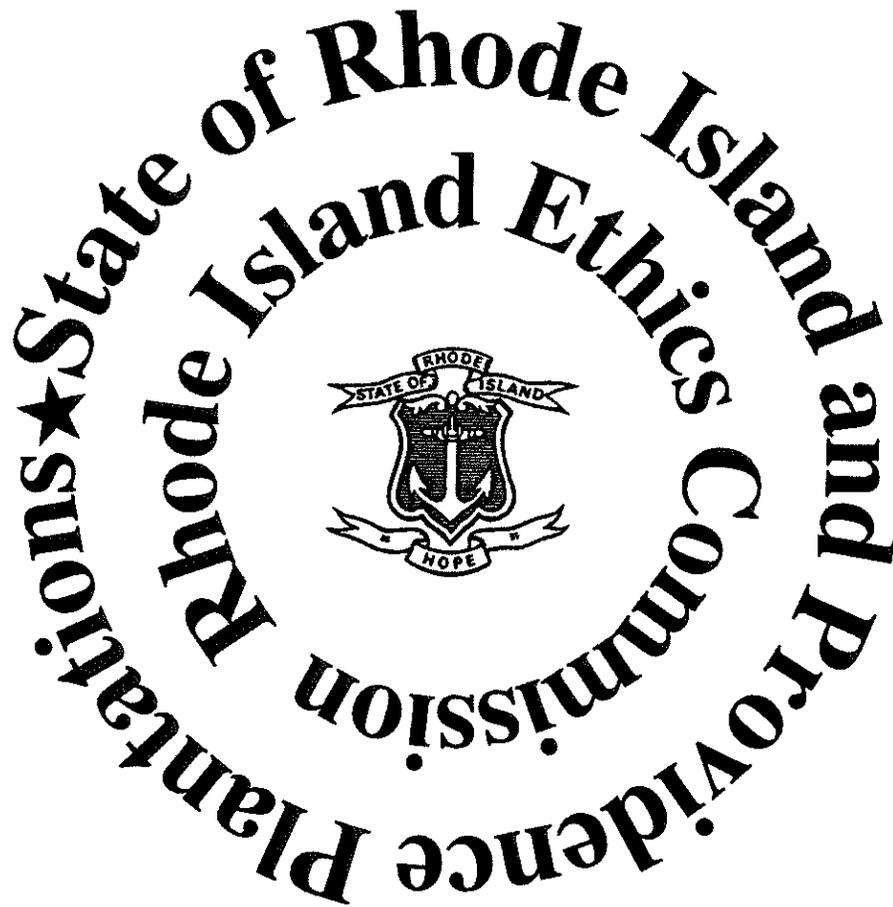


RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION



FISCAL YEAR 2014
ANNUAL REPORT

This Annual Report summarizes the activities of the Ethics Commission for State Fiscal Year 2014 (“FY2014”), the time period covering July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014. The separate sections of this Annual Report describe FY2014 activities relating to regulatory and policy changes, declaratory rulings, advisory opinions, investigations and enforcement proceedings, litigation, financial disclosure, education, and public access.

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMISSION

A. INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Ethics Commission (“Commission”) is a constitutionally mandated body authorized to adopt, administer, and enforce the State of Rhode Island’s Code of Ethics in Government (“Code” or “Code of Ethics”). R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8. The Code of Ethics is embodied in Rhode Island General Laws §§ 36-14-4 to -7 and Commission Regulations 36-14-5001 to -7004. The Code sets forth standards of conduct for all of Rhode Island’s public officials and employees.

The Commission educates and advises public officials and employees about the standards of conduct set forth in the Code of Ethics. The education program offers seminars and workshops, and it disseminates publications about the Code of Ethics and Commission procedures. Advisory opinions respond to specific questions about the Code posed by public officials and employees facing potential conflicts of interest.

The Commission facilitates transparency in government through its administration of the filing of annual financial disclosure statements. This is an ongoing process in which a database of required filers is maintained and updated by Commission staff. Once filed, financial disclosure statements are public and are often requested pursuant to the Access to Public Records Act.

The Commission enforces the Code of Ethics through a combination of executive session investigative proceedings, open hearings, and public adjudications. Enforcement powers include civil penalties and, in some instances, the power to remove an official from office.

All of the Commission’s educational publications, advisory opinions, complaints, and final dispositions are available to the public as public records. Investigative reports, related pleadings, and Commission orders become public at specific junctures in the enforcement process.

B. HISTORY

In 1976, the Rhode Island General Assembly enacted the State's first Code of Ethics and created the Conflict of Interest Commission. That Code governed the activities of state and municipal elected and appointed officials and required all such officials to meet newly imposed financial disclosure requirements.

In November of 1986, Rhode Island voters adopted a constitutional amendment mandating that the General Assembly "establish an independent non-partisan ethics commission . . ." R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8. In 1987, the General Assembly replaced the Conflict of Interest Commission with a fifteen (15) member Ethics Commission. In 1992, the General Assembly reduced the size of the Ethics Commission to its current nine (9) members.

The Rhode Island Constitution empowers the Ethics Commission to adopt and enforce a Code of Ethics, to investigate violations of the Code, and to impose penalties, including removal from office. R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8. Legislation enacted by the General Assembly also grants the Ethics Commission the power to issue advisory opinions to public officials and employees and to offer educational programs. R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-10 & -11. The process by which Commissioners are appointed, quorum requirements, and the administrative powers of the Commission are governed by R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-8 & -9.

C. POWERS

The fundamental powers of the Ethics Commission are to:

- Adopt and amend a Code of Ethics.
- Advise public officials and employees about the Code of Ethics through the issuance of advisory opinions, as requested.
- Enforce the Code of Ethics.
- Administer and enforce financial disclosure requirements.
- Maintain financial disclosure records.
- Educate public officials, government employees, and citizens.

D. RHODE ISLAND CODE OF ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

The Rhode Island Constitution sets forth an expectation that public officials and employees “adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct, respect the public trust and the rights of all persons, be open, accountable and responsive, avoid the appearance of impropriety and not use their position for private gain or advantage.”¹ The Constitution provides that all Rhode Island elected and appointed officials and employees of state and local government, of boards, commissions and agencies are subject to the Code of Ethics.²

The Code of Ethics regulates conflicts of interest, which occur when a public official’s public duties intersect with his or her private interests. Public officials and employees may not have financial interests that are in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of their public duties.³ Conflicts of interest include the financial interests of the public official or employee as well as those of his or her family, private employers, business associates, or any business the official or employee may represent.⁴ When conflicts of interest arise, public officials and employees are required to disclose the nature of the conflict.⁵ They are further required to recuse themselves from taking any official government action or participating in deliberations concerning a matter in which they have a conflict of interest.⁶

The Code of Ethics consists of statutory provisions enacted by the General Assembly and regulations adopted by the Commission.⁷ Commission procedures are also set forth in the statutes and Commission regulations.⁸ Complete copies of the Code are available at the Commission office and may be viewed on the Commission’s website at <http://www.ethics.ri.gov>.

Furthermore, the Ethics Commission has regulatory authority relating to certain financial disclosure requirements for gambling interests,⁹ and has enforcement

¹ R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 7.

² R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8.

³ R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(a).

⁴ R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-7(a).

⁵ R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-6.

⁶ R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-5 & -6; Commission Regulations 36-14-5002 to -5018.

⁷ R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-1 to -7; Commission Regulations 36-14-5001 to -5018, 36-14-6001 to -6002, and 36-14-7001 to -7004.

⁸ R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-12 to -14; Commission Regulations 36-14-1000 to -1029, and 36-14-12001 to -12002.

⁹ R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 41-9-1 to -6.

authority relating to goods or services provided to public officials and employees by state vendors.¹⁰ The Ethics Commission also works with the Board of Governors for Higher Education in the review of applications for exceptions to the Code made by state university inventors and researchers.¹¹

E. THE COMMISSION

The Commission is comprised of nine (9) Rhode Island citizens. Four (4) are appointed directly by the Governor; the other five (5) are appointed by the Governor from lists of nominees submitted by the Majority Leader, the Minority Leader and the Speaker of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, as well as the President and the Minority Leader of the Rhode Island Senate, respectively. R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-8(a). No Commission member may serve more than one full five-year term, provided, however, that a member may continue to serve until a successor is appointed. R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-8(c). While serving on the Commission, members are prohibited from holding or campaigning for public office, holding office in any political party or political committee, and participating in or contributing to any political campaign. R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-8(f). Additionally, Commissioners may neither directly nor indirectly attempt to influence any decision by a governmental body. R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-8(f).

Commission members serve as volunteers and receive no compensation whatsoever. During FY2014, the Commission conducted fifteen (15) meetings.

¹⁰ R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14.1-1 to -4.

¹¹ R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-59-26.

F. COMMISSION MEMBERS DURING FY2014

Ross Cheit (Chair) was nominated by the Senate Minority Leader and appointed by the Governor in 2004. The Commission elected him Secretary on February 12, 2008, Vice Chairperson on June 17, 2008, and Chairperson on April 19, 2011. He graduated from Williams College in 1977 and subsequently received a law degree from the University of California, Berkeley. After clerking for a judge on the Oregon Supreme Court, he returned to the University of California, Berkeley for a doctorate in Public Policy. He has been affiliated with Brown University since 1986 and is currently a Professor of Political Science and Public Policy. Professor Cheit was a Fellow in the Ethics and Professions Program at Harvard University in 1990-1991. He was later a Faculty Fellow in the Ethics and Public Administration Program at the University of Rhode Island.

Deborah M. Cerullo SSND (Vice Chair) was appointed directly by Governor Donald L. Carcieri in 2008. The Commission elected her Vice Chairperson on April 19, 2011. Commissioner Cerullo graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1976 and the Boston University School of Law in 1980. She served as an Assistant D.A. in Massachusetts until 1985, when she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She also served as an investigator in the consumer fraud unit and as an Assistant D.A. in New York before returning to Boston, where she served as a staff attorney with both secular and faith-based poverty law firms. She received a Master's degree in Canon Law from the University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome and has taught at the law schools at the University of Notre Dame and Boston College. Commissioner Cerullo currently has a private law practice that focuses primarily on religious organizations and their members.

John D. Lynch, Jr. (Secretary) was nominated by the Speaker of the House and appointed by the Governor in 2009. He was elected by the Commission to serve as Secretary in October 2012. Mr. Lynch is an attorney with the law firm of Lynch, Lynch & Friel, where he has achieved extensive experience in civil and criminal practice before the Rhode Island Family, District, Superior and Supreme Courts, as well as the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. Mr. Lynch was a member of the Rhode Island Trial Lawyers Association and the American Trial Lawyers Association, and he is a member of the Kent County Bar Association, where he currently serves as a member of the Executive Committee. Mr. Lynch is a graduate of Boston College and received his J.D. from Nova Southeastern University School of Law.

Frederick K. Butler was nominated by the House Minority Leader and appointed by the Governor in 2004. He was Vice President of Business Ethics and Corporate Secretary of Textron, Inc. He joined Textron in 1980 as a staff attorney and served in various legal and executive positions before being named Vice President and Corporate Secretary in 1999, serving in that position until he retired in December 2009. Prior to joining Textron, he was an associate at the New York law firm of Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer, and Wood. Mr. Butler received his B.A. from Harvard University and his J.D. from Harvard Law School. He also participates or has participated in various civic and charitable organizations, including the Rhode Island Foundation, the Providence Foundation, First Works Providence, and Salve Regina University.

Mark B. Heffner was nominated by the President of the Senate and appointed by the Governor in 2009. Mr. Heffner is an attorney in private practice and specializes in the area of elder law. A member of the national Academy of Elder Law Attorneys since 1990, Mr. Heffner has presented at national and regional conferences on elder law topics. Mr. Heffner served in the Rhode Island House of Representatives for five terms from 1990 to 2000. He graduated from Harvard College and Boston College Law School.

John M. LaCross was appointed by the Governor as a direct appointment in 2011. Since January 2002, he has served as the Chief of the Barrington Police Department. His law enforcement career began in 1979 with the Rhode Island State Police, retiring after twenty-three years of service as Executive Officer, the second-highest position within the department. While with the State Police, he completed an eleven week Executive Police Leadership Program at the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Chief LaCross is also a Board Member of the Rhode Island Samaritan's Suicide Prevention Organization and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). He is a graduate of Roger Williams University and holds a Master's degree in Criminal Justice Studies from Anna Maria College.

Edward A. Magro was appointed directly by the Governor in 2008. Mr. Magro graduated from Trinity College in 1982 and received his J.D. from New York Law School in 1986, as well as a Master's degree in Public Administration from Roger Williams University in 2009. Mr. Magro worked as an attorney for a number of private law firms in New York City, including as a litigation attorney and partner at Wilson, Elser, Moskowitz, Edelman and Dicker. Mr. Magro went on to serve as President and Founder of Collections Unlimited, Inc., an East Greenwich based accounts-receivables company. He has worked at Bryant University since 2008, currently serving as the Executive Director of Development. Mr. Magro has also been an adjunct faculty member at Roger Williams University since January 2011, teaching a class in Advanced Construction Law for the Master of Science in Construction Management program.

James V. Murray was nominated by the House Majority Leader and appointed by the Governor in 1998. A resident of Warwick, Mr. Murray has served as Managing Attorney for Amica Mutual Insurance Company since 1993. Prior to joining Amica, he served as Managing Attorney to Cigna Corporation and Aetna Life & Casualty and as senior trial attorney for Travelers Insurance Company. He holds a B.A. in Government, *cum laude*, from Harvard University, and a J.D. from Suffolk Law School.

Robert A. Salk, DO, FACOG was directly appointed by the Governor in December 2012. Dr. Salk graduated from Boston University in 1979 and the University of New England ("UNE"), College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1983. He served as a Major in the United States Army from 1983 to 1991, during which time he completed his medical training with an internship at the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas, and a residency in Obstetrics/Gynecology at the Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. During his military service, he served in Desert Storm and received a medal of distinction. He is board certified by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Dr. Salk previously served as the Director of Medical Education for the UNE medical student rotations at Kent County Memorial Hospital. In addition to treating patients at Caring for Women, Inc., in Warwick, Dr. Salk is also a Clinical Assistant Professor at Brown University and he participates in various committees at Women & Infants Hospital and Kent County Memorial Hospital.

G. COMMISSION STAFF

The staff of the Ethics Commission is responsible for the daily operations of the agency. The Executive Director/Chief Prosecutor is the chief administrative officer; he directs all investigative and enforcement activities, prosecutes complaints before the Commission, litigates matters before the Superior and Supreme Courts of Rhode Island, and coordinates policy decisions of the Commission. The Education Coordinator designs, develops, and directs all educational programs, including seminars and publications; acts as a liaison to the public and the media; and coordinates the Commission's advisory opinion and public access programs. The Staff Attorneys oversee investigative matters, conduct prosecutions, represent the Commission in court litigation, and draft legal recommendations for the Commission regarding advisory opinions, legislation, and policy matters. The Investigators investigate complaints filed by the public and by the Commission, oversee preliminary investigations, and process and review non-complaint information received by and/or referred to the Commission. The Office Manager and administrative staff maintain all financial disclosure and complaint records and provide administrative support to all Commission programs and activities. Considerable staff time is devoted to creating and maintaining accessible records for public inspection. The staff responds to hundreds of requests for information and for access to Commission public records.

In FY2014, the Commission staff was as follows:

Executive Director/Chief Prosecutor	Kent A. Willever, Esq.
Senior Staff Attorney	Katherine D'Arezzo, Esq.
Education Coordinator/Staff Attorney	Jason Gramitt, Esq.
Staff Attorney	Nicole B. DiLibero, Esq.
Staff Attorney	Amy C. Stewart, Esq.
Chief of Investigations	Steven T. Cross
Deputy Chief Investigator	Peter J. Mancini
Investigator	Gary V. Petrarca
Office Manager	Patricia F. Barker
Administrative Officer	Michelle R. Berg
Administrative Assistant	Tracy Teixeira
Research Aide	Alice Aieskoll

H. LEGAL COUNSEL

The services of the Commission's Legal Counsel are retained independently of the Executive Director and other Commission employees. Commission Legal Counsel responds to questions of law posed by Commission members and advises the Commission regarding advisory opinions and all other legal matters. The Commission's Legal Counsel in FY2014 was Edmund L. Alves, Jr., Esq.

I. BUDGET

The Commission's expenditures for FY2014 totaled \$1,541,738. This reflects an increase of \$41,170 from FY2013.

II. ADVISORY OPINIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

Rhode Island General Laws § 36-14-11 authorizes the Ethics Commission to issue advisory opinions to public officials and employees, both at the state and municipal levels. Any public official or employee may request or petition that the Commission interpret the Code of Ethics and recommend specific actions in keeping with the requirements of the Code. Advisory opinions require an affirmative vote of five (5) of the nine (9) members of the Commission. Requests for advisory opinions must be made in writing and include the petitioner's position, the jurisdiction and powers of the department, agency, or public body on or for which he or she serves, and the nature of the potential conflict or other inquiry. Advisory opinions are issued in open session and are public records. Copies of advisory opinions are available at the Commission's offices and advisory opinions issued since 1995 can be found on the Commission's website.

Advisory Opinion Process Flowchart	
The Commission receives a request for an advisory opinion.	
Does the request meet all of the following criteria:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it requested by the person affected or a representative thereof? • Does it concern prospective conduct? • Is it within the Commission's jurisdiction? 	
YES: An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the petitioner.	NO: A rejection letter will be sent to the petitioner.
NEXT: A staff attorney will draft a recommendation and, after review, the Executive Director will send it to the petitioner.	
The Commission reviews the draft at an open meeting and votes to approve or reject the draft. Approval requires 5 affirmative votes.	
IF APPROVED: An advisory opinion is issued as a public record and a copy is sent to the petitioner.	IF REJECTED: No advisory opinion issues. The petitioner is so notified.

B. ADVISORY OPINION REQUESTS IN FY2014

The Commission received sixty-seven (67) requests for advisory opinions in FY2014. Each request is assigned to a staff attorney, who contacts the petitioner to discuss the facts and often requests further information, conducts legal research, meets with the petitioner as necessary, and provides informal guidance. The staff attorney will ascertain whether the Commission has jurisdiction and will explain advisory opinion procedures to the petitioner. In FY2014, after an initial review, twenty-four (24) advisory opinion requests were withdrawn for some of the following reasons: the conduct was most likely prohibited and the petitioner decided to recuse rather than seek the opinion; the Commission lacked jurisdiction over members of the general assembly in matters relating to core legislative activities; the opinion was not requested by the person who had the potential conflict; the request was based on a set of hypothetical facts; or the petitioner's employer prohibited the proposed private employment and the request was moot.

Forty-four (44) advisory opinions were issued in FY2014: eight (8) were issued to state employees; six (6) were issued to state appointed officials; seven (7) were issued to municipal appointed officials; two (2) were issued to municipal employees; twenty (20) were issued to municipal elected officials; and one (1) was issued to a regional elected official.

The advisory opinions issued in FY2014 encompassed a variety of issues, including: business associates, nepotism, recusal, financial interests, and property interests; potential conflicts arising when an official or employee also has private employment; potential conflicts arising when a family member is also employed in the public sector; serving in dual public roles; the post-employment revolving door provision; and whether the hardship or class exceptions apply, allowing a public official to participate in a matter which would otherwise constitute a conflict of interest.

C. ADVISORY OPINION KEYWORD INDEX

Advisory opinions issued in FY2014 addressed a variety of keyword topics. Because requests often raise multiple issues, the number of topics addressed in advisory opinions exceeds the total number of advisory opinions issued.

Business Associates.....	9	Historic Architect	3
Class Exception	2	Memberships	3
Contracts.....	1	Nepotism	3
Dual Public Roles	2	Non-Profit Boards.....	1
Family.....	2	Political Activity	1
Family: Business Interest	1	Post Employment	2
Family: Financial Benefit.....	1	Private Employment.....	15
Family: Public Employment.....	2	Property Interest.....	6
Financial Interest	1	Prospective Employment	1
Government Benefits.....	1	Revolving Door.....	11
Hardship Exception	9		

III. EDUCATION

A. INTRODUCTION

The statutory provisions of the Rhode Island Code of Ethics authorize the Ethics Commission to establish an education program. R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-9(a)(14) & -10. The program's purpose is to educate public officials, public employees, and all Rhode Island citizens regarding the Code of Ethics and Commission procedures. The program includes seminars and workshops, as well as the production and dissemination of handouts and other publications explaining the Code of Ethics.

The Commission employs an Education Coordinator to conduct outreach and training for public officials and employees at all levels of government, crafting objectives and content for presentations that best meet the needs of a specific agency or department. Seminars and workshops incorporate issues that arise under the Code of Ethics in both the advisory opinion and complaint contexts. The educational sessions are provided in an interactive presentation format and vary in duration, depending on the needs and goals of the agency or department. Commission publications are provided during these presentations and are also available at the Commission offices and on its website.

The seminar program is designed to be easily tailored to the unique governmental roles and responsibilities of its participants. Each class is built around a core curriculum. In addition, the governing statutes, policies, and procedures of the sponsoring agency and the job descriptions, powers, and duties of the participants are taken into account so as to focus the discussion on the most relevant sections of the Code of Ethics. The Education Coordinator attempts to enrich the program with real-world examples of Code applications. Whenever possible, seminars are provided at the worksites or meeting places of the participants. Most programs are provided at no cost to the sponsoring agency, although occasionally agencies are asked to assist the Ethics Commission with the costs of duplicating handouts used in the program.

B. EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS PROVIDED IN FY2014

In FY2014, the staff provided thirty (30) workshops, seminars and presentations to over fifteen hundred (1,500) individuals across the state. Among the municipal entities receiving training were the City of Pawtucket and the Police Departments of the Towns of Coventry and Bristol. Training was also provided to various departments of state government, including: the Narragansett Bay Commission; the

Department of Labor & Training Boards and Commissions; the Emergency Management Agency; the House of Representatives; the Department of Health; the University of Rhode Island; the Rhode Island Clean Water Finance Agency; the Rhode Island Department of Education, Board of Directors; the Secretary of State Lobbyist Training; and the Wyatt Detention Facility Board of Directors.

The Commission's Education Coordinator spoke at the Attorney General's Open Government Summit at Roger Williams University School of Law. The Education Coordinator also provided ethics training at Operation Clean Government's Candidate's School at Rhode Island College and for Municipal & School Business Officials at the Community College of Rhode Island.

C. EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

As part of its educational mission, in FY2014 the Commission made several informative publications available to the public. These publications assist the public, as well as those subject to the Code of Ethics, in their efforts to understand and abide by the provisions of the Code. Subjects covered in these publications include information on the content of the Code of Ethics itself and the application of the Code to specific groups of public officials and employees, financial disclosure requirements, as well as information on the complaint, investigation, and enforcement process.

D. TELEPHONE AND WALK-IN INQUIRIES

In FY2014, the Commission continued its efforts in responding to telephone inquiries from government officials, public employees, and the public at large. Each business day, a Commission staff attorney or investigator is assigned as the public contact to respond to numerous phone calls, emails and walk-in visitors in need of information or guidance. While not offering legal advice, the staff provides information, copies of past advisory opinions, and educational publications. Although many of the calls involved questions about advisory opinions or complaints, other matters included questions about financial disclosure, recusal, whether a particular matter fell within the Commission's jurisdiction, gifts, dual public roles, revolving door, recusal, private employment, nepotism, and other requests for information.

IV. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

A. INTRODUCTION

The Ethics Commission is empowered by the Rhode Island Constitution to adopt provisions of the Code of Ethics governing financial disclosure by public officials. The purpose of requiring financial disclosure is to help ensure that those public officials and employees are acting in the public interest do not use their public positions to further their private financial interests. The financial disclosure statement also provides evidence that there are no conflicts between an official's financial interests and his or her public duties. All financial disclosure statements are public records.

By statute, financial disclosure to the Ethics Commission is required of: (a) all state and municipal elected officials; (b) candidates for state or municipal elective office; (c) most state and municipal appointed officials; and (d) some state employees who serve in major decision-making positions.

Financial disclosure statements are filed annually. Officials are required to disclose major assets and sources of occupational income, including those of a spouse and any dependent children. Officials must also disclose whether they, their spouses, or any dependent children, hold an interest in any business regulated by the Rhode Island government or in any enterprise which engages in business transactions with the government. Additionally, officials must disclose the name and address of any person, business, or organization which is owed more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000) by the official, a spouse, or a dependent child.

Most officials are not required to disclose the dollar amount or value of any income, asset, or debt. However, the five General Officers (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and Treasurer) and any candidates for a general office must disclose both the source and amount of any income, occupational or otherwise, that is greater than two hundred dollars (\$200).

B. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE PROCESS

In FY2014, Commission staff processed the filing of calendar year 2013 financial disclosure statements for approximately thirty-eight hundred (3,800) officials. Databases are used to create and maintain lists of officials subject to financial disclosure requirements. Commission staff continuously update these databases when people declare as candidates, elections are held, appointments are made, terms

end, officials resign, new positions are created, and former agencies and commissions are disbanded. Accordingly, the statistics relative to the 2013 financial disclosure filings continue to change even after the close of the fiscal year.

Public officials and employees who are required to file financial disclosure statements are identified by the city and town clerks, fire districts, and leaders of state departments and agencies. Lists containing the names of such filers are transmitted to Commission staff. Thereafter, financial disclosure forms and instructions are mailed to required filers in March of each year. Financial disclosure forms and instructions are also mailed throughout the year to newly installed officials and employees upon receipt by the Commission of official written notice of their election, appointment or hiring.

Financial disclosure statements for each calendar year must be filed by incumbent filers no later than the last Friday in April of the following year. For example, the 2013 financial disclosure statement was due to be filed by the last Friday of April, 2014. Some filers request and are granted a sixty (60) day extension for filing, extending the due date until late June.

The Commission staff dedicates significant attention and resources to encouraging compliance with the financial disclosure requirement. Although not required by statute or regulation, the Commission's Executive Director has developed and implemented a series of procedures referred to as "Operation Compliance," which are aimed at improving the financial disclosure compliance rate. Pursuant to Operation Compliance, which extends beyond the end of each fiscal year, public officials who have not filed by the April deadline, or by the June extension if applicable, are mailed a reminder letter that contains a clear warning that non-filing may result in a formal complaint and the imposition of a civil penalty of up to \$25,000. This letter generally provides a short amnesty period during which no complaint will be initiated by Commission staff if the required filing is made.

Another Operation Compliance procedure involves the Commission staff personally contacting Rhode Island city and town solicitors, clerks and state officials to provide them with lists of non-filers in their municipalities or departments. The Commission staff requests that these non-filers be contacted by their own staff and encouraged to comply with the filing requirement, in an effort to further reduce the need to initiate prosecutions or impose monetary penalties.

The final phase of Operation Compliance involves the initiation of the complaint process. Officials who still have not complied at this point are subject to having complaints filed against them. Each year, the Commission staff initiates non-filing complaints against elected officials who have failed to file, and depending upon Commission resources, against appointed officials. Care is taken to ensure fairness in the complaint process so that, for instance, complaints are always filed against all non-filers in the same category (e.g. Town Council or School Committee members) throughout the state, rather than only against those members in selected communities.

These policies and procedures, including Operation Compliance, are repeated in each successive filing year. It is the goal of the Commission to improve financial disclosure compliance each year in an effort to achieve a rate of 100% compliance.

C. COMPLIANCE IN FILING THE 2013 FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Calendar year 2013 financial disclosure statements for incumbent officials and employees were required to be filed by April 25, 2014. By the filing deadline, 77% of the 3,801 required filers had complied.

Thereafter, the Commission staff initiated the Operation Compliance procedures which included the mailing of reminder letters, making contact with clerks, solicitors, and others to request assistance in locating non-filers, and finally, the initiation of complaints and imposition of civil penalties. This process to improve compliance by those required to file 2013 financial disclosure statements, which included the initiation of complaints, extended beyond the close of FY2014 on June 30, 2014. The ultimate compliance rate for the 2013 financial disclosure statement was 93%.

V. INVESTIGATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION – THE COMPLAINT PROCESS

The Ethics Commission is constitutionally and statutorily empowered to enforce the Code of Ethics. R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8; R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-12 to -14. The Commission's enforcement powers include the authority to accept or initiate complaints alleging Code violations, investigate and adjudicate those complaints, and impose civil penalties.

Filing a Complaint

Prior to filing a complaint, potential complainants are encouraged to contact the Commission by telephone to speak with a member of the Investigative staff during Commission office hours, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Those contemplating filing a complaint may also arrange to come in during office hours to discuss with Investigative staff the procedure, the substance of a potential complaint, or any other questions they might have before actually filing a complaint. While those considering filing a complaint are encouraged to contact Commission staff first, it is not mandatory to do so prior to the actual filing of a complaint. Complaints must be filed on a proper complaint form, allege conduct that is prohibited by the Code of Ethics, and be signed and notarized.

Within three (3) working days of receiving of any properly filed complaint, the Executive Director will either accept it for filing or reject it based on jurisdictional, statutory or regulatory defects. In the event that a complaint is accepted for filing, the Commission mails copies of the complaint, the Code of Ethics, and Commission Regulations to the complainant and to the respondent. The Commission thereafter sends timely notices of subsequent Commission actions to the complainant and respondent as required by the Code. All complaints are public records after being accepted for filing.

Limitations Period on Filing of Complaint

“Any Complaint shall be filed with the Ethics Commission no later than six (6) years from the date of the alleged violation of the Rhode Island Code of Ethics.” Regulation 1001.1.

Initial Determination

At this first stage of review, the Commission determines whether the complaint properly alleges facts sufficient to constitute a violation of the law. Meeting during a closed executive session, the Commission either decides to dismiss the complaint or to initiate an investigation. The decision to investigate does not address the validity of the complaint; rather, it merely indicates that the allegations properly fall under the provisions of the Code of Ethics. Neither the complainant nor the respondent participates in the Initial Determination.

Informal Resolution and Settlement

At any time subsequent to the Initial Determination of a complaint, the Prosecution and the Respondent may seek an informal disposition through an agreed-upon settlement, consent order, or other informal resolution of the pending complaint. This may entail an informal conference between the parties in an effort to reach an agreeable informal disposition. The information learned during an informal conference shall not be used as evidence in any subsequent proceeding. Any informal disposition of a pending complaint shall be subject to the approval of the Commission during a closed executive session. Once approved by the Commission, the Informal Resolution and Settlement Agreement and any Orders issued regarding the complaint become public documents.

Investigation

The investigation may involve the gathering of documentary evidence as well as oral and written statements taken under oath or affirmation. The Commission may also issue subpoenas to compel the production of evidence or the sworn testimony of witnesses. An investigation must be completed within 180 days after the complaint is filed, unless the Commission approves an extension for good cause, with a maximum of two such 60-day extensions. All pleadings and orders relating to the investigative phase become public after a probable cause hearing.

Probable Cause Hearing

The purpose of a probable cause hearing is to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to support that a violation of the Code has or is being committed. An Investigative Report is prepared by the staff prior to a probable cause hearing. The respondent is mailed a copy of the Investigative Report at least 14 days prior to a scheduled hearing. The probable cause hearing is held during a closed executive session, but the respondent and/or the respondent's counsel may be present. At the hearing, the Prosecution presents the results of the investigation. The Commission

reviews the Investigative Report of the Prosecution as well as any response or other written information submitted by the respondent. The Commission may then vote to dismiss the complaint for lack of evidence, find that probable cause exists to support the allegations, and/or amend the complaint if the investigation reveals probable cause exists to believe that other violations of the Code of Ethics have occurred. The Investigative Report becomes a public record after the completion of a probable cause hearing. All pleadings and Commission orders filed after a probable cause hearing are immediately public.

Adjudicative Hearing

If the Commission finds that probable cause exists to support the allegations, an adjudicative hearing is scheduled, providing at least 15 days prior notice to the respondent. This is an adversarial hearing. The Prosecutor and the respondent may present evidence and examine witnesses. Additionally, Commissioners may also question witnesses. Rules of evidence are followed, regulations provide for discovery, and principles of due process govern all procedures. The Prosecutor must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the respondent committed a knowing and willful violation of the Code. A stenographic record is kept, and the hearing is conducted during an open and public session.

Final Disposition

Following adjudicative matters, the Commission may meet in closed session, whenever deliberations are in order, to deliberate and determine whether there has been a knowing and willful violation of the Code of Ethics. Upon a finding of a violation, the Commission may: (a) issue a cease and desist order; (b) require the respondent to file any statement mandated by the Ethics Code; (c) impose a civil fine of up to \$25,000 per violation and the return of any unjust enrichment; and/or (d) for more egregious violations, remove from office any official not subject to impeachment.

Judicial Review

All final orders of the Commission are subject to review by the Rhode Island Superior and Supreme Courts pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act. R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-15 and Commission Regulation 1022.

Whistleblower Protection

Complainants and witnesses have rights under the Rhode Island Whistleblower Act (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 28-50-1 to -9) and may also bring a civil action in Superior Court within three years after being threatened or intimidated in any proceeding before the Ethics Commission.

Frivolous Complaints

The Code of Ethics provides that “no person shall knowingly and willfully make a false or frivolous complaint under this chapter.” R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(k).

B. PENDING COMPLAINTS AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS

The Commission prosecutes two types of complaints: conflict of interest complaints for alleged substantive violations of the Code of Ethics, and non-filing complaints for the failure to timely file financial disclosure statements.

Conflict of Interest Complaints

As FY2014 began, there were four (4) outstanding conflict of interest complaints pending before the Ethics Commission. During FY2014, four (4) conflict of interest complaints were filed. The Commission issued final orders in six (6) cases during FY2014:

- Four (4) cases settled and fines totaling \$10,600 were imposed;
- One (1) case was dismissed; and
- One (1) proceeded to an adjudication where there was a finding of violation and imposition of a \$250 penalty.

At the close of the FY2014, two (2) conflict of interest complaints were pending.

Non-Filing Complaints

At the start of FY2014, there were no outstanding non-filing complaints. During FY2014, eighteen (18) non-filing complaints were filed for the failure to timely file calendar year 2012 financial disclosure statements. The Commission issued final orders in all eighteen (18) cases during FY2014:

- Fourteen (14) cases were settled; and
- Four (4) cases proceeded to adjudication and resulted in a finding of violation.
- Civil penalties were imposed in seventeen (17) cases (totaling \$10,550).

C. PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS

Preliminary investigations may be initiated upon a determination by the Executive Director that information provided to or in the possession of the Commission and/or Commission staff establishes a reasonable basis to believe that a state or municipal official or employee has violated the Code. Commission Regulation 36-14-12001. The Executive Director is required to notify the Commission whenever such an investigation is initiated. All materials relating to the investigation shall remain confidential, except that access may be granted to any federal, state, or municipal law enforcement agency, or disclosed in a complaint, or after a finding of probable cause, in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(c)(4). Following the Preliminary Investigation, the Executive Director may choose to file a formal complaint beginning an enforcement action.

There were no Preliminary Investigations in FY2014.

VI. TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE ONLINE FILING INITIATIVE

In FY2011, the Ethics Commission and the Rhode Island Department of Administration entered into a contract with Rhode Island Interactive, LLC (“RI.gov”) for the development, hosting and maintenance of an online filing system for financial disclosure. Development continued into FY2012 for a roll-out on March 30, 2012, when the system began accepting the filing of calendar year 2011 financial disclosure statements.

RI.gov is paid on a per filing basis at a rate of \$2.50 per filing for the 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 statements. Beginning with the 2016 financial disclosure statements, the rate will drop to \$0.50 per filing. As part of the initial contract, the Department of Administration agreed to pay all costs associated with the first year of filing the 2011 forms. For the 2012 filings, approximately 2,500 forms were filed online at a cost to the Commission of approximately \$6,300.

B. ONLINE FILING PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

The Commission generates a unique PIN number and Person ID number, which are distributed along with online filing instructions in a letter that accompanies the hard copy form and instructions mailed to each filer in March of each year. Filers access the online filing system through the Commission’s website. Once logged in, filers can begin answering questions and log out at any time, and any answers that have been inputted will be saved for later filing. The online statement cannot be submitted until all questions have been answered. At submission, the filer is asked to provide an email address so that a confirmation and a PDF copy of the form can be sent. Email addresses do not appear on the printed form.

C. PHASE II OF ONLINE FILING

After the successful launch of the online filing system during FY2012, the Commission worked with its partners to develop and implement Phase II of the online filing project. This involved adding functionality to the system to allow for the filing of multiple years’ forms and for the migration of the content entered on the 2011 form to the filer’s 2012 form. This migration of information was intended to help filings maintain consistency year to year and to increase the ease and speed of filing.

Phase II also created the ability for filers to amend their previous online filings at any time by logging into the online filing system. Amendments can only ADD TO a previously filed form; no submitted answers may ever be deleted. All amendments carry their own date/time stamps. Amended forms are processed in the same way as original forms, and the amended form replaces the original in the database. There is no additional cost to the Commission for amendments pursuant to the contract with RI.gov.

D. ONLINE FILING STATISTICS

	2011 Financial Disclosure Statement	2012 Financial Disclosure Statement	2013 Financial Disclosure Statement
Total Number of Statements filed to date	3,822	3,802	4,051
Number of Statements filed online	2,211	2,538	2,765
Percentage of Statements filed online	58%	67%	68%

E. GOALS FOR FY2015 AND BEYOND

With greater acceptance and use of the online filing system by required filers, the Commission will have access to filer information in a digital form that can be more easily filtered and analyzed. One of the original goals of moving to an online filing system was to allow for such use of this data. The Commission has been working closely with the Department of Administration’s Division of Information Technology (“DoIT”) to develop an “Ethics Commission Reporting System” interface with the online filing database. This reporting system went live in the second half of FY2014. At the close of FY2014, improvements were still being made to the database’s reporting system. Once fully functional, the Commission will be able to generate reports from the financial disclosure statements that will assist the Commission, and other entities, in better understanding and utilizing the information provided.

F. INSTALLATION OF NEW COMPUTERS

Twelve (12) new computers workstations and corresponding software were ordered prior to the close of FY2013. At the beginning of FY2014, the new computers were received, installed and upgraded to Microsoft Office 2010.

VII. PUBLIC RECORDS

A. INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Ethics Commission is a public agency, subject to the requirements of the Access to Public Records Act (“APRA”). R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 38-2-1 to -15. All persons are welcome to inspect public records during regular business hours – 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on state holidays.

Copies of public records may be obtained in person, requested via email at ethics.email@ethics.ri.gov, by fax at (401) 222-3382, by calling the Commission at (401) 222-3790 (voice/TT), or via Rhode Island Relay, a telecommunications service for persons with hearing or speech disabilities, at 711. A fee of \$0.15 per page may be charged for copies; however, many records may be provided free of charge via email.

B. PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST GUIDELINES & PROCEDURES

The Commission’s Public Records Request Guidelines and an accompanying Public Records Request Form can both be found on the Commission’s website and at the Commission’s office.

Most public records requests result from a phone call or email communication with a Commission staff member. A written request is not required to inspect Commission public records. However, a person may be asked to submit a written request where it involves: search and retrieval; multiple categories of records; voluminous documents; redaction; documents in storage; or other such circumstance. A copy of the Commission’s Public Records Request Form may be completed or a request may otherwise be submitted in writing. APRA allows a public body ten (10) business days to respond, which can be extended an additional twenty (20) business days for “good cause.”

All Commission staff members are trained in APRA procedures and work together to promptly respond to requests for public records. Public records requests are primarily completed by administrative staff, but investigators and staff attorneys will also complete requests. Staff attorneys assist all other staff members in complying with the statutory requirements of APRA.

C. PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST STATISTICS

APRA Requests	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014
Percentage Completed within 1 Business Day	75%	85%	97.5%
Percentage Completed within 10 Business Days	98%	100%	100%
Percentage Completed via email	88%	85%	86.5%
Percentage Involving Financial Disclosure Statements	60%	65%	62%

D. PUBLIC RECORDS AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE

The public can access the following types of public records on the Commission's website: the full-text of all individual advisory opinions from 1995 to the present; Decisions & Orders following adjudications and Settlements & Orders issued by the Commission regarding complaint matters from 1998 to the present; the entire Code of Ethics in Government and Regulations; Commission meeting schedules and agendas; open session minutes from 2007 to the present; updated educational materials; downloadable forms; and the most recent annual report.

E. PUBLIC RECORDS NOT AVAILABLE ON THE WEBSITE

Commission records not available on the website can be easily requested by contacting the Commission in person, or by phone, email or fax. Many documents can be promptly provided to the requester via email, free of charge. Additionally, all of the public records available on the Commission's website are also available at the Commission's offices for anyone who prefers to contact the Commission directly.

Financial Disclosure Statements

Financial disclosure statements are the most commonly requested public record at the Commission. All financial disclosure statements filed since 2005 have been scanned and can be quickly provided to the public via email and free of charge. Records dating prior to 2005 are held at an off-site storage facility but can be ordered and provided to the public within a few business days.

Records within the Public Complaint File

All complaints are public records from the date of filing. Other public records relating to a complaint include: any written response filed by the respondent, all orders issued by the Commission, notices of meetings and hearings, any motions filed, and a docket of Commission actions. After a probable cause hearing or dismissal, the investigative report and all pleadings and Commission orders relating to the investigative phase become public records. All pleadings and Commission orders filed after a probable cause hearing are public records.

All Other Commission Public Records

In addition, the Commission maintains many other public records which may not be on the website but are still available to the public after making a request in person or by email, phone or fax. These public records include, but are not limited to: advisory opinions; advisory opinion request letters; minutes of open session meetings; recusal statements; correspondence; regulations and much more.

VIII. PUBLIC ACCESS

A. INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Ethics Commission is a public agency, subject to the requirements of the Open Meetings Act (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 42-46-1 to -14); the Access to Public Records Act (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 38-2-1 to -15); the Administrative Procedures Act (R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 42-35-1 to -18); and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 to 12213).

B. OPEN MEETINGS

The public is welcome to attend all open meetings. Advisory opinion requests, declaratory rulings, adjudicative hearings, public hearings on proposed regulations, and staff and committee reports are conducted during open meetings. However, initial determination reviews, informal resolution and settlement reviews and probable cause hearings are conducted during executive sessions, which are closed to the public. Notices of all meetings are posted at the State House, at the Commission offices, on the Commission's website and with the Rhode Island Secretary of State.

C. WEBSITE

The Commission's website is located at <http://www.ethics.ri.gov>. It contains basic information about the Commission's history and powers, its members, the Code of Ethics, advisory opinions, education, investigations, and financial disclosure. A search page allows users to search the entire website. The website also provides staff contact information. There is an RSS feed with continuously updated media happenings and news briefs after each Commission meeting.

D. FORMS

All Ethics Commission forms are available at the Commission's office. Additionally, PDFs of the recusal form, financial disclosure statement and the Public Records Request Form may be downloaded from the Commission's website.

E. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

All educational materials are available to the public. Materials include the Code of Ethics, summaries of advisory opinions, brochures explaining Commission procedures and Annual Reports.

F. ACCESS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Ethics Commission has a strong commitment to ensuring and improving access for persons with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are made to afford public officials and the general public access to the Commission's meetings and documents. Any person requesting a reasonable accommodation because of a disability may contact the Commission's A.D.A. coordinator by calling the Commission during regular business hours or writing to its office address.

G. RHODE ISLAND GOVERNMENT OWNER'S MANUAL

Information about the Ethics Commission is also listed in the Rhode Island Government Owner's Manual, which is published annually by the Rhode Island Office of the Secretary of State.

IX. STATUTORY, REGULATORY AND POLICY CHANGES

A. INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Constitution empowers the Commission to “adopt a code of ethics.” R.I. Const. art. III, sec. 8. Statutory provisions authorize the Commission to prescribe and publish, after notice and public hearings, rules and regulations to carry out the provisions of R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-1 to -21. The Commission’s authority to enact a code of ethics is concurrent with that of the General Assembly. Accordingly, changes in the Code may come from either body.

B. CURRENT VERSION OF CODE OF ETHICS

Copies of the Code of Ethics, which is comprised of both state statutes and Commission regulations, are available at the Commission offices. New copies of the Code are printed after there has been a statutory or regulatory change. Additionally, the most recent version of the Code of Ethics is available on the Commission’s website.

C. CHANGES TO THE CODE OF ETHICS IN FY2014

The Commission did not adopt any new regulations or amend any existing regulations in FY2014.

The General Assembly did not enact any additional public laws amending or revising the Code of Ethics in FY2014.

D. GENERAL COMMISSION ADVISORY OPINIONS IN FY2014

GCA’s are intended to provide the public with a general overview of the Commission’s interpretation of specific subject areas with examples and a list of previously issued relevant advisory opinions. The GCA’s issued from 2009 to the present are available on the Commission’s website or by contacting the Commission directly and making an APRA request. The Commission did not adopt any General Commission Advisory (“GCA”) Opinions in FY2014.

X. LITIGATION

A. INTRODUCTION

All final orders of the Ethics Commission in contested cases may be appealed to the Rhode Island Superior Court, pursuant to the Administrative Procedures Act, R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-35-15. Parties may also petition the Rhode Island Supreme Court for review. The Commission may initiate District Court actions to collect unpaid fines and may initiate Superior Court actions where judicial intervention is necessary to enforce the orders of the Ethics Commission.

B. LITIGATION IN FY2014

As of the close of FY2014, the parties were awaiting a decision from the Rhode Island Superior Court in Joseph S. Larisa, Jr. v. R.I. Ethics Commission, C.A. P.C. 2011-6938. The Respondent in the matter of In re: Joseph S. Larisa, Jr., Complaint No. 2010-12, filed an administrative appeal in FY2012 in Superior Court seeking judicial review of an Ethics Commission Decision & Order, which found that the Respondent committed a knowing and willful violation of R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(e)(2). The Commission imposed a civil penalty of One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000) for said violation.

XI. DECLARATORY RULINGS

A. INTRODUCTION

The Ethics Commission, under Commission Regulation 36-14-1025, accepts petitions from any interested person seeking a “declaratory ruling” clarifying the applicability of the Code of Ethics. Such rulings have the same status as Commission orders in contested cases and may be challenged in Superior Court.

All declaratory rulings are public records. Declaratory rulings are issued in open session following a public hearing. Notices of all hearings and open meetings are posted and the public may attend.

B. DECLARATORY RULINGS REQUESTED IN FY2014

The Commission received no requests for declaratory rulings in FY2014.

For additional information, contact:

Rhode Island Ethics Commission
40 Fountain St., 8th Floor
Providence, RI 02903

(401) 222-3790

TTY/TDD: 711

Fax: (401) 222-3382

E-mail: ethics.email@ethics.ri.gov

Website: <http://www.ethics.ri.gov>