

17A.17 Ex parte communications and separation of functions.

1. a. Unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, a presiding officer in a contested case shall not communicate directly or indirectly with any person or party in connection with any issue of fact or law in that contested case, except upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate as shall be provided for by agency rules.

b. However, without such notice and opportunity for all parties to participate, a presiding officer in a contested case may communicate with members of the agency, and may have the aid and advice of persons other than those with a personal interest in, or those engaged in personally investigating, prosecuting, or advocating in, either the case under consideration or a pending factually related case involving the same parties so long as those persons do not directly or indirectly communicate to the presiding officer any ex parte communications they have received of a type that the presiding officer would be prohibited from receiving or that furnish, augment, diminish, or modify the evidence in the record.

2. Unless required for the disposition of ex parte matters specifically authorized by statute, parties or their representatives in a contested case and persons with a direct or indirect interest in such a case shall not communicate, directly or indirectly, in connection with any issue of fact or law in that contested case, with a presiding officer in that contested case, except upon notice and opportunity for all parties to participate as shall be provided for by agency rules.

3. If, before serving as the presiding officer in a contested case, a person receives an ex parte communication relating directly to the merits of the proceeding over which that person subsequently presides, the person, promptly after starting to serve, shall disclose to all parties any material factual information so received and not otherwise disclosed to those parties pursuant to [section 17A.13, subsection 2](#), or through discovery.

4. A presiding officer who receives an ex parte communication in violation of [this section](#) shall place on the record of the pending matter all such written communications received, all written responses to the communications, and a memorandum stating the substance of all such oral and other communications received, all responses made, and the identity of each person from whom the presiding officer received a prohibited ex parte communication, and shall advise all parties that these matters have been placed on the record. Any party desiring to rebut the prohibited ex parte communication must be allowed to do so, upon requesting the opportunity for rebuttal within ten days after notice of the communication.

5. If the effect of an ex parte communication received in violation of [this section](#) is so prejudicial that it cannot be cured by the procedure in [subsection 4](#), a presiding officer who receives the communication shall be disqualified and the portions of the record pertaining to the communication shall be sealed by protective order.

6. The agency and any party may report any violation of [this section](#) to appropriate authorities for any disciplinary proceedings provided by law. In addition, each agency by rule shall provide for appropriate sanctions, including default, suspending or revoking a privilege to practice before the agency, and censuring, suspending, or dismissing agency personnel, for any violations of [this section](#).

7. A party to a contested case proceeding may file a timely and sufficient affidavit alleging a violation of any provision of [this section](#). The agency shall determine the matter as part of the record in the case. When an agency in these circumstances makes such a determination with respect to an agency member, that determination shall be subject to de novo judicial review in any subsequent review proceeding of the case.

8. An individual who participates in the making of any proposed or final decision in a contested case shall not have personally investigated, prosecuted, or advocated in connection with that case, the specific controversy underlying that case, or another pending factually related contested case, or pending factually related controversy that may culminate in a contested case, involving the same parties. In addition, such an individual shall not be subject to the authority, direction, or discretion of any person who has personally investigated, prosecuted, or advocated in connection with that contested case, the specific controversy underlying that contested case, or a pending factually related contested case

or controversy, involving the same parties. However, [this section](#) shall not be construed to preclude a person from serving as a presiding officer solely because that person determined there was probable cause to initiate the proceeding.

[C75, 77, 79, 81, §17A.17]

[98 Acts, ch 1202, §19, 46; 2008 Acts, ch 1032, §201; 2016 Acts, ch 1073, §13](#)

Referred to in [§2C.9, 17A.9, 86.17, 216.15, 421.17, 542.11](#)