

Campaign Finance and Ethics Commission



ANNUAL REPORT 2023



INTRODUCTION

The Orange County Campaign Finance and Ethics Commission (Commission) has again completed a successful year of serving Orange County as the oversight body for the Campaign Reform Ordinance, Lobbyist Registration, Gift Ban and Code of Ethics. In its sixth year of existence, the Commission has not been required to act in an enforcement capacity. We expect this success to continue as the Office of Campaign Finance and Ethics Commission (Office) maintains its active educational programs, is readily available to assist with questions or concerns, and conducts timely detailed audits of all filings within the Commission's jurisdiction.

COMMISSION HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, the Commission fulfilled its stated purpose as the oversight authority to the County's Campaign Reform Ordinance, Lobbyist Registration and Reporting Ordinance, the Gift Ban Ordinance, and Sections 6 and 9 of the County Code of Ethics and Commitment to Public Service. This was accomplished by conducting four in-person meetings to further the goal of transparency and encouraging public participation. Regular business at these quarterly meetings included setting schedules, reviewing minutes, approving reports before transmission to the Board of Supervisors, approving training/educational materials, and receiving reports from the Executive Director.

This year also brought about changes to the Commission. We saw the departure of the last founding member Scott Winchell (due to term limits) and the appointment of a new member Dr. Reza Karkia. I was reappointed to a second three-year term, although 2023 will be my second and last year as Commission Chairman. The Chair position also has a term limit per the Orange County Codified Ordinance section 1-2-353. The Commission looks forward to the appointment of a fifth member in the coming year.

DIRECTOR HIGHLIGHTS

This year saw the continuation of successful education programs to both internal and external audiences. Required education such as elected official and staff training was conducted. AB1234 ethics training was also offered six (6) times in this “odd” year. The “live” training conducted by the Office continues to be well received. In-person and on-line classes were well attended, thus, the program will again be offered in 2024 but on a monthly basis as it is an “even” year. Education programs were also presented to the Orange County Procurement Office, the League of Women Voters, and the Orange County City Attorneys Association. This internal and external engagement helped with communicating the availability and scope of the Office’s ability to answer questions and concerns.

Other Office accomplishments included:

1. Recovery of \$14,516 from the State related to AB1234 mandated duties. (SB90 claim for Fiscal Year 2022-2023);
2. Review of the campaign contribution limitation to ensure the limitation remains legally valid;
3. Improved the AB1234 website page so that all information needed for compliance can be found on a single page and a simplified link can be offered by the Clerk of the Board or Board, Commission and Committee assistants;
4. Lobbyists Fees for 2023 - Approximately \$5,050 in revenue collected with no late payments or fines imposed. The County had an average of 88 active lobbyists in 2023;
5. AB1234 ethics training - 97% compliance rate by December 15, 2023. Odd years involve compliance by new appointees only;
6. The semi-annual audits were completed in approximately 14 days; this timeframe continues to improve even though the number of committees (33) is not decreasing substantially each period;
7. Due to the creation of an advice log, in 2023 the Office received and responded to over 23 requests for advice coming into the Office by email or telephone;
8. The Office budget remains less than 0.01% of the County budget year after year.

LOOKING AHEAD

I look forward to serving the Commission in my last three year term. The entire Commission is grateful to the public and Board of Supervisors for establishing and supporting the important work being accomplished.

Franz Miller

Chair, Campaign Finance and Ethics Commission 2022-2023

Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.
- U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart