel their attendance and testimony, administer oaths and affirmations, take evidence and require by subpoena the production of books, papers, records or other evidence needed for the performance of the Commission's duties or exercise of its powers, including its duties and powers of investigation.

(d) The Commission shall, in addition to its other duties:

(1) Prescribe forms for reports, statements, notices and other documents required by law;

(2) Prepare and publish manuals and guides explaining the duties of individuals covered by this law; and giving instructions and public information materials to facilitate compliance with, and enforcement of, this act; and

(3) Provide assistance to agencies, officials and employees in administering the provisions of this act.

(e) The Commission may:

(1) Prepare reports and studies to advance the purpose of the law;

(2) Contract for any services which cannot satisfactorily be performed by its employees;

(3) Require the Attorney General to provide legal advice without charge to the Commission;

(4) Employ additional legal counsel;

(5) Request appropriate agencies of state to provide any professional assistance the Commission may require in the discharge of its duties: *Provided,* That the Commission shall reimburse any agency other than the Attorney General the cost of providing assistance; and

(6) Share otherwise confidential documents, materials or information with appropriate agencies of state government, provided that the recipient agrees to maintain the confidentiality and privileged status of the document, material or information.

**§6B-2-2a. Probable Cause Review Board.**

(a) There is hereby established a Probable Cause Review Board that shall conduct hearings to determine whether there is probable cause to believe that a violation of the West Virginia Governmental Ethics Act has occurred and, if so, to refer that investigation to the Ethics Commission. The Review Board is an autonomous board, not under the direction or control of the Ethics Commission. The Review Board will review complaints received or initiated by the Ethics Commission to make a threshold determination of whether probable cause exists to believe that a violation of the West Virginia Governmental Ethics Act has occurred.

(b) The Governor, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint three persons as members of the Review Board, each of whom shall be a resident and citizen of the state. Each member of the Review Board shall hold office until his or her successor has been appointed and qualified. At least one member of the board must be an attorney licensed by the State of West Virginia and no more than two members can belong to the same political party. The members of the Review Board shall be appointed for overlapping terms of two years, except that the original appointments shall be for terms of one, two and three years, respectively. Any member whose term expires may be reappointed by the Governor. In the event a Review Board member is unable to complete his or her term, the Governor shall appoint a person with similar qualification to complete that term. Each Review Board member shall receive the same compensation and expense reimbursement as provided to Ethics Commission members pursuant to section one of this article. These and all other costs incurred by the Review Board shall be paid from the budget of the Ethics Commission.

(c) No person may be appointed to the Review Board or continue to serve as a member of the Review Board who holds elected or appointed office under the government of the United States, the State of West Virginia or any of its political subdivisions, or who is a candidate for any of such offices, or who is a registered lobbyist, or who is otherwise subject to the provisions of this chapter other than by reason of his or her appointment to or service on the Review Board. A Review Board member may contribute to a political campaign, but no member shall hold any political party office or participate in a campaign relating to a referendum or other ballot issue.

(d) Members of the Review Board may recuse themselves from a particular case upon their own motion, with the approval of the Review Board, and shall recuse themselves, for good cause shown, upon motion of a party. The remaining members of the Review Board may, by majority vote, select a temporary member to replace a recused member: *Provided,* That the temporary member selected to replace a recused member shall be a person who meets all requirements for appointment

provided by subsection (c), section two-a of this article, and whose political affiliation is the same as the recused member.

(e) The Ethics Commission shall propose, for approval by the Review Board, any procedural and interpretative rules governing the operation of the Review Board. The commission shall propose these rules pursuant to article three, chapter twenty-nine-a of the code.

(f) The Ethics Commission shall provide staffing and a location for the Review Board to conduct hearings. The Ethics Commission is authorized to employ and assign the necessary professional and clerical staff to assist the Review Board in the performance of its duties and commission staff shall, as the commission deems appropriate, also serve as staff to the Review Board. All investigations and proceedings of the Review Board are deemed confidential as provided in section four of this article and members of the Review Board are bound to the same confidentiality requirements applicable to the Ethics Commission pursuant to this article.

(g) The Review Board may subpoena witnesses, compel their attendance and testimony, administer oaths and affirmations, take evidence and require by subpoena the production of books, papers, records or other evidence needed for the performance of the Review Board's duties.

(h) Upon decision by the Review Board that probable cause exists to believe that a violation of this chapter has occurred, commission staff shall send notice to the commission members of the Review Board's finding. After an ethics complaint has been submitted to the Review Board in accordance with section four of this article, the commission may take no further action until it receives the Review Board's probable cause finding.

**§6B-2-3. Advisory opinions; enforcement; applicability; legislative review; rule making.**

(a) A person subject to the provisions of this chapter may make application in writing to the ethics commission for an advisory opinion on whether an action or proposed action violates the provisions of this chapter or the provisions of section fifteen, article ten, chapter sixty-one of this code and would thereby expose the person to sanctions by the commission or criminal prosecution. The commission shall respond within thirty days from the receipt of the request by issuing an advisory opinion on the matter raised in the request. All advisory opinions shall be published and indexed in the code of state rules by the secretary of state: *Provided*, That before an advisory opinion is made public, any material which may identify the person who is the subject of the opinion shall, to the fullest extent possible, be deleted and the identity of the person shall not be revealed. A person subject to the provisions of this chapter may rely upon the published guidelines or an advisory opinion of the commission, and any person acting in good faith reliance on any such guideline or opinion shall be immune from the sanctions of this chapter and the sanctions of section fifteen, article ten, chapter sixty-one of this code, and shall have an absolute defense to any criminal prosecution for actions taken in good faith reliance upon any such opinion or guideline in regard to the sanctions of this chapter and the sanctions of section fifteen, article ten, chapter sixty-one of this code.

(b) By the first day of the third month of the calendar year, the ethics commission shall annually furnish copies of all advisory opinions issued during the preceding calendar year to the archives and history section of the division of culture and history, the office of the Clerk of the West Virginia House of Delegates, the office of the Clerk of the West Virginia Senate and the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals Law Library. Accompanying the initial delivery of the previous calendar year's advisory opinions after the enactment of this subsection, the commission shall supply each of these offices with copies of all advisory opinions issued subsequent to the creation of the commission.

**§6B-2-3a. Complaints.**

(a) The commission may commence an investigation, pursuant to section four of this article, on the filing of a complaint duly verified by oath or affirmation, by any person.

(b) The commission may order the executive director to prepare a complaint, upon a majority affirmative vote of its members, if it receives or discovers credible information which, if true, would merit an inquiry into whether a violation of this article has occurred.

(c) (1) No complaint may be accepted or initiated by the commission against a public official or public employee during the sixty days before a primary or general election at which the public official or public employees is a candidate for elective office.

(2) If a complaint is pending against a public official or public employee who is also a candidate for public office, then the

commission shall stay the processing of the complaint for the sixty day time period preceding the primary election or general election, or both, unless the candidate waives the stay in writing. If the commission receives a written waiver of the stay at least sixty days prior to the election, and if the Review Board has not yet ruled whether probable cause exists to believe there has been a violation of the Ethics Act, then the Review Board will process the complaint and make a probable cause determination at least thirty days prior to the election: *Provided,* That, the stay provisions of this subdivision do not apply to complaints which have already been adjudicated by the commission and are pending on appeal.

(3) For purposes of this subsection, any provisions of this chapter setting time periods for initiating a complaint or for performing any other action are considered tolled until after the election at which the public official or public employee candidate stands for elective office.

**§6B-2-4. Processing complaints; dismissals; hearings; disposition; judicial review.**

(a) Upon the filing of a complaint, the Executive Director of the commission or his or her designee shall, within three working days, acknowledge the receipt of the complaint by first-class mail unless the complaint was initiated by the commission or the complainant or his or her representative personally filed the complaint with the commission and was given a receipt or other acknowledgment evidencing the filing of the complaint. No political party or officer, employee or agent of a political party acting in his or her official capacity may file a complaint for a violation of this chapter with the commission. Nothing in this section prohibits a private citizen, acting in that capacity, from filing a verified complaint with the commission under this section. Within fourteen days after the receipt of a complaint, the Executive Director shall refer the complaint to the Review Board created pursuant to section two-a of this article.

(b) Upon the referral of a complaint by the Executive Director pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Review Board shall determine whether the allegations of the complaint, if taken as true, would constitute a violation of law upon which the commission could properly act under the provisions of this chapter. If the complaint is determined by a majority vote of the Review Board to be insufficient in this regard, the Review Board shall dismiss the complaint.

(c) Upon a finding by the Review Board that the complaint is sufficient, the Executive Director shall give notice of a pending investigation to the complainant, if any, and to the respondent. The notice of investigation shall be mailed to the parties and, in the case of the respondent, shall be mailed as certified mail, return receipt requested, marked "Addressee only, personal and confidential". The notice shall describe the conduct of the respondent which is alleged to violate the law and a copy of the complaint shall be appended to the notice mailed to the respondent. Each notice of investigation shall inform the respondent that the purpose of the investigation is to determine whether probable cause exists to believe that a violation of law has occurred which may subject the respondent to administrative sanctions by the commission, criminal prosecution by the state, or civil liability. The notice shall further inform the respondent that he or she has a right to appear before the Review Board and that he or she may respond in writing to the commission within thirty days after the receipt of the notice, but that no fact or allegation shall be taken as admitted by a failure or refusal to timely respond.

(d) Within the 45-day period following the mailing of a notice of investigation, the Review Board shall proceed to consider: (1) The allegations raised in the complaint; (2) any timely received written response of the respondent; and (3) any other competent evidence gathered by or submitted to the commission which has a proper bearing on the issue of probable cause. A respondent may appear before the Review Board and make an oral response to the complaint. The commission shall promulgate rules prescribing the manner in which a respondent may present his or her oral response. The commission may ask a respondent to disclose specific amounts received from a source and request other detailed information not otherwise required to be set forth in a statement or report filed under the provisions of this chapter if the information sought is considered to be probative as to the issues raised by a complaint or an investigation initiated by the commission. Any information thus received shall be confidential except as provided by subsection (e) of this section. If a person asked to provide information fails or refuses to furnish the information to the commission, the commission may exercise its subpoena power as provided in this chapter and any subpoena issued by the commission shall have the same force and effect as a subpoena issued by a circuit court of this state. Enforcement of any subpoena may be had upon application to a circuit court of the county in which the Review Board is conducting an investigation through the issuance of a rule or an attachment against the respondent as in cases of contempt.

(e) All investigations, complaints, reports, records, proceedings and other information received by the commission and related to complaints made to the commission or investigations conducted by the commission pursuant to this section, including the identity of the complainant or respondent, are confidential and may not be knowingly and improperly disclosed

by any current or former member or employee of the commission or the Review Board except as follows:

(A) Once there has been a finding that probable cause exists to believe that a respondent has violated the provisions of this chapter and the respondent has been served by the commission with a copy of the Review Board's order and the statement of charges prepared pursuant to the provisions of subsection (g) of this section, the complaint and all reports, records, nonprivileged and nondeliberative material introduced at any probable cause hearing held pursuant to the complaint cease to be confidential.

(B) After a finding of probable cause, any subsequent hearing held in the matter for the purpose of receiving evidence or the arguments of the parties or their representatives shall be open to the public and all reports, records and nondeliberative materials introduced into evidence at the hearing, as well as the commission's orders, are not confidential.

(C) The commission may release any information relating to an investigation at any time if the release has been agreed to in writing by the respondent.

(D) The complaint and the identity of the complainant shall be disclosed to a person named as respondent immediately upon the respondent's request.

(E) Where the commission is otherwise required by the provisions of this chapter to disclose information or to proceed in such a manner that disclosure is necessary and required to fulfill those requirements.

(2) If, in a specific case, the commission finds that there is a reasonable likelihood that the dissemination of information or opinion in connection with a pending or imminent proceeding will interfere with a fair hearing or otherwise prejudice the due administration of justice, the commission shall order that all or a portion of the information communicated to the commission to cause an investigation and all allegations of ethical misconduct or criminal acts contained in a complaint shall be confidential and the person providing the information or filing a complaint shall be bound to confidentiality until further order of the commission.

(f) If the members of the Review Board fail to find probable cause, the proceedings shall be dismissed by the commission in an order signed by the members of the Review Board. Copies of the order of dismissal shall be sent to the complainant and served upon the respondent forthwith. If the Review Board decides by a unanimous vote that there is probable cause to believe that a violation under this chapter has occurred, the members of the Review Board shall sign an order directing the commission staff to prepare a statement of charges and assign the matter for hearing to the commission or a hearing examiner as the commission may subsequently direct. The commission shall then schedule a hearing, to be held within ninety days after the date of the order, to determine the truth or falsity of the charges. The commission's review of the evidence presented shall be de novo. For the purpose of this section, service of process upon the respondent is obtained at the time the respondent or the respondent's agent physically receives the process, regardless of whether the service of process is in person or by certified mail.

(g) At least eighty days prior to the date of the hearing, the commission shall serve the respondent by certified mail, return receipt requested, with the statement of charges and a notice of hearing setting forth the date, time and place for the hearing. The scheduled hearing may be continued only upon a showing of good cause by the respondent or under other circumstances as the commission, by legislative rule, directs.

(h) The commission may sit as a hearing board to adjudicate the case or may permit an assigned hearing examiner employed by the commission to preside at the taking of evidence. The commission shall, by legislative rule, establish the general qualifications for hearing examiners. The legislative rule shall also contain provisions which ensure that the functions of a hearing examiner will be conducted in an impartial manner and describe the circumstances and procedures for disqualification of hearing examiners.

(i) A member of the commission or a hearing examiner presiding at a hearing may:

(1) Administer oaths and affirmations, compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents, examine witnesses and parties and otherwise take testimony and establish a record;

(2) Rule on offers of proof and receive relevant evidence;

(3) Take depositions or have depositions taken when the ends of justice will be served;

(4) Regulate the course of the hearing;

(5) Hold conferences for the settlement or simplification of issues by consent of the parties;

(6) Dispose of procedural requests or similar matters;

(7) Accept stipulated agreements;

(8) Take other action authorized by the Ethics Commission consistent with the provisions of this chapter.

(j) With respect to allegations of a violation under this chapter, the complainant has the burden of proof. The West Virginia Rules of Evidence governing proceedings in the courts of this state shall be given like effect in hearings held before the commission or a hearing examiner. The commission shall, by rule, regulate the conduct of hearings so as to provide full procedural due process to a respondent. Hearings before a hearing examiner shall be recorded electronically. When requested by either of the parties, the presiding officer shall order a transcript, verified by oath or affirmation, of each hearing held and so recorded. In the discretion of the commission, a record of the proceedings may be made by a certified court reporter. Unless otherwise ordered by the commission, the cost of preparing a transcript shall be paid by the party requesting the transcript. Upon a showing of indigency, the commission may provide a transcript without charge. Within fifteen days following the hearing, either party may submit to the hearing examiner that party's proposed findings of fact. The hearing examiner shall thereafter prepare his or her own proposed findings of fact and make copies of the findings available to the parties. The hearing examiner shall then submit the entire record to the commission for final decision.

(k) The recording of the hearing or the transcript of testimony, as the case may be, and the exhibits, together with all papers and requests filed in the proceeding, and the proposed findings of fact of the hearing examiner and the parties, constitute the exclusive record for decision by the commission, unless by leave of the commission a party is permitted to submit additional documentary evidence or take and file depositions or otherwise exercise discovery.

(l) The commission shall set a time and place for the hearing of arguments by the complainant and respondent, or their respective representatives, and shall notify the parties thereof. Briefs may be filed by the parties in accordance with procedural rules promulgated by the commission. The commission shall issue a final decision in writing within forty-five days of the receipt of the entire record of a hearing held before a hearing examiner or, in the case of an evidentiary hearing held by the commission acting as a hearing board in lieu of a hearing examiner, within twenty-one days following the close of the evidence.

(m) A decision on the truth or falsity of the charges against the respondent and a decision to impose sanctions must be approved by at least seven members of the commission.

(n) Members of the commission shall recuse themselves from a particular case upon their own motion with the approval of the commission or for good cause shown upon motion of a party. The remaining members of the commission may, by majority vote, select a temporary member to replace a recused member: *Provided,* That the temporary member selected to replace a recused member shall be a person of the same status or category, provided by subsection (b), section one of this article, as the recused member.

(o) Except for statements made in the course of official duties to explain commission procedures, no member or employee or former member or employee of the commission may make any public or nonpublic comment about any proceeding previously or currently before the commission. Any member or employee or former member or employee of the commission who violates this subsection is subject to the penalties contained in subsection (e), section ten of this article. In addition, violation of this subsection by a current member or employee of the commission is grounds for immediate removal from office or termination of employment.

(p) A complainant may be assisted by a member of the commission staff assigned by the commission after a determination of probable cause.

(q) No employee of the commission assigned to prosecute a complaint may participate in the commission deliberations or communicate with commission members or the public concerning the merits of a complaint.

(r) (1) If the commission finds by evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that the facts alleged in the complaint are true and constitute a material violation of this article, it may impose one or more of the following sanctions:

(A) Public reprimand;

(B) Cease and desist orders;

(C) Orders of restitution for money, things of value, or services taken or received in violation of this chapter;

(D) Fines not to exceed five thousand dollars per violation; or

(E) Reimbursement to the commission for the actual costs of investigating and prosecuting a violation. Any reimbursement ordered by the commission for its costs under this paragraph shall be collected by the commission and deposited into the special revenue account created pursuant to section six, article one of this chapter.

(2) In addition to imposing the above-specified sanctions, the commission may recommend to the appropriate governmental body that a respondent be terminated from employment or removed from office.

(3) The commission may institute civil proceedings in the circuit court of the county in which a violation occurred for the enforcement of sanctions.

(s) At any stage of the proceedings under this section, the commission may enter into a conciliation agreement with a respondent if the agreement is deemed by a majority of the members of the commission to be in the best interest of the state and the respondent. Any conciliation agreement must be disclosed to the public: *Provided,* That negotiations leading to a conciliation agreement, as well as information obtained by the commission during the negotiations, shall remain confidential except as may be otherwise set forth in the agreement.

(t) Decisions of the commission involving the issuance of sanctions may be appealed to the circuit court of Kanawha County, only by the respondent and only upon the grounds set forth in section four, article five, chapter twenty- nine-a of this code.

(u) (1) Any person who in good faith files a verified complaint or any person, official or agency who gives credible information resulting in a formal complaint filed by commission staff is immune from any civil liability that otherwise might result by reason of such actions.

(2) If the commission determines, by clear and convincing evidence, that a person filed a complaint or provided information which resulted in an investigation knowing that the material statements in the complaint or the investigation request or the information provided were not true; filed an unsubstantiated complaint or request for an investigation in reckless disregard of the truth or falsity of the statements contained therein; or filed one or more unsubstantiated complaints which constituted abuse of process, the commission shall:

(A) Order the complainant or informant to reimburse the respondent for his or her reasonable costs;

(B) Order the complainant or informant to reimburse the respondent for his or her reasonable attorney fees; and

(C) Order the complainant or informant to reimburse the commission for the actual costs of its investigation. In addition, the commission may decline to process any further complaints brought by the complainant, the initiator of the investigation or the informant.

(3) The sanctions authorized in this subsection are not exclusive and do not preclude any other remedies or rights of action the respondent may have against the complainant or informant under the law.

(v) (1) If at any stage in the proceedings under this section it appears to a Review Board, a hearing examiner or the commission that there is credible information or evidence that the respondent may have committed a criminal violation, the matter shall be referred to the full commission for its consideration. If, by a vote of two-thirds of the members of the full commission, it is determined that probable cause exists to believe a criminal violation has occurred, the commission shall refer the matter to the appropriate county prosecuting attorney having jurisdiction for a criminal investigation and possible prosecution. Deliberations of the commission with regard to referring a matter for criminal investigation by a prosecuting

attorney shall be private and confidential. Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, once a referral for criminal investigation is made under the provisions of this subsection, the ethics proceedings shall be held in abeyance until action on the referred matter is concluded. If the referral of the matter to the prosecuting attorney results in a criminal conviction of the respondent, the commission may resume its investigation or prosecution of the ethics violation, but may not impose a fine as a sanction if a violation is found to have occurred.

(2) If fewer than two-thirds of the full commission determine that a criminal violation has occurred, the commission shall remand the matter to the Review Board, the hearing examiner or the commission itself as a hearing board, as the case may be, for further proceedings under this article.

(w) The provisions of this section shall apply to violations of this chapter occurring after the thirtieth day of September, one thousand nine hundred eighty-nine, and within one year before the filing of a complaint: *Provided,* That the applicable statute of limitations for violations which occur on or after the first day of July, two thousand five, is two years after the date on which the alleged violation occurred.

**§6B-2-5. Ethical standards for elected and appointed officials and public employees.**

(a) *Persons subject to section.* -- The provisions of this section apply to all elected and appointed public officials and public employees, whether full or part time, in state, county, municipal governments and their respective boards, agencies, departments and commissions and in any other regional or local governmental agency, including county school boards.

(b) *Use of public office for private gain.* -- (1) A public official or public employee may not knowingly and intentionally use his or her office or the prestige of his or her office for his or her own private gain or that of another person. Incidental use of equipment or resources available to a public official or public employee by virtue of his or her position for personal or business purposes resulting in de minimis private gain does not constitute use of public office for private gain under this subsection. The performance of usual and customary duties associated with the office or position or the advancement of public policy goals or constituent services, without compensation, does not constitute the use of prestige of office for private gain.

(2) Notwithstanding the general prohibition against use of office for private gain, public officials and public employees may use bonus points acquired through participation in frequent traveler programs while traveling on official government business: *Provided,* That the official's or employee's participation in such program, or acquisition of such points, does not result in additional costs to the government.

(3) The Legislature, in enacting this subsection, recognizes that there may be certain public officials or public employees who bring to their respective offices or employment their own unique personal prestige which is based upon their intelligence, education, experience, skills and abilities, or other personal gifts or traits. In many cases, these persons bring a personal prestige to their office or employment which inures to the benefit of the state and its citizens. Those persons may, in fact, be sought by the state to serve in their office or employment because, through their unusual gifts or traits, they bring stature and recognition to their office or employment and to the state itself. While the office or employment held or to be held by those persons may have its own inherent prestige, it would be unfair to those individuals and against the best interests of the citizens of this state to deny those persons the right to hold public office or to be publicly employed on the grounds that they would, in addition to the emoluments of their office or employment, be in a position to benefit financially from the personal prestige which otherwise inheres to them. Accordingly, the commission is directed, by legislative rule, to establish categories of public officials and public employees, identifying them generally by the office or employment held, and offering persons who fit within those categories the opportunity to apply for an exemption from the application of the provisions of this subsection. Exemptions may be granted by the commission, on a case-by-case basis, when it is shown that: (A) The public office held or the public employment engaged in is not such that it would ordinarily be available or offered to a substantial number of the citizens of this state; (B) the office held or the employment engaged in is such that it normally or specifically requires a person who possesses personal prestige; and (C) the person's employment contract or letter of appointment provides or anticipates that the person will gain financially from activities which are not a part of his or her office or employment.

(c) *Gifts.* -- (1) A public official or public employee may not solicit any gift unless the solicitation is for a charitable purpose with no resulting direct pecuniary benefit conferred upon the official or employee or his or her immediate family: *Provided,* That no public official or public employee may solicit for a charitable purpose any gift from any person who is also an official

or employee of the state and whose position is subordinate to the soliciting official or employee: *Provided, however,* That nothing herein shall prohibit a candidate for public office from soliciting a lawful political contribution. No official or employee may knowingly accept any gift, directly or indirectly, from a lobbyist or from any person whom the official or employee knows or has reason to know:

(A) Is doing or seeking to do business of any kind with his or her agency;

(B) Is engaged in activities which are regulated or controlled by his or her agency; or

(C) Has financial interests which may be substantially and materially affected, in a manner distinguishable from the public generally, by the performance or nonperformance of his or her official duties.

(2) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection, a person who is a public official or public employee may accept a gift described in this subdivision, and there shall be a presumption that the receipt of such gift does not impair the impartiality and independent judgment of the person. This presumption may be rebutted only by direct objective evidence that the gift did impair the impartiality and independent judgment of the person or that the person knew or had reason to know that the gift was offered with the intent to impair his or her impartiality and independent judgment. The provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection do not apply to:

(A) Meals and beverages;

(B) Ceremonial gifts or awards which have insignificant monetary value;

(C) Unsolicited gifts of nominal value or trivial items of informational value;

(D) Reasonable expenses for food, travel and lodging of the official or employee for a meeting at which the official or employee participates in a panel or has a speaking engagement;

(E) Gifts of tickets or free admission extended to a public official or public employee to attend charitable, cultural or political events, if the purpose of such gift or admission is a courtesy or ceremony customarily extended to the office;

(F) Gifts that are purely private and personal in nature; or

(G) Gifts from relatives by blood or marriage, or a member of the same household.

(3) The commission shall, through legislative rule promulgated pursuant to chapter twenty-nine-a of this code, establish guidelines for the acceptance of a reasonable honorarium by public officials and elected officials. The rule promulgated shall be consistent with this section. Any elected public official may accept an honorarium only when:

(A) That official is a part-time elected public official;

(B) The fee is not related to the official's public position or duties;

(C) The fee is for services provided by the public official that are related to the public official's regular, nonpublic trade, profession, occupation, hobby or avocation; and

(D) The honorarium is not provided in exchange for any promise or action on the part of the public official.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed so as to prohibit the giving of a lawful political contribution as defined by law.

(5) The Governor or his designee may, in the name of the State of West Virginia, accept and receive gifts from any public or private source. Any gift so obtained shall become the property of the state and shall, within thirty days of the receipt thereof, be registered with the commission and the Division of Culture and History.

(6) Upon prior approval of the Joint Committee on Government and Finance, any member of the Legislature may solicit donations for a regional or national legislative organization conference or other legislative organization function to be held in the state for the purpose of deferring costs to the state for hosting of the conference or function. Legislative organizations are bipartisan regional or national organizations in which the Joint Committee on Government and Finance authorizes

payment of dues or other membership fees for the Legislature's participation and which assist this and other state legislatures and their staff through any of the following:

(A) Advancing the effectiveness, independence and integrity of legislatures in the states of the United States;

(B) Fostering interstate cooperation and facilitating information exchange among state legislatures;

(C) Representing the states and their legislatures in the American federal system of government;

(D) Improving the operations and management of state legislatures and the effectiveness of legislators and legislative staff, and to encourage the practice of high standards of conduct by legislators and legislative staff;

(E) Promoting cooperation between state legislatures in the United States and legislatures in other countries.

The solicitations may only be made in writing. The legislative organization may act as fiscal agent for the conference and receive all donations. In the alternative, a bona fide banking institution may act as the fiscal agent. The official letterhead of the Legislature may not be used by the legislative member in conjunction with the fund raising or solicitation effort. The legislative organization for which solicitations are being made shall file with the Joint Committee on Government and Finance and with the Secretary of State for publication in the State Register as provided in article two of chapter twenty-nine-a of the code, copies of letters, brochures and other solicitation documents, along with a complete list of the names and last known addresses of all donors and the amount of donations received. Any solicitation by a legislative member shall contain the following disclaimer:

"This solicitation is endorsed by [name of member]. This endorsement does not imply support of the soliciting organization, nor of the sponsors who may respond to the solicitation. A copy of all solicitations are on file with the West Virginia Legislature's Joint Committee on Government and Finance, and with the Secretary of State and are available for public review."

(7) Upon written notice to the commission, any member of the Board of Public Works may solicit donations for a regional or national organization conference or other function related to the office of the member to be held in the state for the purpose of deferring costs to the state for hosting of the conference or function. The solicitations may only be made in writing. The organization may act as fiscal agent for the conference and receive all donations. In the alternative, a bona fide banking institution may act as the fiscal agent. The official letterhead of the office of the Board of Public Works member may not be used in conjunction with the fund raising or solicitation effort. The organization for which solicitations are being made shall file with the Joint Committee on Government and Finance, with the Secretary of State for publication in the State Register as provided in article two of chapter twenty-nine-a of the code and with the commission, copies of letters, brochures and other solicitation documents, along with a complete list of the names and last known addresses of all donors and the amount of donations received. Any solicitation by a member of the Board of Public Works shall contain the following disclaimer: "This solicitation is endorsed by (name of member of Board of Public Works.) This endorsement does not imply support of the soliciting organization, nor of the sponsors who may respond to the solicitation. Copies of all solicitations are on file with the West Virginia Legislature's Joint Committee on Government and Finance, with the West Virginia Secretary of State and with the West Virginia Ethics Commission and are available for public review." Any moneys in excess of those donations needed for the conference or function shall be deposited in the Capitol Dome and Capitol Improvement Fund established in section two, article four of chapter five-a of this code.

(d) *Interests in public contracts.* --

(1) In addition to the provisions of section fifteen, article ten, chapter sixty-one of this code, no elected or appointed public official or public employee or member of his or her immediate family or business with which he or she is associated may be a party to or have an interest in the profits or benefits of a contract which the official or employee may have direct authority to enter into, or over which he or she may have control: *Provided,* That nothing herein shall be construed to prevent or make unlawful the employment of any person with any governmental body: *Provided, however,* That nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit a member of the Legislature from entering into a contract with any governmental body, or prohibit a part-time appointed public official from entering into a contract which the part-time appointed public official may have direct authority to enter into or over which he or she may have control when the official has not participated in the review or evaluation thereof, has been recused from deciding or evaluating and has been excused from voting on the contract and

has fully disclosed the extent of his or her interest in the contract.

(2) In the absence of bribery or a purpose to defraud, an elected or appointed public official or public employee or a member of his or her immediate family or a business with which he or she is associated shall not be considered as having a prohibited financial interest in a public contract when such a person has a limited interest as an owner, shareholder or creditor of the business which is awarded a public contract. A limited interest for the purposes of this subsection is:

(A) An interest which does not exceed one thousand dollars in the profits or benefits of the public contract or contracts in a calendar year;

(B) An interest as a creditor of a public employee or official who exercises control over the contract, or a member of his or her immediate family, if the amount is less than five thousand dollars.

(3) If a public official or employee has an interest in the profits or benefits of a contract, then he or she may not make, participate in making, or in any way attempt to use his office or employment to influence a government decision affecting his or her financial or limited financial interest. Public officials shall also comply with the voting rules prescribed in subsection (j) of this section.

(4) Where the provisions of subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection would result in the loss of a quorum in a public body or agency, in excessive cost, undue hardship, or other substantial interference with the operation of a state, county, municipality, county school board or other governmental agency, the affected governmental body or agency may make written application to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection.

(e) *Confidential information.* -- No present or former public official or employee may knowingly and improperly disclose any confidential information acquired by him or her in the course of his or her official duties nor use such information to further his or her personal interests or the interests of another person.

(f) *Prohibited representation.* -- No present or former elected or appointed public official or public employee shall, during or after his or her public employment or service, represent a client or act in a representative capacity with or without compensation on behalf of any person in a contested case, rate-making proceeding, license or permit application, regulation filing or other particular matter involving a specific party or parties which arose during his or her period of public service or employment and in which he or she personally and substantially participated in a decision-making, advisory or staff support capacity, unless the appropriate government agency, after consultation, consents to such representation. A staff attorney, accountant or other professional employee who has represented a government agency in a particular matter shall not thereafter represent another client in the same or substantially related matter in which that client's interests are materially adverse to the interests of the government agency, without the consent of the government agency: *Provided,* That this prohibition on representation shall not apply when the client was not directly involved in the particular matter in which the professional employee represented the government agency, but was involved only as a member of a class. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to legislators who were in office and legislative staff who were employed at the time it originally became effective on the first day of July, one thousand nine hundred eighty-nine, and those who have since become legislators or legislative staff and those who shall serve hereafter as legislators or legislative staff.

(g) *Limitation on practice before a board, agency, commission or department.* -- Except as otherwise provided in section three, four or five, article two, chapter eight-a of this code: (1) No elected or appointed public official and no full-time staff attorney or accountant shall, during his or her public service or public employment or for a period of one year after the termination of his or her public service or public employment with a governmental entity authorized to hear contested cases or promulgate or propose rules, appear in a representative capacity before the governmental entity in which he or she serves or served or is or was employed in the following matters:

(A) A contested case involving an administrative sanction, action or refusal to act;

(B) To support or oppose a proposed rule;

(C) To support or contest the issuance or denial of a license or permit;

(D) A rate-making proceeding; and

(E) To influence the expenditure of public funds.

(2) As used in this subsection, "represent" includes any formal or informal appearance before, or any written or oral communication with, any public agency on behalf of any person: *Provided,* That nothing contained in this subsection shall prohibit, during any period, a former public official or employee from being retained by or employed to represent, assist or act in a representative capacity on behalf of the public agency by which he or she was employed or in which he or she served. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to prevent a former public official or employee from representing another state, county, municipal or other governmental entity before the governmental entity in which he or she served or was employed within one year after the termination of his or her employment or service in the entity.

(3) A present or former public official or employee may appear at any time in a representative capacity before the Legislature, a county commission, city or town council or county school board in relation to the consideration of a statute, budget, ordinance, rule, resolution or enactment.

(4) Members and former members of the Legislature and professional employees and former professional employees of the Legislature shall be permitted to appear in a representative capacity on behalf of clients before any governmental agency of the state or of county or municipal governments, including county school boards.

(5) An elected or appointed public official, full-time staff attorney or accountant who would be adversely affected by the provisions of this subsection may apply to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from the one year prohibition against appearing in a representative capacity, when the person's education and experience is such that the prohibition would, for all practical purposes, deprive the person of the ability to earn a livelihood in this state outside of the governmental agency. The Ethics Commission shall by legislative rule establish general guidelines or standards for granting an exemption or reducing the time period, but shall decide each application on a case-by-case basis.

(h) *Employment by regulated persons and vendors.* -- (1) No full-time official or full-time public employee may seek employment with, be employed by, or seek to purchase, sell or lease real or personal property to or from any person who:

(A) Had a matter on which he or she took, or a subordinate is known to have taken, regulatory action within the preceding twelve months; or

(B) Has a matter before the agency on which he or she is working or a subordinate is known by him or her to be working.

(C) Is a vendor to the agency where the official serves or public employee is employed and the official or public employee, or a subordinate of the official or public employee, exercises authority or control over a public contract with such vendor, including, but not limited to:

(i) Drafting bid specifications or requests for proposals;

(ii) Recommending selection of the vendor;

(iii) Conducting inspections or investigations;

(iv) Approving the method or manner of payment to the vendor;

(v) Providing legal or technical guidance on the formation, implementation or execution of the contract; or

(vi) Taking other nonministerial action which may affect the financial interests of the vendor.

(2) Within the meaning of this section, the term "employment" includes professional services and other services rendered by the public official or public employee, whether rendered as employee or as an independent contractor; "seek employment" includes responding to unsolicited offers of employment as well as any direct or indirect contact with a potential employer relating to the availability or conditions of employment in furtherance of obtaining employment; and "subordinate" includes only those agency personnel over whom the public official or public employee has supervisory responsibility.

(3) A full-time public official or full-time public employee who would be adversely affected by the provisions of this subsection may apply to the Ethics Commission for an exemption from the prohibition contained in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(A) The Ethics Commission shall by legislative rule establish general guidelines or standards for granting an exemption, but shall decide each application on a case-by-case basis;

(B) A person adversely affected by the restriction on the purchase of personal property may make such purchase after seeking and obtaining approval from the commission or in good faith reliance upon an official guideline promulgated by the commission, written advisory opinions issued by the commission, or a legislative rule.

(C) The commission may establish exceptions to the personal property purchase restrictions through the adoption of guidelines, advisory opinions or legislative rule.

(4) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not take personal regulatory action on a matter affecting a person by whom he or she is employed or with whom he or she is seeking employment or has an agreement concerning future employment.

(5) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not personally participate in a decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, rendering advice, investigation, inspection or other substantial exercise of nonministerial administrative discretion involving a vendor with whom he or she is seeking employment or has an agreement concerning future employment.

(6) A full-time public official or full-time public employee may not receive private compensation for providing information or services that he or she is required to provide in carrying out his or her public job responsibilities.

(i) *Members of the Legislature required to vote*. -- Members of the Legislature who have asked to be excused from voting or who have made inquiry as to whether they should be excused from voting on a particular matter and who are required by the presiding officer of the House of Delegates or Senate of West Virginia to vote under the rules of the particular house shall not be guilty of any violation of ethics under the provisions of this section for a vote so cast.

(j) *Limitations on Voting*.

(1) Public officials, excluding members of the Legislature who are governed by subsection (i) of this section, may not vote on a matter:

(A) In which they, an immediate family member, or a business with which they or an immediate family member is associated have a financial interest. Business with which they are associated means a business of which the person or an immediate family member is a director, officer, owner, employee, compensated agent, or holder of stock which constitutes five percent or more of the total outstanding stocks of any class.

(B) If a public official is employed by a financial institution and his or her primary responsibilities include consumer and commercial lending, the public official may not vote on a matter which directly affects the financial interests of a customer of the financial institution if the public official is directly involved in approving a loan request from the person or business appearing before the governmental body or if the public official has been directly involved in approving a loan for that person or business within the past 12 months: *Provided,* That this limitation only applies if the total amount of the loan or loans exceeds fifteen thousand dollars.

(C) A personnel matter involving the public official's spouse or relative;

(D) The appropriations of public moneys or the awarding of a contract to a nonprofit corporation if the public official or an immediate family member is employed by the nonprofit.

(II) A public official may vote:

(A) If the public official, his or her spouse, immediate family members or relatives or business with which they are associated are affected as a member of, and to no greater extent than any other member of a profession, occupation, class of persons or class of businesses. A class shall consist of not fewer than five similarly situated persons or businesses; or

(B) If the matter affects a publicly traded company when:

(i) The public official, or dependent family members individually or jointly own less than five percent of the issued stock in the publicly traded company and the value of the stocks individually or jointly owned is less than ten thousand dollars; and

(ii) Prior to casting a vote the public official discloses his or her interest in the publicly traded company.

(3) For a public official's recusal to be effective, it is necessary to excuse him or herself from participating in the discussion and decision-making process by physically removing him or herself from the room during the period, fully disclosing his or her interests, and recusing him or herself from voting on the issue.

*(k) Limitations on participation in licensing and rate-making proceedings.* -- No public official or employee may participate within the scope of his or her duties as a public official or employee, except through ministerial functions as defined in section three, article one of this chapter, in any license or rate-making proceeding that directly affects the license or rates of any person, partnership, trust, business trust, corporation or association in which the public official or employee or his or her immediate family owns or controls more than ten percent. No public official or public employee may participate within the scope of his or her duties as a public official or public employee, except through ministerial functions as defined in section three, article one of this chapter, in any license or rate-making proceeding that directly affects the license or rates of any person to whom the public official or public employee or his or her immediate family, or a partnership, trust, business trust, corporation or association of which the public official or employee, or his or her immediate family, owns or controls more than ten percent, has sold goods or services totaling more than one thousand dollars during the preceding year, unless the public official or public employee has filed a written statement acknowledging such sale with the public agency and the statement is entered in any public record of the agency's proceedings. This subsection shall not be construed to require the disclosure of clients of attorneys or of patients or clients of persons licensed pursuant to article three, eight, fourteen, fourteen-a, fifteen, sixteen, twenty, twenty-one or thirty-one, chapter thirty of this code.

(l) *Certain compensation prohibited.* -- (1) A public employee may not receive additional compensation from another publicly-funded state, county or municipal office or employment for working the same hours, unless:

(A) The public employee's compensation from one public employer is reduced by the amount of compensation received from the other public employer;

(B) The public employee's compensation from one public employer is reduced on a pro rata basis for any work time missed to perform duties for the other public employer;

(C) The public employee uses earned paid vacation, personal or compensatory time or takes unpaid leave from his or her public employment to perform the duties of another public office or employment; or

(D) A part-time public employee who does not have regularly scheduled work hours or a public employee who is authorized by one public employer to make up, outside of regularly scheduled work hours, time missed to perform the duties of another public office or employment maintains time records, verified by the public employee and his or her immediate supervisor at least once every pay period, showing the hours that the public employee did, in fact, work for each public employer. The public employer shall submit these time records to the Ethics Commission on a quarterly basis.

(2) This section does not prohibit a retired public official or public employee from receiving compensation from a publicly-funded office or employment in addition to any retirement benefits to which the retired public official or public employee is entitled.

(m) *Certain expenses prohibited.* -- No public official or public employee shall knowingly request or accept from any governmental entity compensation or reimbursement for any expenses actually paid by a lobbyist and required by the provisions of this chapter to be reported, or actually paid by any other person.

(n) Any person who is employed as a member of the faculty or staff of a public institution of higher education and who is engaged in teaching, research, consulting or publication activities in his or her field of expertise with public or private entities and thereby derives private benefits from such activities shall be exempt from the prohibitions contained in subsections (b), (c) and (d) of this section when the activity is approved as a part of an employment contract with the governing board of the institution or has been approved by the employee's department supervisor or the president of the institution by which the faculty or staff member is employed.

(o) Except as provided in this section, a person who is a public official or public employee may not solicit private business from a subordinate public official or public employee whom he or she has the authority to direct, supervise or control. A person who is a public official or public employee may solicit private business from a subordinate public official or public employee whom he or she has the authority to direct, supervise or control when:

(A) The solicitation is a general solicitation directed to the public at large through the mailing or other means of distribution of a letter, pamphlet, handbill, circular or other written or printed media; or

(B) The solicitation is limited to the posting of a notice in a communal work area; or

(C) The solicitation is for the sale of property of a kind that the person is not regularly engaged in selling; or

(D) The solicitation is made at the location of a private business owned or operated by the person to which the subordinate public official or public employee has come on his or her own initiative.

(p) The commission may, by legislative rule promulgated in accordance with chapter twenty-nine-a of this code, define further exemptions from this section as necessary or appropriate.

**§6B-2-5a. Code of conduct for state administrative law judges.**

(a) As used in this section, "state administrative law judge" means any public employee, public officer or contractor functioning as a hearing officer, referee, trial examiner or other position in state government to whom the authority to conduct an administrative adjudication has been delegated by an agency or by statute and who exercises independent and impartial judgment in conducting hearings and in issuing recommended decisions or reports containing findings of fact and conclusions of law in accordance with applicable statutes or rules, but does not include any person whose conduct is subject to the code of judicial conduct promulgated by the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals.

(b) In accordance with the provisions of chapter twenty-nine-a of this code, the commission, in consultation with the West Virginia state bar, shall propose rules for legislative approval establishing a code of conduct for state administrative law judges, which shall incorporate the following major provisions:

(1) A state administrative law judge shall uphold the integrity and independence of the administrative judiciary;

(2) A state administrative law judge shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in all activities;

(3) A state administrative law judge shall perform the duties of the office impartially and diligently;

(4) A state administrative law judge shall regulate the judge's extra-judicial activities to minimize the risk of conflict with judicial duties;

(5) A state administrative law judge shall refrain from political activity inappropriate to the office; and

(6) Appropriate civil penalties and sanctions for violations.

In proposing the rules, the commission shall consider the model codes of judicial conduct for state administrative law judges as drafted by the National Association of Administrative Law Judges and the American Bar Association.

(c) The legislative rules shall provide that an individual agency may develop a code of conduct for its own administrative law judges, which shall supersede the general code of conduct established under this section, if the commission determines that it is in substantial compliance with the objectives of the code proposed by the commission. Upon granting a waiver to an agency, the commission shall retain a copy of the agency's code to be made available to the public.

(d) The commission shall propose the legislative rules by the first day of October, two thousand four, so that it may be considered by the Legislature at the regular session in the year two thousand five, and the commission may not promulgate an emergency rule on this matter in the interim.

**§6B-2-5b. Ethics training requirements.**

An individual who, on or after the effective date of this subsection, is elected or appointed to serve in the Legislature, as a member of the Board of Public Works, and those positions in the executive branch of state government which the Governor

designates by executive order, shall, within six months of filling such position, attend a training course conducted by the Ethics Commission on the requirements of the Ethics Act. The Commission shall offer the training contemplated by this section once every four years and shall prescribe by legislative rule the nature, duration and content of the training and the manner in which the training will be conducted.

**§6B-2-6. Financial disclosure statement; filing requirements.**

(a) The financial disclosure statement shall be filed on the first day of February of each calendar year to cover the period of the preceding calendar year, except insofar as may be otherwise provided herein. The following persons must file the financial disclosure statement required by this section with the Ethics Commission:

(1) All elected officials in this state, including, but not limited to, all persons elected statewide, all county elected officials, municipal elected officials in municipalities which have, by ordinance, opted to be covered by the disclosure provisions of this section, all members of the several county or district boards of education and all county or district school board superintendents;

(2) All members of state boards, commissions and agencies appointed by the governor; and

(3) Secretaries of departments, commissioners, deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, directors, deputy directors, assistant directors, department heads, deputy department heads and assistant department heads.

A person who is required to file a financial disclosure statement under this section by virtue of becoming an elected or appointed public official whose office is described in subdivision (1), (2) or (3) of this subsection, and who assumes the office less than ten days before a filing date established herein or who assumes the office after the filing date, shall file a financial disclosure statement for the previous twelve months no later than thirty days after the date on which the person assumes the duties of the office, unless the person has filed a financial disclosure statement with the commission during the twelve-month period before he or she assumed office.

(b) A candidate for public office shall file a financial disclosure statement for the previous calendar year with the state Ethics Commission no later than ten days after he or she files a certificate of candidacy, but in all circumstances, not later than ten days prior to the election, unless he or she has filed a financial disclosure statement with the state Ethics Commission during the previous calendar year.

The Ethics Commission shall file a duplicate copy of the financial disclosure statement required in this section in the following offices within ten days of the receipt of the candidate's statement of disclosure:

(1) Municipal candidates in municipalities which have opted, by ordinance, to be covered by the disclosure provisions of this section, in the office of the clerk of the municipality in which the candidate is seeking office;

(2) Legislative candidates in single county districts and candidates for a county office or county school board in the office of the clerk of the county commission of the county in which the candidate is seeking office;

(3) Legislative candidates from multi-county districts and congressional candidates in the office of the clerk of the county commission of the county of the candidate' residence.

After a ninety-day period following any election, the clerks who receive the financial disclosure statements of candidates may destroy or dispose of those statements filed by candidates who were unsuccessful in the election.

(c) No candidate for public office may maintain his or her place on a ballot and no public official may take the oath of office or enter or continue upon his or her duties or receive compensation from public funds unless he or she has filed a financial disclosure statement with the state Ethics Commission as required by the provisions of this section.

(d) The Ethics Commission may, upon request of any person required to file a financial disclosure statement, and for good cause shown, extend the deadline for filing such statement for a reasonable period of time: *Provided,* That no extension of time shall be granted to a candidate who has not filed a financial disclosure statement for the preceding filing period.

(e) No person shall fail to file a statement required by this section.

(f) No person shall knowingly file a materially false statement that is required to be filed under this section.

(g) The Ethics Commission shall publish either on the internet or by printed document made available to the public, a list of all persons who have violated any ethics commission's financial disclosure statement filing deadline.

(h) The Ethics Commission shall, in addition to making all financial disclosure statements available for inspection upon request:

(1) Publish on the internet all financial disclosure statements filed by members of the legislature and candidates for legislative office, elected members of the executive department and candidates for the offices that constitute the executive department, and members of the Supreme Court of Appeals and candidates for the Supreme Court of Appeals, commencing with those reports filed on or after January 1, 2012; and

(2) Publish on the internet all financial disclosure statements filed by any other person required to file such financial disclosure statements, as the commission determines resources are available to permit the Ethics Commission to make such publication on the internet. The commission shall redact financial disclosure statements published on the internet to exclude from publication personal information such as signatures, home addresses and mobile and home telephone numbers. **§6B-2-7. Financial disclosure statement; contents.**

(a) The financial disclosure statement required under this article shall contain the following information:

(1) The name, residential and business addresses of the person filing the statement and of his or her spouse and all names under which the person or the person's spouse, or both, do business. For purposes of this section, the word "spouse" means any individual who is legally married to and cohabits with the person filing the statement.

(2) For each position of employment held by the person filing the statements and the person's spouse:

(A) The name of the employer;

(B) The address of the employer;

(C) The job title; and

(D) A general description of job duties.

(3) The name and address of each business in which the person filing the statement or that person's spouse has or had in the last year an interest of at least $10,000 at fair market value.

(A) For the purposes of this subsection, business interests include, but are not limited to, an interest in:

(i) Non-publicly owned businesses;

(ii) Publicly or privately traded stocks, bonds or securities, including those held in self-directed retirement accounts; and

(iii) Commercial real estate.

(B) For the purposes of this subsection, business interests do not include mutual funds, specific holdings in mutual funds or retirement accounts.

(4) The name, address, and brief description of a nonprofit organization in which the individual or spouse is a director or officer.

(5) The identification, by category, of every source of income over $1,000, including distributions from retirement accounts received during the preceding calendar year, in his or her own name or by any other person for his or her use or benefit, by the person filing the statement, or that person's spouse, and a brief description of the nature of the income producing activities for which the income was received. This subdivision does not require a person filing the statement who derives income from a business, profession or occupation, or who's spouse derives income from a business, profession or occupation, to disclose the individual sources and items of income that constitute the gross income of that business, profession or occupation.

(6) If the person filing the statement, or that person's spouse, profited or benefitted in the year before the date of filing from a contract for the sale of goods or services to a state, county, municipal or other local governmental agency either directly or through a partnership, corporation or association in which the person, or that person's spouse, owned or controlled more than ten percent, the person shall describe the nature of the goods or services and identify the governmental agencies which purchased the goods or services.

(7) Each interest group or category listed below doing business in this state with which the person filing the statement, did business or furnished services and from which the person filing the statement, or that person's spouse, received more than twenty percent of his or her gross income during the preceding calendar year. The groups or categories are electric utilities, gas utilities, telephone utilities, water utilities, cable television companies, interstate transportation companies, intrastate transportation companies, oil or gas retail, wholesale, exploration, production or drilling companies, banks, savings and loan associations, loan or finance companies, manufacturing companies, surface mining companies, deep mining companies, mining equipment companies, chemical companies, insurance companies, retail companies, beer, wine or liquor companies or distributors, recreation related companies, timbering companies, hospitals or other health care providers, trade associations, professional associations, associations of public employees or public officials, counties, cities or towns, labor organizations, waste disposal companies, wholesale companies, groups or associations promoting gaming or lotteries, advertising companies, media companies, race tracks, promotional companies, lobbying, economic development entities, state government, construction, information technology and legal service providers.

(8) The names of all persons, excluding that person's immediate family, parents or grandparents residing or transacting business in the state to whom the person filing the statement, owes, on the date of execution of this statement in the aggregate in his or her own name or in the name of any other person more than $5,000: *Provided,* That nothing herein requires the disclosure of a mortgage on the person's primary and secondary residences or of automobile loans on automobiles maintained for the use of the person's immediate family, or of a student loan, nor does this section require the disclosure of debts which result from the ordinary conduct of the person's business, profession or occupation or of debts of the person filing the statement to any financial institution, credit card company or business, in which the person has an ownership interest: *Provided, however,* That the previous proviso does not exclude from disclosure loans obtained pursuant to the linked deposit program provided in article one-a, chapter twelve of this code or any other loan or debt incurred which requires approval of the state or any of its political subdivisions.

(9) The names of all persons except immediate family members, parents and grandparents residing or transacting business in the state (other than a demand or savings account in a bank, savings and loan association, credit union or building and loan association or other similar depository) who owes on the date of execution of this statement more than, in the aggregate, $5,000 to the person filing the statement, either in his or her own name or to any other person for his or her use or benefit. This subdivision does not require the disclosure of debts owed to the person filing the statement which debts result from the ordinary conduct of the person's business, profession or occupation or of loans made by the person filing the statement to any business in which the person has an ownership interest.

(10) The source of each gift, including those described in subdivision (2), subsection (c), section five of this article, having a value of over $100, received from a person having a direct and immediate interest in a governmental activity over which the person filing the statement has control, shall be reported by the person filing the statement when the gift is given to that person in his or her name or for his or her use or benefit during the preceding calendar year: *Provided,* That any person filing a statement required to be filed pursuant to this section is not required to report those gifts described in subdivision (2), subsection (c), section five of this article that are otherwise required to be reported by a registered lobbyist under section four, article three of this chapter: *Provided, however,* That gifts received by will or by virtue of the laws of descent and distribution, or received from one's spouse, child, grandchild, parents or grandparents, or received by way of distribution from an inter vivos or testamentary trust established by the spouse or child, grandchild or by an ancestor of the person filing the statement are not required to be reported. As used in this subdivision, any series or plurality of gifts which exceeds in the aggregate the sum of $100 from the same source or donor, either directly or indirectly, and in the same calendar year are regarded as a single gift in excess of that aggregate amount.

(11) The name of each for-profit business of which the person filing the statement, or that person's spouse, serves as a member of the board of directors or an officer, as well as a general description of the type of business.

(12) The name and business address of any child or step-child who is eighteen years or older and employed by state,

county or municipal government.

(13) The signature of the person filing the statement.

(b) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, any person serving on a board, commission or agency for which no compensation, other than expense reimbursement, is statutorily authorized, is not required to disclose the financial information relating to his or her spouse as required by subdivisions three or five of subsection (a) of this section if:

(1) His or her spouse, or a business with which he or she is associated, are not regulated by, do not have a contract with, or do not receive any grants or appropriations from, the board, the commission or agency on which the person filing the statement serves. A business with which a filer's spouse is associated means a business in which the person or an immediate family member is a director, officer, owner, employee, compensated agent, or holder of stock which constitutes five percent or more of the total outstanding stocks of any class; and

(2) The filer executes a signed statement on a form provided by the commission verifying these facts. **§6B-2-8. Exceptions to financial disclosure requirements and conflicts of interest provisions.**
(a) Any person regulated by the provisions of this article need not report the holdings of or the source of income from any of the holdings of:

(1) Any qualified blind trust; or

(2) A trust --

(A) Which was not created directly by such individual, his spouse, or any dependent child, and

(B) The holdings or sources of income of which such individual, or a member of his or her immediate family, have no knowledge.

Failure to report the holdings of or the source of income of any trust referred to herein in good faith reliance upon this section shall not constitute a violation of sections six or seven of this article.

(b) The provisions of subsection (d), section five of this article shall not apply to holdings which are assets within the trusts referred to in subsection (a) of this section.

(c) For purposes of this section, the term "qualified blind trust" includes a trust in which a regulated person or immediate family has a beneficial interest in the principal or income, and which meets the following requirements:

(1) The trustee of the trust is a financial institution, an attorney, a certified public accountant, a broker, or an investment adviser, who (in the case of a financial institution or investment company, any officer or employee involved in the management or control of the trust) --

(A) Is independent of and unassociated with any interested party so that the trustee cannot be controlled or influenced in the administration of the trust by any interested party;

(B) Is not or has not been an employee of any interested party, or any organization affiliated with any interested party and is not a partner of, or involved in any joint venture or other investment with, any interested party; and

(C) Is not a relative of any interested party.

(2) Any asset transferred to the trust by an interested party is free of any restriction with respect to its transfer or sale unless such restriction is expressly approved by the ethics commission;

(3) The trust instrument which establishes the trust provides that --

(A) Except to the extent provided in paragraph (F) of this subdivision the trustee in the exercise of his authority and discretion to manage and control the assets of the trust shall not consult or notify any interested party;

(B) The trust shall not contain any asset the holding of which by an interested party is prohibited by any law or regulation;

(C) The trustee shall promptly notify the regulated person and the ethics commission when the holdings of any particular asset transferred to the trust by any interested party are disposed of;

(D) The trust tax return shall be prepared by the trustee or his designee, and such return and any information relating thereto (other than the trust income summarized in appropriate categories necessary to complete an interested party's tax return), shall not be disclosed to any interested party;

(E) An interested party shall not receive any report on the holdings and sources of income of the trust, except a report at the end of each calendar quarter with respect to the total cash value of the interest of the interested party in the trust or the net income or loss of the trust or any reports necessary to enable the interested party to complete an individual tax return required by law, but such report shall not identify any asset or holding;

(F) Except for communications which solely consist of requests for distribution of cash or other unspecified assets of the trust, there shall be no direct or indirect communication between the trustee and an interested party with respect to the trust unless such communication is in writing and unless it relates only (i) to the general financial interest and needs of the interested party (including, but not limited to, an interest in maximizing income or long-term capital gain), (ii) to the notification of the trustee of a law or regulation subsequently applicable to the reporting individual which prohibits the interested party from holding an asset, which notification directs that the asset not be held by the trust, or (iii) to directions to the trustee to sell all of an asset initially placed in the trust by an interested party which in the determination of the reporting individual creates a conflict of interest or the appearance thereof due to the subsequent assumption of duties by the reporting individual (but nothing herein shall require any such direction); and

(G) The interested parties shall make no effort to obtain information with respect to the holdings of the trust, including obtaining a copy of any trust tax return filed or any information relating thereto except as otherwise provided in this section.

(4) The proposed trust instrument and the proposed trustee is approved by the ethics commission and approval shall be given if the conditions of this section are met.

**§6B-2-9. Special prosecutor authorized.**

(a)(1) If after referral to the appropriate county prosecuting attorney under subsection (v), section four of this article the Ethics Commission finds that the prosecuting attorney is, due to ill health or conflict of interest, unable to undertake a criminal investigation or prosecution, the chair of the Ethics Commission may, upon a two-thirds vote of the members of the Ethics Commission, petition the appropriate circuit court for the appointment of a special prosecutor through the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Institute pursuant to the provisions of section six, article four, chapter seven of this code for the purpose of conducting an investigation to determine whether a violation of the criminal law of this state has occurred.

(2) If the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Institute is unable, due to a conflict of interest of its Executive Director, to assign a special prosecuting attorney to a criminal investigation or prosecution, the chair of the Ethics Commission may, upon a two-thirds vote of the members of the Ethics Commission, petition the appropriate circuit court for the appointment of a special prosecutor through communication with the Board of Directors of the West Virginia Prosecuting Attorneys Institute.

(b) A special prosecutor shall have the same authority as a county prosecutor to investigate and prosecute persons subject to this article for criminal violations committed in connection with their public office or employment which constitute felonies. No person who is serving as a prosecuting attorney or assistant prosecuting attorney of any county is required to take an additional oath when appointed to serve as a special prosecuting attorney.

(c) The ethics committee shall be authorized to employ and assign the necessary professional and clerical staff to assist any such special prosecutor in the performance of his or her duties.

(d) The special prosecutor shall be empowered to make a presentment to any regularly or specially impaneled grand jury in the appointing circuit court. The special prosecutor shall be empowered to prosecute any person indicted by such grand jury.

**§6B-2-10. Violations and penalties.**

(a) Any person who violates the provisions of subsection (e), (f) or (g), section five of this article or violates the provisions of subdivision (1), subsection (e), section four of this article is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be confined in jail for a period not to exceed six months or shall be fined not more than one thousand dollars, or both. A member or employee of the Commission or the Review Board convicted of violating said subdivision is subject to immediate removal from office or discharge from employment.

(b) Any person who violates the provisions of subsection (f), section six of this article by willfully and knowingly filing a false financial statement or knowingly and willfully concealing a material fact in filing the statement is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined not more than one thousand dollars, or confined in jail not more than one year, or both.

(c) Any person who knowingly fails or refuses to file a financial statement required by section six of this article is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than one thousand dollars.

(d) If any Commission member or staff knowingly violates subsection (o), section four of this article, such person, upon conviction thereof, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than one thousand dollars.

(e) Any person who violates the provisions of subdivision (2), subsection (e), section four of this article by knowingly and willfully disclosing any information made confidential by an order of the Commission is subject to administrative sanction by the Commission as provided in subsection (r) of said section.

(f) Any person who knowingly gives false or misleading material information to the Commission or who induces or procures another person to give false or misleading material information to the Commission is subject to administrative sanction by the Commission as provided in subsection (r), section four of this article.

**§6B-2-11.**
Repealed.

Acts, 2010 Reg. Sess., Ch. 32. *Note: WV Code updated with legislation passed through the 2015 Regular Session*
*The WV Code Online is an unofficial copy of the annotated WV Code, provided as a convenience. It has NOT been edited for publication, and is not in any way official or authoritative.*

**CHAPTER 6B. PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES; ETHICS; CONFLICTS OF INTEREST; FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.**
**ARTICLE 2A. RULES.**

**§6B-2A-1. Legislative rules; revocation of existing commission emergency rules; manner of reporting.**
(a) West Virginia ethics commission emergency rule one hundred fifty-eight is hereby revoked.

(b) Any disclosure form, statement or report required under any provision of this chapter shall be made in a manner prescribed by legislative rule of the commission.

*Note: WV Code updated with legislation passed through the 2015 Regular Session*
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# CHAPTER 6B. PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES; ETHICS; CONFLICTS OF INTEREST; FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE.

## ARTICLE 3. LOBBYISTS.

### §6B-3-1. Definitions.

As used in this article, unless the context in which used clearly indicates otherwise:

(1) "Compensation" means money or any other thing of value received or to be received by a lobbyist from an employer for services rendered.

(2) "Employer" or "lobbyist's employer" means any person who employs or retains a lobbyist.

(3) "Expenditure" means payment, distribution, loan, advance deposit, reimbursement, or gift of money, real or personal property or any other thing of value; or a contract, promise or agreement, whether or not legally enforceable.

(4) "Government officer or employee" means a member of the Legislature, a legislative employee, the Governor and other members of the Board of Public Works, heads of executive departments and any other public officer or public employee under the legislative or executive branch of state government who is empowered or authorized to make policy and perform nonministerial functions. In the case of elected offices included herein, the term "government officer or employee" includes candidates who have been elected but who have not yet assumed office.

(5) "Legislation" means bills, resolutions, motions, amendments, nominations and other matters pending or proposed in either house of the Legislature and includes any other matters that may be the subject of action by either house or any committee of the Legislature and all bills or resolutions that, having passed both houses, are pending approval or veto by the Governor.

(6) "Lobbying" or "lobbying activity" means the act of communicating with a government officer or employee to promote, advocate or oppose or otherwise attempt to influence:

(i) The passage or defeat or the executive approval or veto of any legislation which may be considered by the Legislature of this state; or

(ii) The adoption or rejection of any rule, regulation, legislative rule, standard, rate, fee or other delegated legislative or quasilegislative action to be taken or withheld by any executive department.

(7) "Lobbying firm" means any business entity, including an individual contract lobbyist, which meets either of the following criteria:

(A) The business entity receives or becomes entitled to receive any compensation, other than reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses, for the purpose of lobbying on behalf of any other person, and any partner, owner, officer or employee of the business entity.

(B) The business entity receives or becomes entitled to receive any compensation, other than reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses, to communicate directly with any elected state official, agency official or legislative official for the purpose of lobbying on behalf of any other person.

(8)(A) "Lobbyist" means any individual employed by a lobbying firm or who is otherwise employed or contracts for economic consideration, other than reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses, to communicate directly or through his or her agents with any elective state official, agency official or legislative official for the purpose of promoting, advocating, opposing or otherwise attempting to influence:

(i) The passage or defeat or the executive approval or veto of any legislation which may be considered by the Legislature of this state; or

(ii) The adoption or rejection of any rule, legislative rule, standard, rate, fee or other delegated legislative or quasilegislative action to be taken or withheld by any executive department.

(B) The term "lobbyist" does not include the following persons, who are exempt from the registration and reporting requirements set forth in this article, unless they engage in activities which would otherwise subject them to the registration and reporting requirements:

(i) Persons who limit their lobbying activities to appearing before public sessions of committees of the Legislature, or public hearings of state agencies, are exempt.

(ii) Persons who limit their lobbying activities to attending receptions, dinners, parties or other group functions and make no expenditure in connection with such lobbying are exempt.

(iii) Persons who engage in news or feature reporting activities and editorial comment as working members of the press, radio or television and persons who publish or disseminate such news, features or editorial comment through a newspaper, book, regularly published periodical, radio station or television station are exempt.

(iv) Persons who lobby without compensation or other consideration, other than reimbursement for reasonable travel expenses, for acting as lobbyists, who are not employed by a lobbying firm or lobbyist employer, and whose total expenditures in connection with lobbying activities do not exceed one hundred fifty dollars during any calendar year, are exempt. The exemptions contained in this subparagraph and in subparagraph (ii) are intended to permit and encourage citizens of this state to exercise their constitutional rights to assemble in a peaceable manner, consult for the common good, instruct their representatives, and apply for a redress of grievances. Accordingly, such persons may lobby without incurring any registration or reporting obligation under this article. Any person exempt under this subparagraph or subparagraph (ii) may at his or her option register and report under this article.

(v) Persons who lobby on behalf of a nonprofit organization with regard to legislation, without compensation, and who restrict their lobbying activities to no more than twenty days or parts thereof during any regular session of the Legislature, are exempt. The Commission may promulgate a legislative rule to require registration and reporting by persons who would otherwise be exempt under this subparagraph, if it determines that such rule is necessary to prevent frustration of the purposes of this article. Any person exempt under this subparagraph may, at his or her option, register and report under this article.

(vi) The Governor, members of the Governor's staff, members of the Board of Public Works, officers and employees of the executive branch who communicate with a member of the Legislature on the request of that member, or who communicate with the Legislature, through the proper official channels, requests for legislative action or appropriations which are deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of the public business or which are made in the proper performance of their official duties, are exempt.

(vii) Members of the Legislature are exempt.

(viii) Persons employed by the Legislature for the purpose of aiding in the preparation or enactment of legislation or the performance of legislative duties are exempt.

(ix) Persons rendering professional services in drafting proposed legislation or in advising or rendering opinions to clients as to the construction and effect of proposed or pending legislation are exempt.

(9) "Person" means any individual, partnership, trust, estate, business trust, association or corporation; any department, commission, board, publicly supported college or university, division, institution, bureau or any other instrumentality of the state; or any county, municipal corporation, school district or any other political subdivision of the state.

**§6B-3-2. Registration of lobbyists.**

(a) Before engaging in any lobbying activity, or within thirty days after being employed as a lobbyist, whichever occurs first, a lobbyist shall register with the Ethics Commission by filing a lobbyist registration statement. The registration statement shall contain information and be in a form prescribed by the Ethics Commission by legislative rule, including, but not limited to, the following information:

(1) The registrant's name, business address, telephone numbers and any temporary residential and business addresses and telephone numbers used or to be used by the registrant while lobbying during a legislative session;

(2) The name, address and occupation or business of the registrant's employer;

(3) A statement as to whether the registrant is employed or retained by his or her employer solely as a lobbyist or is a regular employee performing services for the employer which include, but are not limited to, lobbying;

(4) A statement as to whether the registrant is employed or retained by his or her employer under any agreement, arrangement or understanding according to which the registrant's compensation, or any portion of the registrant's compensation, is or will be contingent upon the success of his or her lobbying activity;

(5) The general subject or subjects, if known, on which the registrant will lobby or employ some other person to lobby in a manner which requires registration under this article; and

(6) An appended written authorization from each of the lobbyist's employers confirming the lobbyist's employment and the subjects on which the employer is to be represented.

(b) Any lobbyist who receives or is to receive compensation from more than one person for services as a lobbyist shall file a separate notice of representation with respect to each person compensating him or her for services performed as a lobbyist. When a lobbyist whose fee for lobbying with respect to the same subject is to be paid or contributed by more than one person, then the lobbyist may file a single statement, in which he or she shall detail the name, business address and occupation of each person paying or contributing to the fee.

(c) Whenever a change, modification or termination of the lobbyist's employment occurs, the lobbyist shall, within one week of the change, modification or termination, furnish full information regarding the change, modification or termination by filing with the commission an amended registration statement.

(d) Each lobbyist who has registered shall file a new registration statement, revised as appropriate, on the Monday preceding the second Wednesday in January of each odd-numbered year and failure to do so terminates his or her authorization to lobby. Until the registration is renewed, the person may not engage in lobbying activities unless he or she is otherwise exempt under paragraph (B), subdivision (7), section one of this article.

(e) The following public officers or employees may not, during or up to one year after the termination of their public employment or service, be allowed to register as lobbyists:

(1) Members of the Legislature;

(2) Members of the Executive Department as referenced in article VII, section one of the Constitution of West Virginia;

(3) Will and pleasure professional employees of the Legislature under the direct supervision of a member of the Legislature;

(4) Will and pleasure professional employees of members of the Executive Department under the direct supervision of the Executive Department officer and who regularly, personally and substantially participates in a decision-making or advisory capacity regarding agency or department policy;

(5) Members of the Supreme Court of Appeals;

(6) Any department secretary of an executive branch department created by the provisions of section two, article one, chapter five-f of this code; and

(7) Heads of any state departments or agencies. **§6B-3-3. Photograph and information-booklet-publication.**
Each lobbyist shall, at the time he or she registers, submit to the commission a recent photograph of the lobbyist of a size and format as determined by rule of the commission, together with the name of the lobbyist's employer, a brief biographical description, and any other information the lobbyist may wish to submit, not to exceed fifty words in length. The photograph and information shall be published at least annually in a booklet form by the commission for distribution to government officers or employees, lobbyists, and to the public. The method of distribution is in the discretion of the commission, which is not required to compile and maintain a distribution list of all persons who may be entitled to receive the booklet.

**§6B-3-3a. Registration fees.**

(a) Each lobbyist shall, at the time he or she registers, pay the Commission a base registration fee of one hundred dollars, plus one hundred dollars for each employer represented, to be filed with the initial registration statement and with each new registration statement filed by the lobbyist in subsequent odd numbered years. Whenever a lobbyist modifies his or her registration to add additional employers, an additional registration fee of one hundred dollars for each additional employer represented shall be paid to the Commission.

(b) All fees authorized and collected pursuant to this article shall be paid to the Ethics Commission and thereafter deposited pursuant to section six, article one of this chapter.

**§6B-3-3b. Conflict of interest.**

A lobbyist or a lobbyist's immediate family member may not participate in any decision as a member of a state or county board, council, commission or public service district if the lobbyist may receive direct, personal economic or pecuniary benefit from a decision of that state or county board, council, commission or public service district. The lobbyist's economic or pecuniary benefit must affect him or her directly and not merely as a member of a class.

**§6B-3-3c. Lobbyist training course.**

The commission shall provide a training course for registered lobbyists and prospective lobbyists at least twice each year regarding the provisions of the ethics code relevant to lobbyists. One such course shall be conducted during the month of January. In addition to the registration fees authorized in section three-a of this article, the commission may collect a reasonable fee established by legislative rule authorized pursuant to article three, chapter twenty-nine-a of this code from those attending lobbyist training, which is to be collected by the Ethics Commission and deposited pursuant to section six, article one of this chapter. To maintain registration and engage in lobbying activities, a lobbyist must complete one such training course during each two-year registration cycle as described in section three-a of this article: *Provided,* That a lobbyist must attend such training course prior to engaging in lobbying activities.

**§6B-3-4. Reporting by lobbyists.**

(a) A registered lobbyist shall file with the commission reports of his or her lobbying activities, signed by the lobbyist. The reports shall be filed three times a year as follows:

(1) On or before the fifteenth day of May, a lobbyist shall report all lobbying activities in which he or she engaged from the first day of January through the thirtieth day of April.

(2) On or before the fifteenth day of September, a lobbyist shall report all lobbying activities in which he or she engaged from the first day of May through the thirty-first day of August;

(3) On or before the fifteenth day of January, a lobbyist shall report all lobbying activities in which he or she engaged from the first day of September through the thirty-first day of December.

(b) If the date on which a lobbyist expenditure report is due falls on a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday, the report will be considered timely filed if it is postmarked not later than the next business day. If a registered lobbyist files a late report, the lobbyist shall pay the commission a fee of ten dollars for each late day, not to exceed a total of two hundred fifty dollars. If a registered lobbyist fails to file a report or to pay the required fee for filing an untimely report, the commission may, after written notice sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, suspend the lobbyist's privileges as a registered lobbyist until the lobbyist has satisfactorily complied with all reporting requirements and paid the required fee.

(c) (1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, each report filed by a lobbyist shall show the total amount of all expenditures for lobbying activities made or incurred by on behalf of the lobbyist during the period covered by the report. The report shall also show subtotals segregated according to financial category, including meals and beverages; living accommodations; advertising; travel; contributions; gifts to public officials or employees or to members of the immediate family of a public official or employee; and other expenses or services.

(2) Lobbyists are not required to report the following:

(A) Unreimbursed personal living and travel expenses not incurred directly for lobbying;

(B) Any expenses incurred for the lobbyist's own living accommodations;

(C) Any expenses incurred for the lobbyist's own travel to and from public meetings or hearings of the legislative and executive branches; or

(D) Any expenses incurred for telephone and any office expenses, including rent and salaries and wages paid for staff and secretarial assistance.

(d) If a lobbyist is employed by more than one employer, the report shall show the proportionate amount of the expenditures in each category incurred on behalf of each of his or her employers.

(e) The report shall describe the subject matter of the lobbying activities in which the lobbyist has been engaged during the reporting period.

(f) If, during the period covered by the report, the lobbyist made expenditures or expenditures were made or incurred on behalf of the lobbyist in the reporting categories of meals and beverages, living accommodations, travel, gifts or other expenditures, other than for those expenditures governed by subsection (g) of this section, the lobbyist shall report the name of the public official or employee to whom or on whose behalf the expenditures were made, the total amount of the expenditures, and the subject matter of the lobbying activity, if any: *Provided,* That a registered lobbyist who entertains more than one public official or public employee at a time with meals and beverages complies with the provisions of this section if he or she reports the names of the public officials or public employees entertained and the total amount expended for meals and beverages for all of the public officials or public employees entertained: *Provided, however,* That where several lobbyists join in entertaining one or more public officials or public employees at a time with meals and beverages, each lobbyist complies with the provisions of this section by reporting the names of the public officials or public employees entertained and his or her proportionate share of the total amount expended for meals and beverages for all of the public officials or public employees entertained. Under this subsection, no portion of the amount of an expenditure for a dinner, party or other function sponsored by a lobbyist's employer need be attributed to a particular public official or employee who attends the function if the sponsor has invited to the function all the members of: (1) The Legislature; (2) either house of the Legislature; (3) a standing or select committee of either house; or (4) a joint committee of the two houses of the Legislature. However, the amount spent for the function shall be added to other expenditures for the purpose of determining the total amount of expenditures reported under subdivision (1), subsection (c) of this section: *Provided further,* That if the expenditure is for a function to which the entire membership of the Legislature has been invited, the lobbyist need only report that fact, the total amount of the expenditure and the subject matter of the lobbying activity.

(g) If, during the period covered by the report, the lobbyist made expenditures in the reporting categories of meals and beverages, lodging, travel, gifts and scheduled entertainment for or on behalf of a particular public official or public employee in return for the participation of the public official or employee in a panel or speaking engagement at a meeting, the lobbyist shall report the name of the public official or employee to whom or on whose behalf the expenditures were made and the total amount of the expenditures.

**§6B-3-5. Grass roots lobbying campaigns.**

(1) Any person who has made expenditures, not required to be reported under other sections of this chapter, exceeding five hundred dollars in the aggregate within any three-month period or exceeding two hundred dollars in the aggregate within any one-month period in presenting a program addressed to the public, a substantial portion of which is intended, designed or calculated primarily to influence legislation, shall be required to register and report, as provided in subsection (2) of this section, as a sponsor of a grass roots lobbying campaign.

(2) Within thirty days after becoming a sponsor of a grass roots lobbying campaign, the sponsor shall register by filing with the ethics commission a registration statement, in such detail as the commission shall prescribe, showing:

(a) The sponsor's name, address and business or occupation, and, if the sponsor is not an individual, the names, addresses, and titles of the controlling persons responsible for managing the sponsor's affairs;

(b) The names, addresses and business or occupation of all persons organizing and managing the campaign, or hired to assist the campaign, including any public relations or advertising firms participating in the campaign, and the terms of compensation for all such persons;

(c) The names and addresses of each person contributing twenty-five dollars or more to the campaign and the aggregate amount contributed;

(d) The purpose of the campaign, including the specific legislation, rules, rates, standards or proposals that are the subject matter of the campaign;

(e) The totals of all expenditures made or incurred to date on behalf of the campaign, which totals shall be segregated according to financial category, including, but not limited to, the following: Advertising, segregated by media, and, in the case of large expenditures (as provided by legislative rule of the commission), by outlet; contributions; entertainment, including meals and beverages; office expenses, including rent and the salaries and wages paid for staff and secretarial assistance, or the proportionate amount thereof paid or incurred for lobbying campaign activities; consultants; and printing and mailing expenses.

(3) Every sponsor who has registered under this section shall file reports with the commission, which reports shall be filed for the same time periods required for the filing of lobbyists' reports under the provisions of section four of this article.

(4) When the campaign has been terminated, the sponsor shall file a notice of termination with the final monthly report, which notice shall state the totals of all contributions and expenditures made on behalf of the campaign, in the same manner as provided for in the registration statement.

**§6B-3-6. Employment of unregistered persons.**
It shall be a violation of this chapter for any person to employ for pay or any consideration, or pay or agree to pay any consideration to, a person to lobby who is not registered under this chapter except upon condition that such person register as a lobbyist as provided by this chapter, and such person does in fact so register as soon as practicable.

**§6B-3-7. Duties of lobbyists.**
A person required to register as a lobbyist under this article also has the following obligations, the violation of which constitutes cause for revocation of his or her registration and termination of his or her lobbying privileges and may subject the person, and the person's employer, if employer aids, abets, ratifies or confirms the violation, to other civil liabilities as provided by this chapter.

(1) Any person required to register as a lobbyist shall obtain, preserve and make available for inspection by the Commission at any time all accounts, bills, receipts, books, papers and documents necessary to substantiate the financial reports required to be made under this article for a period of at least two years from the date of the filing of the statement to which those items relate: *Provided,* That if a lobbyist is required under the terms of his or her employment contract to turn any records over to his or her employer, responsibility for the preservation of the records under this subsection shall rest with the employer.

(2) In addition, a person required to register as a lobbyist may not:

(A) Engage in any lobbying activity before registering as a lobbyist;

(B) Knowingly deceive or attempt to deceive any government officer or employee as to any fact pertaining to a matter which is the subject of lobbying activity;

(C) Cause or influence the introduction of any legislation for the purpose of thereafter being employed to secure its defeat;

(D) Exercise any undue influence, extortion or unlawful retaliation upon any government officer or employee by reason of the government officer or employee's position with respect to, or his or her vote upon, any matter which is the subject of lobbying activity;

(E) Exercise undue influence upon any legislator or other privately employed government officer or employee through communications with the person's employer;

(F) Give a gift to any government officer or employee in excess of or in violation of any limitations on gifts set forth in subsection (c), section five, article two of this chapter or give any gift, whether lawful or unlawful, to a government officer or employee without the government officer or employee's knowledge and consent.

**§6B-3-8. Limitation on persons lobbying in legislative chambers.**
Former legislators and other persons having the privilege of the floor are prohibited from lobbying upon the floor of either house of the Legislature or the foyer thereof while such house is in session.

**§6B-3-9. Penalties.**
(a) Any person who is required under the provisions of this article to file an application, statement or report and who willfully and knowingly makes a false statement, conceals a material fact or otherwise commits a fraud in the application, statement or report is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not more than one thousand dollars, or confined in a county or regional jail not more than one year, or both.

(b) A person who is subject to the registration and reporting requirements of this article and who fails or refuses to register or who fails or refuses to file a required statement or report or who otherwise violates the provisions of this article may be the subject of a complaint filed with the ethics commission and may be proceeded against in the same manner and to the same ends as a public officer or public employee under the provisions of this chapter.

(c) A person who willfully and knowingly files a false report under the provisions of this article is liable in a civil action to any government officer or employee who sustains damage as a result of the filing or publication of the report.

**§6B-3-10. Provisions may be adopted by local governments.**
An incorporated municipality may enact lobbyist regulation provisions substantially similar to the provisions of this article which may be modified to the extent necessary to make the provisions relevant to that jurisdiction and which may be further modified to the extent deemed necessary and appropriate by and for that jurisdiction.

**§6B-3-11. Compliance audits.**
(a) The Commission shall initiate, by lottery, random audits of lobbyist registration statements and disclosure reports required to be filed under this chapter on or after the first day of July, two thousand five: *Provided*, That the Commission may not conduct compliance audits pursuant to this section until it has proposed for promulgation and received final approval from the Legislature of a legislative rule in accordance with the provisions of chapter twenty-nine-a of this code setting forth, among other things, the manner in which the audit is to be conducted, the information, documents and materials to be considered during the audit, the selection and qualification of the auditor(s), the audit procedures to be employed by the auditors and the preparation and contents of any post-audit reports.

(b) The Commission may hold up to four lotteries per year. The number of lotteries held within a given year will be a matter within the Commission's discretion.

(c) The number of audits to be conducted will be determined by the Commission through resolutions adopted at public meetings and based on various factors, including the complexity, results and time required to complete the audits.

(d) No lobbyist or lobbyist's employer will be subject to a random audit more than once in any 24-month period.

*Note: WV Code updated with legislation passed through the 2015 Regular Session*
*The WV Code Online is an unofficial copy of the annotated WV Code, provided as a convenience. It has NOT been edited for publication, and is not in any way official or authoritative.*