

Article 2.

State Ethics Commission.

§ 138A-6. State Ethics Commission established.

There is established the State Ethics Commission. (2006-201, s. 1; 2017-6, ss. 4(c), 5(a); 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 3.3(a).)

§ 138A-7. Membership.

(a) The Commission shall consist of eight members. Four members shall be appointed by the Governor, of whom no more than two shall be of the same political party. Four members shall be appointed by the General Assembly, two upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, neither of whom shall be of the same political party, and two upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, neither of whom shall be of the same political party. Members shall serve for four-year terms, beginning January 1, 2019, except for the initial terms that shall be as follows:

- (1) Two members appointed by the Governor shall serve an initial term of one year.
- (2) Two members appointed by the General Assembly, one upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, shall serve initial terms of two years.
- (3) Two members appointed by the Governor shall serve initial terms of three years.
- (4) Two members appointed by the General Assembly, one upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one member upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, shall serve initial terms of four years.

(b) Members shall be removed from the Commission only for misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance. Members appointed by the Governor may be removed by the Governor. Members appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall be removed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the Speaker. Members appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate shall be removed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

(c) Vacancies in appointments made by the Governor shall be filled by the Governor for the remainder of any unfulfilled term. Vacancies in appointments made by the General Assembly shall be filled in accordance with G.S. 120-122 for the remainder of any unfulfilled term.

(d) No member while serving on the Commission or employee while employed by the Commission shall:

- (1) Hold or be a candidate for any other office or place of trust or profit under the United States, the State, or a political subdivision of the State.
- (2) Hold office in any political party above the precinct level.
- (3) Participate in or contribute to the political campaign of any covered person or any candidate for a public office as a covered person over which the Commission would have jurisdiction or authority.
- (4) Otherwise be an employee of the State, a community college, or a local school administrative unit, or serve as a member of any other State board.

(e) No individual is eligible to serve on the Commission who, within the 48 months prior to appointment, has held any of the following positions with an organization that has engaged in electioneering in those 48 months:

- (1) Director, officer, or governing board member.
- (2) Employee.
- (3) Lobbyist registered under Chapter 120C of the General Statutes.
- (4) Independent contractor.
- (5) Legal counsel of record.

(f) The Governor shall annually appoint a member of the Commission to serve as chair of the Commission. The Commission shall elect a vice-chair annually from its membership. The vice-chair shall act as the chair in the chair's absence or if there is a vacancy in that position.

(g) Members of the Commission shall receive no compensation for service on the Commission but shall be reimbursed for subsistence, travel, and convention registration fees as provided under G.S. 138-5 or G.S. 138-7, as applicable.

(h) No individual may serve more than two consecutive four-year terms. (2006-201, s. 1; 2017-6, ss. 4(c), 5(b); 2018-2, s. 8(b); 2018-13, s. 5; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 3.3(b).)

§ 138A-8. Meetings and quorum.

The Commission shall meet at least quarterly and at other times as called by its chair or by four of its members. In the case of a vacancy in the chair, meetings may be called by the vice-chair. Five members of the Commission constitute a quorum. (2006-201, s. 1; 2017-6, ss. 4(c), 5(c); 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 3.3(c).)

§ 138A-9. Staff and offices.

(a) The Commission may employ professional and clerical staff, including an executive director.

(b) The Commission shall be located within the Department of Administration for administrative purposes only, but shall exercise all of its powers, including the power to employ, direct, and supervise all personnel, independently of the Secretary of Administration, and is subject to the direction and supervision of the Secretary of Administration only with respect to the management functions of coordinating and reporting. The Department shall provide administrative support to the Commission free of charge. (2006-201, s. 1; 2015-241, s. 27.1; 2017-6, ss. 4(c), 5(d); 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 3.3(d).)

§ 138A-10. Powers and duties.

- (a) In addition to other powers and duties specified in this Chapter, the State Board shall:
- (1) Provide reasonable assistance to covered persons in complying with this Chapter.
 - (2) Develop readily understandable forms, policies, and procedures to accomplish the purposes of the Chapter.
 - (3) Identify and publish the following:
 - a. A list of nonadvisory boards.
 - b. The names of individuals subject to this Subchapter as covered persons and legislative employees under G.S. 138A-11.
 - (4) Receive and review all statements of economic interest filed with the Commission by prospective and actual covered persons as provided in

G.S. 138A-28. Pursuant to G.S. 138A-24(c), this subdivision does not apply to statements of economic interest of legislators and judicial officers.

- (5) Conduct inquiries of alleged violations against judicial officers, legislators, and legislative employees in accordance with G.S. 138A-28.
- (6) Conduct inquiries into alleged violations against public servants in accordance with G.S. 138A-12.
- (6a) Issue confidential recommendations to the State Board of Elections regarding the appropriateness of a criminal referral of campaign finance violations.
- (7) Render advisory opinions in accordance with G.S. 138A-13 and G.S. 138A-102.
- (8) Initiate and maintain oversight of ethics educational programs for public servants and their staffs, and legislators and legislative employees, consistent with G.S. 138A-14.
- (9) Conduct a continuing study of governmental ethics in the State and propose changes to the General Assembly in the government process and the law as are conducive to promoting and continuing high ethical behavior by governmental officers and employees.
- (10) Adopt procedures and guidelines to implement this Chapter.
- (11) Report annually to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on General Government and the Governor on the Commission's activities and generally on the subject of public disclosure, ethics, and conflicts of interest, including recommendations for administrative and legislative action, as the Commission deems appropriate.
- (12) Publish annually statistics on complaints filed with or considered by the State Board, including the number of complaints filed, the number of complaints referred under G.S. 138A-12(c), the number of complaints dismissed under G.S. 138A-12(e)(4), the number of complaints dismissed under G.S. 138A-12(h), the number of complaints referred for criminal prosecution under G.S. 138A-12, the number of complaints dismissed under G.S. 138A-12(j), the number of complaints referred for appropriate action under G.S. 138A-12(j) or G.S. 138A-12(m)(3), and the number and age of complaints pending action by the Commission.
- (13) Perform other duties as may be necessary to accomplish the purposes of this Chapter.

(b) The Commission may authorize the Executive Director and other staff of the Commission to evaluate statements of economic interest on behalf of the Commission as authorized under subdivision (a)(4) of this section.

(c) Except as otherwise provided in this Chapter, the Commission shall be the sole State agency with authority to determine compliance with or violations of this Chapter and to issue interpretations and advisory opinions under this Chapter. Decisions and advisory opinions by the Commission under this Chapter shall be binding on all other State agencies. (2006-201, s. 1; 2008-213, s. 55; 2008-215, s. 7; 2009-549, s. 8; 2013-360, s. 30.4(a); 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 4.11(a); 2021-180, s. 37.2.)

§ 138A-11. Identify and publish names of covered persons and legislative employees.

The Commission shall identify and publish at least quarterly a listing of the names and positions of all individuals subject to this Chapter as covered persons or legislative employees. The Commission shall also identify and publish at least annually a listing of all boards to which this Chapter applies. This listing may be published electronically on a public Internet Web site maintained by the Commission. (2006-201, s. 1; 2008-213, s. 56; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, s. 3.1(a), (b).)

§ 138A-12. Inquiries by the Commission.

(a) Jurisdiction. – The Commission may receive complaints alleging unethical conduct by covered persons and legislative employees and shall conduct inquiries of complaints alleging unethical conduct by covered persons and legislative employees, as set forth in this section.

(b) Notice of Allegation. – Upon receipt by the State Board of a written allegation of unethical conduct by a covered person or legislative employee, or the initiation by the State Board of an inquiry into unethical conduct under subsection (c) of this section, the State Board shall immediately notify the covered person or legislative employee subject to the allegation or inquiry in writing.

(c) Institution of Proceedings. – On its own motion, in response to a signed and sworn, under oath or affirmation, complaint of any registered voter filed with the Commission, or upon the written request of any public servant or those responsible for the hiring, appointing, or supervising of a public servant, the Commission shall conduct an inquiry into any of the following:

- (1) The application or alleged violation of this Chapter.
- (2) For legislators, the application or alleged violations of Part 1 of Article 14 of Chapter 120 of the General Statutes.
- (3) An alleged violation of the criminal law by a covered person in the performance of that individual's official duties.
- (4) An alleged violation of G.S. 126-14.

Upon receipt of a referral under G.S. 147-64.6B or a report under G.S. 147-64.6(c)(19), the Commission may conduct an inquiry under this section on its own motion. Allegations of violations of the Code of Judicial Conduct shall be referred to the Judicial Standards Commission without investigation.

(d) Complaints on Its Own Motion. – An investigation initiated by the Commission on its own motion or upon written request of any public servant or those responsible for the hiring, appointing, or supervising of a public servant instituted under subsection (c) of this section shall be treated as a complaint for purposes of this section and need not be sworn or verified.

(e) Complaint. –

- (1) A sworn complaint filed under this Chapter shall state the name, address, and telephone number of the individual filing the complaint, the name and job title or appointive position of the covered person or legislative employee against whom the complaint is filed, and a concise statement of the nature of the complaint and specific facts indicating that a violation of this Chapter or Chapter 120 of the General Statutes or G.S. 126-14 or the criminal law in the performance of that individual's official duties has occurred, the date the alleged violation occurred, and either (i) that the contents of the complaint are within the knowledge of the individual verifying the complaint, or (ii) the basis upon which the individual verifying the complaint believes the allegations to be true.

- (2) Except as provided in subsection (f) of this section, a complaint filed under this Chapter must be filed within two years of the date the complainant knew or should have known of the conduct upon which the complaint is based.
- (3) The Commission may decline to accept, refer, or conduct an inquiry into any complaint that does not meet all of the requirements set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection, or the Commission may, in its sole discretion, request additional information to be provided by the complainant within a specified period of time of no less than five business days.
- (4) In addition to subdivision (3) of this subsection, the Commission may decline to accept, refer, or conduct an inquiry into a complaint if it determines that any of the following apply:
 - a. The complaint is frivolous or brought in bad faith.
 - b. The covered person or legislative employee and conduct complained of have already been the subject of a prior complaint.
 - c. The conduct complained of is primarily a matter more appropriately and adequately addressed and handled by other federal, State, or local agencies or authorities, including law enforcement authorities. If other agencies or authorities are conducting an investigation of the same actions or conduct involved in a complaint filed under this section, the Commission may stay its complaint inquiry pending final resolution of the other investigation.
- (5) The Commission shall send a copy of the complaint to the covered person or legislative employee who is the subject of the complaint and the employing entity, within 10 business days of the filing.

(f) **Conduct of Inquiry of Complaints by the Commission.** – The Commission shall conduct an inquiry into all complaints properly before the Commission in a timely manner. The Commission shall initiate an inquiry into a complaint within 10 business days of the filing of the complaint. The Commission is authorized to initiate inquiries upon request of any member of the Commission if there is reason to believe that a covered person or legislative employee has or may have violated this Chapter. Commission-initiated complaint inquiries under this section shall be initiated within two years of the date the State Board knew of the conduct upon which the complaint is based, except when the conduct is material to the continuing conduct of the duties in office. In determining whether there is reason to believe that a violation has or may have occurred, a member of the Commission may take general notice of available information even if not formally provided to the Commission in the form of a complaint. The Commission may utilize the services of a hired investigator when conducting inquiries.

(g) **Covered Person and Legislative Employees Cooperation With Inquiry.** – Covered persons and legislative employees shall promptly and fully cooperate with the Commission in any Commission-related inquiry. Failure to cooperate fully with the Commission in any inquiry shall be grounds for sanctions as set forth in G.S. 138A-45.

(h) **Dismissal of Complaint After Preliminary Inquiry.** – The Commission shall conclude the preliminary inquiry within 20 business days. The Commission shall dismiss the complaint, if at the end of its preliminary inquiry the Commission determines that any of the following apply:

- (1) The individual who is the subject of the complaint is not a covered person or legislative employee subject to the Commission's jurisdiction and authority under this Chapter.

- (2) The complaint does not allege facts sufficient to constitute a violation within the jurisdiction of the Commission under subsection (c) of this section.
- (3) The complaint is determined to be frivolous or brought in bad faith.
- (i) Commission Inquiries. – If at the end of its preliminary inquiry, the Commission determines to proceed with further inquiry into the conduct of a covered person or legislative employee, the Commission shall provide written notice to the individual who filed the complaint and the covered person or legislative employee as to the fact of the inquiry and the charges against the covered person or legislative employee. The covered person or legislative employee shall be given an opportunity to file a written response with the Commission.
- (j) Action on Inquiries. – The Commission shall conduct inquiries into complaints to the extent necessary to either dismiss the complaint for lack of probable cause of a violation under this section, or:
 - (1) For public servants, decide to proceed with a hearing under subsection (k) of this section.
 - (2) For legislators, except the Lieutenant Governor, refer the complaint to the Committee.
 - (3) For judicial officers, refer the complaint to the Judicial Standards Commission for complaints against justices and judges, to the senior resident superior court judge of the district or county for complaints against district attorneys, or to the chief district court judge for the district or county for complaints against clerks of court.
 - (4) For legislative employees, refer the complaint to the employing entity.
- (k) Hearing. –
 - (1) The Commission shall give full and fair consideration to all complaints received against a public servant. If the Commission determines that the complaint cannot be resolved without a hearing, or if the public servant requests a hearing, a hearing shall be held.
 - (2) The Commission shall send a notice of the hearing to the complainant, and the public servant. The notice shall contain the time and place for a hearing on the matter, which shall begin no less than 30 days and no more than 90 days after the date of the notice.
 - (3) The Commission shall make available to the public servant or that public servant's private legal counsel all documents or other evidence which are intended to be presented at the hearing to the Commission or which a reasonable person would believe might exculpate the accused public servant at least 30 days prior to the date of the hearing held in connection with the investigation of a complaint. Any documents or other evidence discovered within less than 30 days of the hearing shall be furnished as soon as possible after discovery but prior to the hearing.
 - (4) At any hearing held by the Commission:
 - a. Oral evidence shall be taken only on oath or affirmation.
 - b. The hearing shall be open to the public, except for matters involving minors, personnel records, or matters that could otherwise be considered in closed session under G.S. 143-318.11. In any event, the deliberations by the Commission on a complaint may be held in closed session.

- c. The public servant being investigated shall have the right to present evidence, call and examine witnesses, cross-examine witnesses, introduce exhibits, and be represented by counsel.

(l) Settlement of Inquiries. – The public servant who is the subject of the complaint and the staff of the Commission may meet by mutual consent before the hearing to discuss the possibility of settlement of the inquiry or the stipulation of any issues, facts, or matters of law. Any proposed settlement of the inquiry is subject to the approval of the Commission.

(m) Disposition of Inquiries. – After hearing, the Commission shall dispose of the matter in one or more of the following ways:

- (1) If the Commission finds substantial evidence of an alleged violation of a criminal statute, the Commission shall refer the matter to the Attorney General for investigation and referral to the district attorney for possible prosecution.
- (2) If the Commission finds that the alleged violation is not established by clear and convincing evidence, the Commission shall dismiss the complaint.
- (3) If the Commission finds that the alleged violation of this Chapter is established by clear and convincing evidence, the Commission shall do one or more of the following:
 - a. Issue a private admonishment to the public servant and notify the employing entity, if applicable. Such notification shall be treated as part of the personnel record of the public servant.
 - b. Refer the matter for appropriate action to the Governor and the employing entity that appointed or employed the public servant or of which the public servant is a member.
 - c. Refer the matter for appropriate action to the Chief Justice for judicial employees.
 - d. Refer the matter to the Principal Clerks of the House of Representatives and Senate of the General Assembly for constitutional officers of the State.
 - e. Refer the matter for appropriate action to the principal clerk of the house of the General Assembly that elected the public servant for members of the Board of Governors and the State Board of Community Colleges.

(n) Notice of Dismissal. – Upon the dismissal of a complaint under this section, the Commission shall provide written notice of the dismissal to the individual who filed the complaint and the covered person or legislative employee against whom the complaint was filed. The Commission shall forward copies of complaints and notices of dismissal of complaints against legislators to the Committee, against legislative employees to the employing entity for legislative employees, and against judicial officers to the Judicial Standards Commission for complaints against justices and judges, and the senior resident superior court judge of the district or county for complaints against district attorneys, or the chief district court judge of the district or county for complaints against clerks of court. The Commission shall also forward a copy of the notice of dismissal to the employing entity of the covered person against whom a complaint was filed if the employing entity received a copy of the complaint under subdivision (5) of subsection (e) of this section. Except as provided in subsection (p) of this section, the complaint and notice of dismissal are confidential and not public records.

(o) Reports and Records. – The Commission shall render the results of its inquiry in writing. When a matter is referred under subdivision (j)(2) and (3), or subsection (m) of this

section, the Commission's report shall consist of the complaint, response, and detailed results of its inquiry in support of the Commission's finding of a violation under this Chapter.

(p) Confidentiality. – Complaints and responses filed with the Commission and reports and other investigative documents and records of the Commission connected to an inquiry under this section, including information provided pursuant to G.S. 147-64.6B or G.S. 147-64.6(c)(19), shall be confidential and not matters of public record, except as otherwise provided in this section or when the covered person or legislative employee under inquiry requests in writing that the complaint, response, and findings be made public. Once a hearing under this section commences, the complaint, response, and all other documents offered at the hearing in conjunction with the complaint, not otherwise privileged or confidential under law, shall be public records. If no hearing is held at such time as the State Board reports to the employing entity a recommendation of sanctions, the complaint and response shall be made public.

(q) Staff to the Commission may share with staff to the Committee information connected to an inquiry into the conduct of a legislator under this section. The Commission shall provide to the Committee copies of all reports, investigative documents, information, and other documents used by the State Board when it refers a complaint to the Committee under subdivision (2) of subsection (j) of this section. Upon written request by staff to the Committee, the Commission shall provide copies of all reports, investigative documents, information, and other documents used by the Commission when it dismisses a complaint against a legislator under subsection (n) of this section. The information and documents provided to the Committee and staff to the Committee and the written request provided to the Commission are confidential and are not public records as defined in G.S. 132-1.

(r) Recommendations of Sanctions. – After referring a matter under subsection (m) of this section, if requested by the entity to which the matter was referred, the State Board may recommend sanctions or issue rulings as it deems necessary or appropriate to protect the public interest and ensure compliance with this Subchapter. In recommending appropriate sanctions, the State Board may consider the following factors:

- (1) The public servant's prior experience in an agency or on a board and prior opportunities to learn the ethical standards for a public servant as set forth in Article 7 of this Chapter, including those dealing with conflicts of interest.
- (2) The number of ethics violations.
- (3) The severity of the ethics violations.
- (4) Whether the ethics violations involve the public servant's financial interest.
- (5) Whether the ethics violations were inadvertent or intentional.
- (6) Whether the public servant knew or should have known that the improper conduct was a violation of this Subchapter.
- (7) Whether the public servant has previously been advised or warned by the State Board.
- (8) Whether the conduct or situation giving rise to the ethics violation was pointed out to the public servant in the State Board's Statement of Economic Interest evaluation letter issued under G.S. 138A-24(e).
- (9) The public servant's motivation or reason for the improper conduct or action, including whether the action was for personal financial gain versus protection of the public interest.

In making recommendations under this subsection, if the State Board determines, after proper review and investigation, that sanctions are appropriate, the State Board may recommend any

action it deems necessary to properly address and rectify any violation of this Subchapter by a public servant, including removal of the public servant from the public servant's State position. Nothing in this subsection is intended, and shall not be construed, to give the State Board any independent civil, criminal, or administrative investigative or enforcement authority over covered persons, or other State employees or appointees.

(s) Authority of Employing Entity. – Any action or failure to act by the Commission under this Subchapter, except G.S. 138A-13, shall not limit any authority of any of the applicable employing entities to discipline the covered person or legislative employee.

(s1) Subpoena Authority. – The Commission may petition the Superior Court of Wake County for the approval to issue subpoenas and subpoenas duces tecum as necessary to conduct investigations of alleged violations of this Chapter. The court shall authorize subpoenas under this subsection when the court determines the subpoenas are necessary for the enforcement of this Chapter. Subpoenas issued under this subsection shall be enforceable by the court through contempt powers. Venue shall be with the Superior Court of Wake County for any person or governmental unit covered by this Chapter, and personal jurisdiction may be asserted under G.S. 1-75.4.

(t) Continuing Jurisdiction. – The Commission shall have continuing jurisdiction to investigate possible criminal violations of this Chapter for a period of one year following the date an individual, who was formerly a public servant or legislative employee, ceases to be a public servant or legislative employee for any investigation that commenced prior to the date the public servant or legislative employee ceases to be a public servant or legislative employee.

(u) Reports. – The number of complaints referred under this section shall be reported under G.S. 138A-10(a)(12).

(v) Concurrent Jurisdiction. – Nothing in this section shall limit the jurisdiction of the Committee or the Judicial Standards Commission with regards to legislative or judicial misconduct, and jurisdiction under this section shall be concurrent with the jurisdiction of the Committee and the Judicial Standards Commission. (2006-201, s. 1; 2007-348, ss. 27-30; 2008-187, s. 21; 2008-213, ss. 1(b), 57; 2008-215, ss. 4, 5; 2009-549, ss. 9, 10, 11; 2010-169, s. 23(a)-(e), (h); 2012-182, s. 3; 2017-6, ss. 3, 5(e); 2018-146, ss. 3.1(a), (b), 3.3(e), 4.2(a).)

§ 138A-13. Request for advice.

(a) At the request of any public servant or legislative employee, any individual who is responsible for the supervision or appointment of a public servant or legislative employee, legal counsel for any public servant or legislative employee, any ethics liaison under G.S. 138A-14, or any member of the Commission, the Commission shall render advice on specific questions involving the meaning and application of this Chapter and the public servant's or legislative employee's compliance therewith. Requests for advice and advice rendered in response to those requests shall relate prospectively to real or reasonably anticipated fact settings or circumstances.

(b) On its own motion, the Commission may render advisory opinions on specific questions involving the meaning and application of this Chapter.

(c) A request for a formal advisory opinion under subsection (a) of this section shall be in writing, electronic or otherwise. The Commission shall issue formal advisory opinions having prospective application only. A public servant or legislative employee who relies upon the advice provided to that public servant or legislative employee on a specific matter addressed by the requested formal advisory opinion shall be immune from all of the following:

- (1) Investigation by the Commission, except for an inquiry under G.S. 138A-12(c)(3).
- (2) Any adverse action by the employing entity.
- (3) Investigation by the Secretary of State.

(d) At the request of a legislator, the Commission shall render advice on specific questions involving the meaning and application of this Chapter and Part 1 of Article 14 of Chapter 120 of the General Statutes, and the legislator's compliance therewith. Requests for advice and advice rendered in response to those requests shall relate prospectively to real or reasonably anticipated fact settings or circumstances.

(e) A request by a legislator for a recommended formal advisory opinion shall be in writing, electronic or otherwise. The Commission shall issue recommended formal advisory opinions having prospective application only. Until action is taken by the Committee under G.S. 120-104, a legislator who relies upon the advice provided to that legislator on a specific matter addressed by the requested recommended formal advisory opinion shall be immune from all of the following:

- (1) Investigation by the Commission, except for an inquiry under G.S. 138A-12(c)(3).
- (2) Any adverse action by the house of which the legislator is a member.
- (3) Investigation by the Secretary of State.

Any recommended formal advisory opinion issued to a legislator under this subsection shall immediately be delivered to the chairs of the Committee, together with a copy of the request. Except for the Lieutenant Governor, the immunity granted under this subsection shall not apply after the time the Committee modifies or overturns the advisory opinion of the Commission in accordance with G.S. 120-104.

(f) At the request of the Auditor, the Commission shall render advisory opinions on specific questions involving the meaning and application of this Chapter, Article 14 of Chapter 120 of the General Statutes, Chapter 120C of the General Statutes, and an affected person's compliance therewith. The request shall be in writing, electronic or otherwise, and relate to real fact settings and circumstances. Except when the question involves a question governed by subsection (d) or (e) of this section, the Commission shall issue an advisory opinion under this subsection within 60 days of the receipt of all information deemed necessary by the Commission to render an opinion. If the question involves a question governed by subsection (d) or (e) of this section, the Commission shall comply with the provisions of that section [subsection] prior to responding to the Auditor by delivering the recommended advisory opinion to the Committee within 60 days of the receipt of all information deemed necessary by the Commission to render an opinion. The Committee shall act on the opinion within 30 days of receipt and the State Board shall deliver the opinion to the Auditor. If the Committee fails to act on a recommended advisory opinion under this subsection with 30 days of receipt, the Commission shall deliver its recommended advisory opinion to the Auditor. Notwithstanding G.S. 138A-13(i), the Auditor may only release those portions of the advisory opinion necessary to comply with the requirements of G.S. 147-64.6(c)(1).

(g) Staff to the Commission may issue advice, but not formal or recommended formal advisory opinions, under procedures adopted by the Commission.

(h) The Commission shall publish its formal advisory opinions within 30 days of issuance. These formal advisory opinions shall be edited for publication purposes as necessary to protect the identities of the individuals requesting formal advisory opinions. When the Commission issues a

recommended formal advisory opinion to a legislator under subsection (e) of this section, the Commission shall publish only the edited formal advisory opinion of the Committee within 30 days of receipt of the edited opinion from the Committee.

(i) Except as provided under subsections (f), (h) and (j) of this section, a request for advice, any advice provided by Commission staff, any formal or recommended formal advisory opinions, any supporting documents submitted or caused to be submitted to the Commission or Commission staff, and any documents prepared or collected by the Commission or Commission staff in connection with a request for advice are confidential. The identity of the individual making the request for advice, the existence of the request, and any information related to the request may not be revealed without the consent of the requestor. An individual who requests advice or receives advice, including a formal or recommended formal advisory opinion, may authorize the release to any other person, the State, or any governmental unit of the request, the advice, or any supporting documents.

For purposes of this section, "document" is as defined in G.S. 120-129. Requests for advice, any advice, and any documents related to requests for advice are not "public records" as defined in G.S. 132-1.

(j) Staff to the Commission may share all information and documents related to requests for advice, made by legislators under this section with staff to the Committee. The information and documents in the possession of staff to the Committee are confidential and are not public records.

(k) This section shall apply to judicial officers only for advice related to Article 3 of this Chapter.

(l) Requests for advice may be withdrawn by the requestor at any time prior to the issuance of the advice. (2006-201, s. 1; 2007-348, s. 31; 2008-213, ss. 2(b), 91.5; 2008-215, s. 6; 2009-570, s. 17; 2010-169, s. 17(p); 2016-125, 4th Ex. Sess., s. 3(e); 2017-6, ss. 2, 3, 5(f); 2018-146, s. 3.1(a), (b).)

§ 138A-13.5. Recommendations Regarding Criminal Referrals of Campaign Finance Violations.

Upon request by the State Board of Elections, the Commission shall offer confidential recommendations regarding the appropriateness of a criminal referral for campaign finance violations. The Commission shall employ staff to conduct an investigation. The investigation and vote of the Commission on the recommendation shall be completed within 90 days of receipt of the request from the State Board of Elections. (2018-146, s. 4.11(b).)

§ 138A-14. Ethics education program.

(a) The Commission shall develop and implement an ethics education and awareness program designed to instill in all covered persons and their immediate staffs, and legislative employees, a keen and continuing awareness of their ethical obligations and a sensitivity to situations that might result in real or potential conflicts of interest.

(b) The Commission shall offer basic ethics education and awareness presentations to all public servants and their immediate staffs, upon their election, appointment, or employment, and shall offer periodic refresher presentations as the Commission deems appropriate. Every public servant shall participate in an ethics presentation approved by the Commission within six months of the public servant's election, reelection, appointment, or employment, and shall attend refresher ethics education presentations at least every two years thereafter in a manner as the Commission deems appropriate.

(c) A public servant appointed to a board determined and designated as nonadvisory under G.S. 138A-10(a)(3) shall attend an ethics presentation approved by the Commission within six months of notification of the designation by the Commission and at least every two years thereafter in a manner as the Commission deems appropriate.

(d) The Commission, jointly with the Committee, shall make basic ethics education and awareness presentations to all legislators and legislative employees upon their election, reelection, appointment, or employment and shall offer periodic refresher presentations as the Commission and the Committee deem appropriate. Every legislator shall participate in an ethics presentation approved by the Commission and Committee within two months of either the convening of the General Assembly to which the legislator is elected or within two months of the legislator's appointment, whichever is later. Every legislative employee shall participate in an ethics presentation approved by the Commission and Committee within three months of employment, and shall attend refresher ethics education presentations at least every two years thereafter, in a manner as the Commission and Committee deem appropriate.

(e) Upon request, the Commission shall assist each agency in developing in-house education programs and procedures necessary or desirable to meet the agency's particular needs for ethics education, conflict identification, and conflict avoidance.

(f) Each agency head shall designate an ethics liaison who shall maintain active communication with the Commission on all agency ethical issues. The ethics liaison shall attend ethics education and awareness programs as provided under this section and lobbying education and awareness programs as provided under G.S. 120C-103 and continuously assess and advise the Commission of any issues or conduct which might reasonably be expected to result in a conflict of interest and seek advice and rulings from the State Board as to their appropriate resolution.

(g) The Commission shall publish a newsletter containing summaries of the Commission's opinions, policies, procedures, and interpretive bulletins as issued from time to time. The newsletter shall be distributed to all covered persons and legislative employees. Publication under this subsection may be done electronically.

(h) The Commission shall assemble and maintain a collection of relevant State laws, rules, and regulations that set forth ethical standards applicable to covered persons. This collection shall be made available electronically as resource material to public servants, and ethics liaisons, upon request.

(i) This section shall not apply to judicial officers. (2006-201, s. 1; 2007-347, s. 9(a); 2008-213, ss. 59, 60; 2009-10, s. 4; 2009-549, s. 12; 2010-169, s. 22(a); 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, s. 3.1(a), (b).)

§ 138A-15. Duties of heads of State agencies.

(a) The head of each State agency, including the chair of each board subject to this Chapter, shall take an active role in furthering ethics in public service and ensuring compliance with this Chapter. The head of each State agency and the chair of each board shall make a conscientious, good-faith effort to assist public servants within the agency or on the board in monitoring their personal, financial, and professional affairs to avoid taking any action that results in a conflict of interest.

(b) The head of each State agency, including the chair of each board subject to this Chapter, shall maintain familiarity with and stay knowledgeable of the reports, opinions, newsletters, and other communications from the Commission regarding ethics in general and the interpretation and enforcement of this Chapter. The head of each State agency and the chair of each board shall also

maintain familiarity with and stay knowledgeable of the Commission's reports, evaluations, opinions, or findings regarding individual public servants in that individual's agency or on that individual's board, or under that individual's supervision or control, including all reports, evaluations, opinions, or findings pertaining to actual or potential conflicts of interest.

(c) When an actual or potential conflict of interest is cited by the State Board under G.S. 138A-24(e) with regard to a public servant sitting on a board, the conflict shall be recorded in the minutes of the applicable board and duly brought to the attention of the membership by the board's chair as often as necessary to remind all members of the conflict and to help ensure compliance with this Chapter.

(d) The head of each State agency, including the chair of each board subject to this Chapter, shall periodically remind public servants under that individual's authority of the public servant's duties to the public under the ethical standards and rules of conduct in this Chapter, including the duty of each public servant to continually monitor, evaluate, and manage the public servant's personal, financial, and professional affairs to ensure the absence of conflicts of interest.

(e) At the beginning of any meeting of a board, the chair shall remind all members of their duty to avoid conflicts of interest under this Chapter. The chair also shall inquire as to whether there is any known conflict of interest with respect to any matters coming before the board at that time.

(f) The head of each State agency, including the chair of each board subject to this Chapter, shall ensure that legal counsel employed by or assigned to their agency or board are familiar with the provisions of this Chapter, including the Ethical Standards for Covered Persons set forth in Article 4 of this Chapter, and are available to advise public servants on the ethical considerations involved in carrying out their public duties in the best interest of the public. Legal counsel so engaged may consult with the Commission, seek the Commission's assistance or advice, and refer public servants and others to the Commission as appropriate.

(g) Taking into consideration the individual autonomy, needs, and circumstances of each agency and board, the head of each State agency, including the chair of each board subject to this Chapter, shall consider the need for the development and implementation of in-house educational programs, procedures, or policies tailored to meet the agency's or board's particular needs for ethics education, conflict identification, and conflict avoidance. This includes the periodic presentation to all agency heads, their chief deputies or assistants, other public servants under their supervision or control, and members of boards, of the basic ethics education and awareness presentation outlined in G.S. 138A-14 and any other workshop or seminar program the agency head or board chair deems necessary in implementing this Chapter. Agency heads and board chairs may request reasonable assistance from the Commission in complying with the requirements of this subsection.

(h) As soon as reasonably practicable after the designation, hiring, or promotion of their chief deputies, assistants, or other public servants under their supervision or control, or learning of the appointment or election of other public servants to a board covered under this Chapter, all agency heads and board chairs shall (i) notify the Commission of such designation, hiring, promotion, appointment, or election and (ii) provide these public servants with copies of this Chapter and all applicable financial disclosure forms, if these materials and forms have not been previously provided to these public servants in connection with their designation, hiring, promotion, appointment, or election. In order to avoid duplication of effort, agency heads and board chairs shall coordinate this effort with the Commission's staff. (2006-201, s. 1; 2007-347, s. 9(b); 2008-213, ss. 61, 62; 2017-6, s. 3; 2018-146, s. 3.1(a), (b).)

§ **138A-16.** Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ **138A-17.** Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ **138A-18.** Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ **138A-19.** Reserved for future codification purposes.

§ **138A-20.** Reserved for future codification purposes.