

2017 ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY ETHICS COMMISSION

The 2017 annual report, which is mandated by [§7-2-104](#) of the Public Ethics Law, 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 available on its [website](#). A copy of this report is also available in print upon request. The information provided in this report refers to calendar year 2017, unless otherwise indicated.

2017 MEMBERS

Name	Party	Dates of Appointment and Reappointment	Date of Term Expiration
Karl J. Appel	Republican	May 1, 2016	April 30, 2020
Vanessa S. Carter	Democrat	January 19, 2016	April 30, 2019
Katherine K. Cawood	Democrat	August 20, 2012 May 1, 2016	April 30, 2020
Emerson C. Davis Chair	Republican	November 18, 2013 May 1, 2017	April 30, 2021
Jonathan P. Kagan Resigned August 2, 2017	Democrat	July 21, 2014 May 1, 2015	April 30, 2019
Thomas J. Mulrenin	Democrat	September 18, 2017	April 30, 2019
J. Adger Stokes	Republican	July 6, 2015	April 30, 2019
John W. Van de Kamp	Republican	January 10, 2017	April 30, 2020

The commission's staff includes Michael S. Botsaris, Esq., the director, and Gina Scerbo, the commission secretary. Ms. Scerbo is a part-time employee. Mr. Botsaris was a former commission member and was appointed to the position of director by the commission on December 15, 2016.

The commission met at the call of its Chairman the following times:

February 13, 2017
May 22, 2017
October 23, 2017
December 18, 2017

2017 UPDATE INFORMATION:

INQUIRIES

The commission received 49 ethics inquiries as well as many lobbying, financial disclosure, and other types of 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: 49

Employees	25
Appointed Officials	2
Elected Officials	4
Citizens	6
Covered Volunteers	5
Lobbyists	2
Anonymous	4
Outside Agency	1
Other	0

The primary issue raised in these inquiries breakdown as follows:

Gifts	14
Prestige of office	1
Secondary employment	13
Non-participation	5
Other	5
Asst/Representation	1
Lobbying	4
Financial Disclosure	2
Post-employment	0
Political Activity	4

ADVISORY OPINIONS

The commission issued 8 written advisory opinions. Each opinion is summarized on the commission's [website](#). Opinions on specific issues may now keyword searched through the new search engine available on the [opinions](#) page. Note that only advisory opinions issued from 2009 are available on the website at this time. Earlier advisory opinions are available by request. Some requests for advice are handled by the staff directly, in cases where there is sufficient precedent to provide guidance or where time does not permit the consideration of the inquiry by the full commission. In each case, the ethics commission subsequently reviewed and retroactively approved each response.

COMPLAINTS

The commission received 2 complaints of ethics violations. After investigation, both complaints were dismissed and/or closed without further action.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENTS

The commission is charged with the responsibility of reviewing 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. This year the commission received 223 disclosure statements as follows:

Regular employees and covered volunteers	201
New employees	1
Departing employees	8
Candidates	13

Each statement of covered filers was reviewed as required by law and employee filers were notified of, and directed to correct all 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. The statements of volunteers who are required to file, but are not otherwise covered by the ethics law, were not reviewed.

There were no late filing fees assessed in 2017.

There was 1 request to examine/copy filings. As required by law, all filers whose statements were examined were notified of that fact in writing.

LOBBYING

The commission received 67 lobbying registrations from 48 lobbyists.

Lobbying registrations, employer authorizations, and activity reports are public documents. The ethics commission staff received, reviewed, and compiled the statistics on 113 activity reports. There were no late filing fees assessed.

The following information summarizes the compensation and expenditures reported by registered lobbyists in 2017:

Compensation paid to lobbyists.....	\$396,836.66
Office expenses in addition to compensation	65,918.14
Professional and technical research and assistance	0.00
Publications or letter writing campaigns	0.00
Witnesses.....	600.00
Meals and beverages for county employees	

and their immediate families	0.00
Special events (parties, dinners, athletic events, entertainment, and other functions)	625.00
Food, lodging, or other expenses at a conference or meeting	0.00
Other gifts	0.00
Miscellaneous expenses	0.00

EDUCATION

The ethics commission director presented a training session for the Department of Aging and Disabilities employees, at their request. About 125 people were in attendance. Training includes the use of multi-media as well as printed hand-outs and copies of the *Pocket Guide*, a mini-brochure summarizing the ethics law’s conflicts of interest provisions. At the request of the personnel office, the ethics commission also provides the *Pocket Guide* to all new employees. The *Pocket Guide* is for the present, available to the public upon request.

The commission also updates and publishes two 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*.

The commission, in conjunction with the Office of Information Technology, is working on an on-line Ethics Training Course to allow County employees and officials to take ethics training at their convenience, on-line. The training course will take about an hour to complete and will consist of several chapters and a few questions at the end of each chapter. Upon successful completion (score of 80% or better) employees will be able to print out a Certificate of Completion and the commission will maintain a list of County employees who successfully complete the training. The training should be available by the first quarter, 2018.

The commission instituted a new quarterly newsletter for educational purposes (see below).

The director is a member of the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (COGEL), an international organization of ethics agencies and ethics law practitioners. The director attended a 4 day COGEL convention in Toronto, Canada in December 2017.

NEWSLETTER

The commission began issuing a quarterly newsletter in 2017, the *Ethics Bulletin*. The newsletter is sent to all employees and elected officials via countywide email and posted on the commission’s web site. The newsletter has been well received.

NEW FORM

A new online form, *Request for Review of Secondary Employment*, was created and approved by the commission in 2017. It is available on the commission's website for use by County employees.

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 FY2019 is unchanged.

ETHICS LAW CHANGES

In October 2017, the State's ethics law was amended as more particularly described in House Bill 879. The commission has been following those changes and the impact they have on our local Public Ethics Law.

Since we are required to keep our local Public Ethics Law "equivalent" and "substantially similar" to the State's ethics law, it is mandatory that we now make certain changes in 2018 so that we can maintain compliance. The commission is working with the administration and Office of Law to implement those changes.

In addition to the mandatory changes required by House Bill 879, there are several optional changes that local jurisdictions are now able to consider. Our Ethics Commission has considered each of the five (5) optional changes and is recommending several changes to our current ethics law. The administration is now considering those mandatory and recommended changes. We anticipate a bill being drafted in the coming months for consideration by the County Council that will amend our Public Ethics Law accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The commission holds its regular meetings on the second Monday of each month at 4:00 p.m. in the conference room at the commission's office on an "as needed basis". Any citizen or employee is welcome to attend the open session of the meeting. At the request of the Chair and commission members, much of the commission's work is done by email and telephone conference. Contingent meetings are also scheduled for specific dates but are only held if called by the Chair. The dates of all scheduled meetings are available online.

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

Respectfully submitted on January 29, 2018 by:

Anne Arundel County Ethics Commission:

Michael S. Botsaris, Executive Director

Emerson C. Davis, Chair

Karl J. Appel

Vanessa S. Carter

Katherine K. Cawood

Thomas J. Mulrenin

J. Adger Stokes

John W. Van de Kamp