

68B.31 Legislative ethics committee.

1. There shall be an ethics committee in the senate and an ethics committee in the house, each to consist of six members; three members to be appointed by the majority leader in each house, and three members by the minority leader in each house. A member of the ethics committee may disqualify himself or herself from participating in any proceeding upon submission of a written statement that the member cannot render an impartial and unbiased decision in a case. A member is ineligible to participate in committee meetings, as a member of the committee, in any proceeding relating to the member's own conduct. A member may be disqualified by a unanimous vote of the remaining eligible members of the committee. If a member of the ethics committee is disqualified from or is ineligible to participate in any committee proceedings, the authority responsible for the original appointment of the disqualified or ineligible member shall appoint a replacement member who shall serve during the period of the original member's disqualification or ineligibility.

2. Members shall receive a per diem and travel expenses at the same rate as paid members of interim committees for attending meetings held when the general assembly is not in session. The per diem and expenses shall be paid from funds appropriated by section 2.12.

3. The majority leader of each house shall designate the chairperson and vice chairperson, and the minority leader of each house shall designate the ranking member, of each committee. The chairperson of each committee shall have the following powers, duties and functions:

a. Preside over meetings of the committee.

b. Call meetings of the committee upon receipt of findings from the independent special counsel that there is probable cause to believe that a member of the general assembly or a lobbyist has committed a violation of a provision of this chapter or of the rules relating to ethical conduct that are adopted pursuant to this chapter.

4. a. The ethics committee of each house shall have the following powers, duties, and functions:

(1) Prepare a code of ethics within thirty days after the commencement of each general assembly.

(2) Prepare rules relating to lobbyists and lobbying activities in the general assembly.

(3) Issue advisory opinions interpreting the intent of constitutional and statutory provisions relating to legislators, lobbyists, and clients as well as interpreting the code of ethics and rules issued pursuant to this section. Opinions shall be issued when approved by a majority of the six members and may be issued upon the written request of a member of the general assembly or upon the committee's initiation. Opinions are not binding on the legislator, lobbyist, or client.

(4) Receive and hear complaints and charges against members of its house, lobbyists, or clients of a lobbyist alleging a violation of the code of ethics, rules governing lobbyists, this chapter, or other matters referred to it by its house or the independent special counsel. The committee shall recommend rules for the receipt and processing of findings of probable cause relating to ethical violations of members of the general assembly, lobbyists, or clients of lobbyists during the legislative session and those received after the general assembly adjourns.

(5) Recommend legislation relating to legislative ethics and lobbying activities.

b. The ethics committee may employ independent legal counsel to assist the committee in carrying out the committee's duties under this chapter. Payment of costs for the independent legal counsel shall be made from funds appropriated pursuant to section 2.12.

5. Any person may file a complaint with the ethics committee of either house alleging that a member of the general assembly, lobbyist, or client of a lobbyist before the general assembly has committed a violation of this chapter. The ethics committee shall prescribe and provide forms for this purpose. The complaint shall include the name and address of the complainant and a statement of the facts believed to be true that form the basis of the complaint, including the sources of information and approximate dates of the acts alleged and a certification by the complainant under penalty of perjury that the facts stated to be true are true to the best of the complainant's knowledge.

6. The ethics committee shall promptly notify any party alleged to have committed a

violation of the code of ethics, rules governing lobbyists, or this chapter of the filing of a complaint by causing a copy of the complaint to be served or personally delivered to the party charged, unless service is waived by the party charged, and shall review the complaint to determine if the complaint meets the requirements for formal sufficiency. If the complaint is deficient as to form, the complaint shall be returned to the complainant with a statement of the nature of the deficiency and the party charged in the complaint shall be notified that the complaint has been returned. If a complaint, previously found to be deficient as to form, is refiled in different form, the party charged in the complaint shall be provided with a copy of the new document in the same manner as provided for service of the initial complaint. Any amendments to a complaint that are filed with the committee shall also be served or personally delivered, unless service is waived, to the party charged in the complaint. If the complaint is sufficient as to form, the ethics committee shall review the complaint to determine whether the complaint states a valid charge which may be investigated. A valid complaint must allege all of the following:

a. Facts, that if true, establish a violation of a provision of this chapter, the rules governing lobbyists, or the code of ethics for which penalties or other remedies are provided.

b. That the conduct providing the basis for the complaint occurred within three years of the filing of the complaint.

c. That the party charged with a violation is a party subject to the jurisdiction of the ethics committee.

7. a. If the ethics committee determines that a complaint is not valid, the complaint shall be dismissed and returned to the complainant with a notice of dismissal stating the reason or reasons for the dismissal. If the ethics committee determines that a complaint is valid and the ethics committee does not take action under rules adopted pursuant to paragraph "b", the ethics committee shall request that the chief justice of the supreme court appoint an independent special counsel to investigate the allegations contained in the complaint to determine whether there is probable cause to believe that a violation of this chapter has occurred and whether an evidentiary hearing on the complaint should be held. Payment of costs for the independent special counsel shall be made from section 2.12.

b. The ethics committee may adopt rules for purposes of taking action on valid complaints without requesting the appointment of an independent special counsel and without requiring action by the appropriate house pursuant to subsection 11. Such action may only be taken if the committee determines that no dispute exists between the parties regarding material facts that establish a violation.

8. If a hearing on the complaint is ordered, the ethics committee shall receive all admissible evidence, determine any factual or legal issues presented during the hearing, and make findings of fact based upon evidence received. Hearings shall be conducted in the manner prescribed in section 17A.12. The rules of evidence applicable under section 17A.14 shall also apply in hearings before the ethics committee. Clear and convincing evidence shall be required to support a finding that the member of the general assembly, lobbyist, or client before the general assembly has committed a violation of this chapter. Parties to a complaint may, subject to the approval of the ethics committee, negotiate for settlement of disputes that are before the ethics committee. Terms of any negotiated settlements shall be publicly recorded. If a complaint is filed or initiated less than ninety days before the election for a state office, for which the person named in the complaint is the incumbent officeholder, the ethics committee shall, if possible, set the hearing at the earliest available date so as to allow the issue to be resolved before the election. An extension of time for a hearing may be granted when both parties mutually agree on an alternate date for the hearing. The ethics committee shall make every effort to hear all ethics complaints within three months of the date that the complaints are filed. However, after three months from the date of the filing of the complaint, extensions of time for purposes of preparing for hearing may only be granted by the ethics committee when the party charged in the complaint with the ethics violation consents to an extension. If the party charged does not consent to an extension, the ethics committee shall not grant any extensions of time for preparation prior to hearing. All complaints alleging a violation of this chapter or the code of ethics shall be heard within nine months of the filing of the complaint. Final dispositions of violations, which the ethics

committee has found to have been established by clear and convincing evidence, shall be made within thirty days of the conclusion of the hearing on the complaint.

9. The ethics committee of each house shall recommend rules for adoption by the respective house relating to the confidentiality of a complaint or information which has been filed or provided to the committee. Rules adopted shall provide for initial confidentiality of a complaint, unless the complaint has been publicly disclosed, and shall permit the ethics committee to treat some or all of the contents of a complaint or other information as confidential if the committee finds that the criteria established under section 22.7, subsection 18, for keeping certain information confidential, are met. If the existence of a complaint or a preliminary investigation is made public, the ethics committee shall publicly confirm the existence of the complaint or preliminary inquiry and, in the ethics committee's discretion, make public the complaint or investigation and any documents which were issued to any party to the complaint or investigation. However, this subsection shall not prevent the committee from furnishing the complaint or other information to the appropriate law enforcement authorities at any time. Upon commencement of a hearing on a complaint, all investigative material shall be made available to the subject of the hearing and any material that is introduced at the hearing shall be public information.

10. The code of ethics and rules relating to lobbyists and lobbying activities shall not become effective until approved by the members of the house to which the proposed code and rules apply. The code or rules may be amended either upon the recommendation of the ethics committee or by members of the general assembly.

11. Violation of a provision of this chapter or rules adopted relating to ethical conduct may result in censure, reprimand, or other sanctions as determined by a majority of the member's house. However, a member may be suspended or expelled and the member's salary forfeited only if directed by a two-thirds vote of the member's house. A suspension, expulsion, or forfeiture of salary shall be for the duration specified in the directing resolution. Violation of a rule relating to lobbyists and lobbying activities may result in censure, reprimand, or other sanctions as determined by a majority of the members of the house in which the violation occurred. However, a lobbyist may be suspended from lobbying activities for the duration provided in the directing resolution only if directed by a two-thirds vote of the house in which the violation occurred.

[C71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §68B.10]

87 Acts, ch 213, §4 – 7; 90 Acts, ch 1223, §14; 90 Acts, ch 1256, §26; 92 Acts, ch 1228, §13 C93, §68B.31

93 Acts, ch 163, §11 – 13; 2008 Acts, ch 1032, §201; 2010 Acts, ch 1006, §2 – 5, 11

Referred to in §22.7, 68B.31A