

2023 ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY ETHICS COMMISSION

The 2023 annual report is mandated by §7-2-104 of the Public Ethics Law and provides a summary of the work conducted by the ethics commission during the calendar year just ended. This and other information about the commission is also available on its website. A copy of this report is also available in print upon request. The information provided in this report refers to the calendar year 2023, unless otherwise indicated.

2023 MEMBERS

Name	Party	Dates of Appointment and Reappointment	Date of Term Expiration
Dale P. Kelberman Chair	Democrat	May 1, 2023 June 3, 2019	April 30, 2027 April 30, 2023
Daniel J. Semick	Democrat	May 11, 2020	April 30, 2024
Robert J. Mansfield	Republican	January 19, 2021	April 30, 2024
Solon Webb	Unaffiliated	October 6, 2021	April 30, 2024
Corinne Fitzgerald	Republican	November 15, 2021	April 30, 2025 Resigned Aug. 3, 2023
Donna L. Rober	Unaffiliated	June 5, 2023	April 30, 2027
Amy Thomas	Democrat	June 5, 2023	April 30, 2027
Brian M. Conrad	Republican	November 6, 2023	April 30, 2025

The commission's staff includes Michael S. Botsaris, Esq., Executive Director and General Counsel, and Gina Scerbo, the commission secretary. Ms. Scerbo is a part-time employee.

In 2023 the commission conducted a majority of its business via email, conference calls and Zoom meetings. It met at a formal meeting at the call of its Chairman on October 9, 2023.

2023 UPDATE INFORMATION:

INQUIRIES AND ADVISORY OPINIONS

The commission received 77 ethics inquiries in 2023 and issued 4 formal written (emailed) advisory opinions. In addition, the commission’s staff handled numerous lobbying, financial disclosure, and other types of general questions and inquiries. (Inquiries from lobbyists and other filers are not numbered or summarized unless they result in an administrative decision from the ethics commission.) The sources and primary issues raised in these inquiries were:

TOTAL INQUIRIES:

Employees	36
Appointed Officials	13
Elected Officials	13
Citizens	9
Covered Volunteers	3
Lobbyists	1
Anonymous	1
Outside Agency	1
Other	0

The primary issue raised in these inquiries breakdown as follows:

Boards/Commissions	10
Gifts	17
Prestige of office	12
Secondary employment	8
Non-participation	2
Conflict disclosure	12
Other	4
Asst/Representation	5
Lobbying	2
Financial Disclosure	3
Post-employment	0
Political Activity	2

Copies of published Advisory Opinions are available on the commission’s website.

COMPLAINTS

The commission did not receive any formal written complaints of ethics violations in 2023.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENTS

The commission is charged with the responsibility of reviewing and making available for public inspection, each financial disclosure (FDS) and conflict of interest (COI) statement received from required County employees, elected officials, candidates for elected office, compensated and uncompensated board members, and covered volunteers. Each statement is reviewed for completeness, accuracy, and for potential conflicts of interest. In 2023, the commission received 240 disclosure statements as follows:

Regular employees and covered volunteers	240
Candidates	0

Each statement of covered filers was reviewed for completeness and potential conflicts as required by law and employee filers were directed to correct any omissions or deficiencies. All disclosure statements, including corrections and additions, are available for inspection and copying with advance notice at the commission’s office as required by law. There were no late filing fees assessed in 2023.

There were 8 requests to examine/copy 8 separate disclosure filings. As required by law, all filers whose statements were examined were notified of that fact in writing and any redactions required by law were made prior to producing the records for examination. No copying charges were collected in 2023.

LOBBYING

The commission received 107 lobbying registrations from 45 lobbyists. Lobbying registrations, employer authorizations, and activity reports are public documents. The ethics commission staff received, reviewed, and compiled the statistics on 183 bi-annual activity reports. There were no late filing fees assessed. The following information summarizes the compensation and expenditures reported by registered lobbyists in 2023:

Compensation paid to lobbyists	\$214,530.35
Office expenses in addition to compensation.....	0.00
Professional and technical research and assistance	0.00
Publications or letter writing campaigns	0.00
Witnesses.....	0.00
Meals and beverages for county employees and their immediate families.....	0.00
Special events (parties, dinners, athletic events,	

entertainment, and other functions)	0.00
Food, lodging, or other expenses at a conference or meeting	0.00
Other gifts.....	0.00
Miscellaneous expenses	78.60

EDUCATION

2023 On-line Training Completed - 137 Employees and 77 Board and Commission Members.

Training includes the use of an online multimedia training course as well as printed hand-outs and copies of an employee brochure summarizing the ethics law’s conflicts of interest provisions. The on-line Ethics Training Course allows everyone to satisfy the mandatory ethics training requirements, at their convenience, on-line. The training course takes about an hour to complete and consists of several chapters with a few questions at the end of each chapter. Upon successful completion (score of 80% or better) employees are able to print out a Certificate of Completion. The commission also maintains an email list of County employees who successfully complete the training. Training is required by law for all employees, board and commission members, and elected officials, within 60 days of hire, appointment or taking office.

The ethics commission provides copies of the brochure, *What employees need to know about the Public Ethics Law* to the Office of Personnel and other departments and agencies upon request. The brochure is available on-line on the Ethics Commission website at <https://live-aacounty.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/2023-03/employee-ethics-brochure.pdf>.

The commission also updates and publishes two other brochures: *What You Need to Know about the Public Ethics Law- Lobbyists* and *What You Need to Know about the Public Ethics Law- Vendors and Contractors*. Both brochures are available at the ethics commission’s office and are distributed freely upon request.

NEW FORMS

No new ethics forms were created in 2023.

BUDGET

Saving money while performing the duties assigned to the commission by the Anne Arundel County Charter has always been a priority. Use of email has largely replaced paper - the commission sends all notifications and disclosure forms to County employees by email in lieu of first-class mail. The commission also requests all disclosure filers (covered volunteers and lobbyists) to accept email notifications and to access all forms via the commission’s website. Many of these filers have agreed to accept email only notifications. The anticipated budget for FY2025 is unchanged.

RECENT ETHICS LAW CHANGES

Amendment to Section 7-1-101(23) through (26), 7-4-104, 7-5-106, 7-5-112, 7-6-104, 7-6-105, and 7-6-107 of the Ethics Code: State law required counties to have certain changes made to public ethics laws, and that certain provisions be similar to State law. For the purpose of defining “quasi-government entity”; repealing a provision that allows for the disclosure of a complainant; requiring the disclosure of certain gifts and relationships in financial disclosure statements; amending the terms for disclosing certain real property and business interests; allowing the public inspection of certain records by electronic means; and generally relating to public ethics. Effective date: 5/29/23.

Amendment to Section 7-4-106 of the Ethics Code: Removed paragraph (c)(2) which allows the commission to disclose the identity of the complainant to the respondent at any time. Effective date: 5/29/23.

CONCLUSION

The commission schedules its regular meetings for the second Monday of each month at 4:00 p.m. in the conference room at the commission’s office on an “as needed or as requested basis”. Decisions on whether a physical meeting is called is made by the commission’s Chairman. Any citizen or employee is welcome to attend the open session of the meeting or make an appointment to address the commission concerning any ethics issue. Much of the commission’s work is done by email, telephone conference and Zoom meetings. Contingent meetings are also scheduled for specific dates, but are only held if specially called by the Chairman. The dates of all scheduled and contingent meetings are available on the ethics commission’s website.

Questions or comments about this report are welcome and may be mailed, emailed, or faxed to the ethics commission.

Respectfully submitted on January 18, 2024 by:

Anne Arundel County Ethics Commission:

Michael S. Botsaris, Esq., Executive Director
Gina Scerbo, Secretary
Dale P. Kelberman, Chair
Daniel J. Semick, Member
Robert J. Mansfield, Member
Solon Webb, Member
Donna L. Rober, Member
Amy Thomas, Member
Brian M. Conrad, Member