



**Prince George's County  
Office of Ethics and Accountability and  
Board of Ethics**

# **Annual Report**

## **INCLUSIVE OF CALENDAR YEAR 2022 & FISCAL YEAR 2023**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hon. Todd M. Turner, Esq.



It is with great pleasure I am providing my first annual report for the Office of Ethics and Accountability (OEA) in conjunction with the Board of Ethics (BOE). As we remain committed to promoting trust in County government, OEA is always looking for ways to better achieve our mission of providing increased accountability and oversight in the operations of the County government.

As a result of the OEA's investigations, legal reviews and other activities, we are providing recommendations to Executive and County Council Leadership to promote a culture of integrity, efficiency and public trust. The Office of Ethics and Accountability has made recommendations each year since Fiscal Year 2015, resulting in significant policy development and organizational change. We highlighted several top Fiscal Year 2023 recommendations in this Report.

During Fiscal Year 2023, OEA continued to provide administrative support to the Board of Ethics through the collection of financial disclosure statements from County officials and employees, the registration and reporting of lobbying activities, and the continuation of regular board meetings and hearings, which were conducted virtually. There were six (6) referrals of alleged ethics violations complaints referred to the Board of Ethics of which three (3) substantiated or partially substantiated.

This past year, OEA collaborated with the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) to offer mandatory ethics training and resources to the County's workforce of more than 6,000 employees and officials. The Office is continuing to collaborate with the OHRM and the Office of Information Technology (OIT) to make ethics training and awareness more accessible to both employees and appointed officials operating on both internal and external electronic platforms.

In FY 2023 the Office began additional community outreach and education activities to inform the public of the mission of OEA and the Board of Ethics in County government. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to serve and provide increased accountability and oversight in the operations of Prince George's County government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd M. Turner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Todd M. Turner  
Executive Director

*“Your **A**dvice, **C**ompliance, & **E**nforcement Team”*

## Mission

The mission of the Office of Ethics and Accountability is to promote public trust in County government through:

- Providing comprehensive intake, processing, investigations, management, and adjudication of allegations of waste, fraud, abuse and illegal acts in County government.
- Promoting disclosure of outside business and monetary interests of County government employees/officials and real-time notice of lobbying activity directed towards County government.
- Providing training, technical assistance and public education necessary to ensure County government services are delivered with integrity and in accordance with the standards of professional conduct identified within the ethics code.

## Purpose

The Office of Ethics and Accountability provides increased accountability and oversight in the operations of the County government by identifying fraud, waste, abuse, and illegal acts pursuant to Prince George's County Code §2-299. It also provides support to the Prince George's County Board of Ethics in the exercise of its authority to interpret the County Code of Ethics in order to promote public trust in County government by ensuring impartiality of the employees and elected officials in accordance with Prince George's County Code §2-292.

The Office of Ethics and Accountability's two main functions are best described as investigative of County operations and administrative in its support to the Board of Ethics. Investigations are initiated in several ways: (1) through the PGCEthics Hotline, (2) directly to the Office, (3) via media, or (4) by other means. After an initial investigation by OEA, a matter may eventually be referred to law enforcement, an appropriate agency, or the Board of Ethics. Administratively, the Office of Ethics and Accountability oversees Financial Disclosure Statement submissions and lobbyists' registrations and reports; renders ethics advice to individuals governed by the Ethics Code; maintains compliance with the Open Meetings Act for the Board of Ethics; and provides ethics training to County officials, employees and lobbyists.

### Office of Ethics and Accountability Staff

Executive Director	Todd M. Turner	tmturner2@co.pg.md.us	(301) 883-3445
Compliance Officer	Roslyn Walker	rwalker@co.pg.md.us	(301) 883-3447
Legal Counsel	Bamidele Alexander	bbalexander1@co.pg.md.us	(301) 883-3446
Compliance Analyst	Vacant		(301) 883-5331
Investigator	Garry Bourke	gbourke@co.pg.md.us	(301) 883-3448
Administrative Aide	Chelinda Bullock	cvbullock@co.pg.md.us	(301) 883-3445

## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

**Cassandra Burckhalter**



In accordance with Section 2- 292(a)(6) of the Prince George’s County Code, the Board of Ethics is required to provide an annual report of its activities to the County Executive and County Council. I am pleased to provide the 2023 Annual Report of the Board of Ethics (“Board”).

I am excited to report that Calendar Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023 included the continuation of the County’s mandatory ethics training for employees, board and commission members and elected officials. The Office of Ethics and Accountability successfully collaborated with the Office of Human Resources Management to offer training through the County’s online learning module system NEOGOV.

Throughout the year, the Board and OEA staff continued to receive and respond to a large number of requests for ethics advice, regarding, but not limited to, conflicts of interest, gifts, political activity, secondary employment, and post-employment matters.

The Office of Ethics and Accountability continued to investigate several complaints alleging violations of the Ethics Code. Some of the complaints have resulted in the issuance of recommendations to improve County policies and procedures.

To ensure compliance with the County’s Code of Ethics, during the Financial Disclosure Statement filing season, the Office of Ethics and Accountability staff provided assistance and legal advice on electronic filings to several officials, employees, volunteer commissioners and board members. To-date, staff have received and processed approximately (1,000) Financial Disclosures Statements as well as seventy-six (76) lobbyist registration forms and two-hundred and seventy-six (276) lobbyist annual reports.

The Board will continue to render advisory opinions to officials and the employees of the County and address all questions arising under the Code of Ethics, receive complaints and authorize, when applicable, the conduct of investigations in connection with the Code of Ethics. This past year, the Board adopted a Board Manual setting forth the board policies, procedures and other information for future Boards.

In my tenth year of service on the Board, I want to thank my fellow Board Members for their dedicated service. I look forward to continuing to serve the County and promoting public trust in its officials and employees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cassandra Burckhalter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cassandra Burckhalter  
Board Chair

## **Purpose of the Board of Ethics**

The Code was enacted to guard against improper influence and even the appearance of improper influence by County officials, employees and appointees to boards and commissions. To ensure impartiality and independent judgment, the Ethics Code requires designated individuals to disclose their financial affairs, and it sets standards for their business conduct. The Board of Ethics is the advisory body responsible for interpreting the Ethics Code and advising those persons subject to it. The Board of Ethics also serves as the body to hear and determine ethics complaints and violations.

## **Members of the Board of Ethics**

The Board of Ethics currently consists of five (5) members. Members must be residents of Prince George's County and no more than three members may be of the same political party. Todd M. Turner serves as the Executive Director to the Board of Ethics in addition to serving as the Executive Director to the Office of Ethics and Accountability. The Board of Ethics selected Cassandra Burckhalter to serve as Chair through December 31, 2023. The remaining members are as follows: Sharon Theodore-Lewis, Esq., Member, Charlene Gallion, Member, Melanie Barr-Brooks, Member, and Mickei Milton, Member.

## **Meetings of the Board of Ethics**

All regular meetings were either held virtually or in the Office of Ethics and Accountability, in the Largo Government Center located at 9201 Basil Court, Suite 155, Largo, Maryland 20774. As required, advance notice of meetings and the possibility of closed sessions were posted on the County's website. All decisions of the Board of Ethics are reflected in the minutes of the monthly meetings and are available on the OEA's website.

Generally, agenda topics included establishing procedures for the Board of Ethics, consideration of formal requests for advisory opinions on the application of Ethics Code, and review of investigation reports related to alleged violations of the County's Ethics Code, many of which include recommendations to Executive Leadership in the County. The Board has submitted proposed legislation to the County Council for revisions to the County's Ethics Code disclosure requirements as part of the requirements to align with the State's Ethics Laws and to promote public trust in County government.

During the 2022 calendar year, the Board of Ethics met nine (9) times for regular session, and once (1) for a hearing (open and closed) session. A notice of the meetings appeared on the County's website. The Board of Ethics conducted closed sessions to discuss advisory opinion requests, exemption requests and Board investigation referrals. The Board of Ethics conducted open meetings for all other actions.

## **Charter §1002 Waivers**

The Board of Ethics did not receive any requests for Section 1002 waivers in the calendar year of 2022. Section 1002 of the Charter provides that the Board of Ethics may authorize any County employee to own stock or maintain a business, which engages in business with the County subject to the Board of Ethics' determination that the employee's involvement does not violate the public trust, and that there is full disclosure of all pertinent facts.

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## Board of Ethics Referrals

The Board of Ethics is empowered with authority to determine violations of the County's Ethics Code. The Board of Ethics reviews all complaints of alleged violations, conducts fact findings and hearings, and determines if an Ethics Code violation has occurred. Investigations of ethics violations completed by the Office of Ethics and Accountability are referred to the Board of Ethics for a determination of violations. Some complaints may be determined by the Board of Ethics in the following fiscal year upon completion of investigations. During the 2023 Fiscal Year, the Board received six (6) referrals of alleged ethics violations of which three (3) were substantiated or partially substantiated through investigations by the Office of Ethics and Accountability.

## Enforcement Activities

The Board of Ethics is empowered to impose fines and other penalties as warranted and to seek judicial enforcement of its sanctions. The Board of Ethics did not seek judicial enforcement but did impose late filing fees for delinquent filing of Financial Disclosure Statements and Lobbyists Annual Reports during the calendar year.

## Proposed Legislative Changes

Periodically, certain provisions in the Prince George's County Code will require revisions to comply with statutory changes made by the State Ethics Commission or to clarify interpretation to ensure compliance. Any proposed amendments to the Prince George's County Code of Ethics embodied in legislative proposals require approval by the State Ethics Commission in addition to an enactment by the County Council. There were no County Code legislative reviews in FY 2023. OEA also reviewed, as the request of the Executive Branch, several State legislative bills in the 2023 General Assembly session for potential impacts on the County Code and/or OEA operations.

## Ethics Training

The Office of Ethics & Accountability collaborated with the OHRM to offer mandatory ethics training and other ethics training resources to more than 6,000 employees, officials and board/commission members. Between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, the Office provided in-person and/or online ethics training to several agencies, boards and commissions, including the new Police Accountability Board (PAB) and Administrative Charging Committee (ACC) created in 2022. Through the use of online Learning Management Systems such as NEOGOV and E-Learning platforms, ethics training is made readily available to individuals upon hire or appointment and throughout their tenure of service with the County. The Office promotes ethics training and compliance through five (5) distinct training areas: new employee orientation materials, online Learning Management System training, in-person or virtual online workshops, on-site agency trainings by agency request, and special ethics topics trainings. Ethics training materials are periodically reviewed to incorporate any revisions to the Code of Ethics or other requirements.

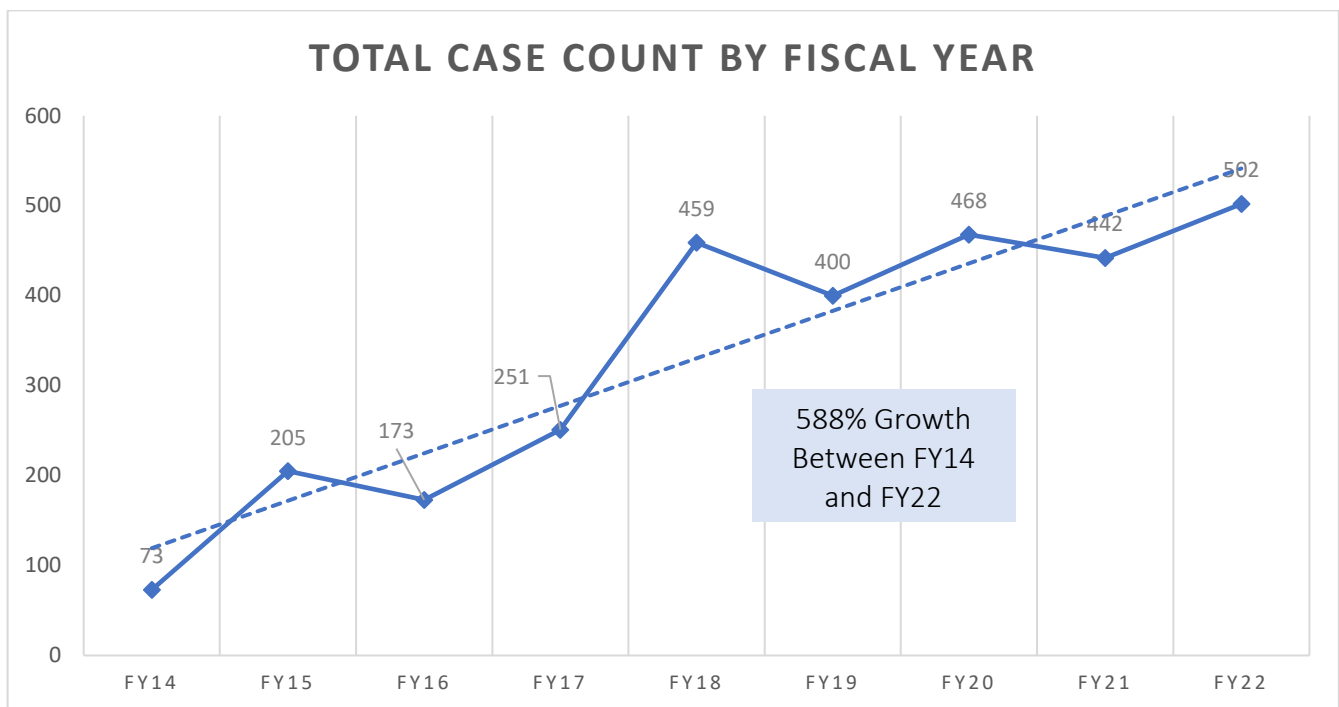




## FY2023 Key Accomplishments

The Office of Ethics and Accountability (OEA) achieved the following key milestones:

The Office of Ethics and Accountability processed four hundred and seventy-three (473) requests for the following case types in Fiscal Year 2023: investigations, operations reviews, audits, legal reviews, advisory opinions, informal ethics advice, information provision, and financial disclosure exemptions or fee waivers – largely received electronically. The Office has seen a five hundred eighty eight percent (588%) increase in cases since its establishment in Fiscal Year 2014. Of the complaints investigated solely or jointly by the Office of Ethics and Accountability this fiscal year, three (3) cases were substantiated or partially substantiated with appropriate actions taken by agencies to address the identified ethics violations. Information related to Advisory Opinions, Informal Ethics Advice and Investigations are provided on the OEA's website.



The Office of Ethics and Accountability continues to provide ethics advice, rendering thirty-five (35) informal opinions and one (1) formal advisory opinion to officials, employees and lobbyists in Fiscal Year 2023. During Fiscal Year 2023, twenty-six percent (25%) of the cases involved investigations and seven percent (7%) involved the rendering of informal ethics advice. Legal reviews constituted another twenty percent (20%) of the Office's efforts, which entailed, in part, review of the County and State legislation that impacted ethics laws. Information Requests comprised nine percent (9%) of cases and Waivers or Exemptions comprised five percent (5%) of cases. OEA also carried out Operations Reviews (1%) and provided administrative support to the Board of Ethics in rendering Advisory Opinions (1%) in the interpretation of permissible activities under the County's Ethics Code.



The majority of cases received by OEA in Fiscal Year 2023 were filed electronically or by phone such as via email directly to the Office, through the County's Web-Portal, or through the hotline, which allows reporters to file complaints anonymously. This category (internal) was newly added in Fiscal Year 2020 and therefore omitted in prior years. The Office of Ethics and Accountability continues to utilize an online payment system for late fees and fines due from designated filers of Financial Disclosure Statements and lobbyists. This electronic payment enhancement provides convenience to those designated filers who have been assessed fees as a result of filing their disclosure statements and reports after the mandated filing dates mandated by the County's Ethics Code.

In its role of providing oversight and review of the collection of Financial Disclosure Statements (FDS) from designated filers in accordance with the County's Ethics Code, the Office of Ethics and Accountability processed over one thousand (1,000) Financial Disclosure Statements. OEA annually conducts a common error and FDS Schedules audits on approximately one-hundred and twenty-five (125) Financial Disclosure Statements filed for calendar year 2022 pertaining to Schedule E (business entities employed with County), Schedule H (other sources of income), and Schedule J (Other Interests) to determine any conflicts related to secondary employment.

The Office of Ethics and Accountability continues to partner with agencies to broaden its global ethics training initiatives, and through training, bring awareness to officials and employees on the importance of reporting ethics violations and instances of fraud, waste, abuse, illegal acts and noncompliance with County policies.



OEA Compliance Officer Roslyn Walker (center) being recognized by Chief Administrative Officer Tara H. Jackson for Public Service Recognition Week – May 2023.  
Photo Credit: Office of the County Executive

## Major Objectives for Fiscal Year 2024

The Office of Ethics and Accountability will continue to focus on establishing processes to govern its core services of investigations, evaluation of County operations, collection of Financial Disclosure Statements for employees and officials, collection of registrations and annual reports for lobbyists, and provision of ethics training and advice to include the following:

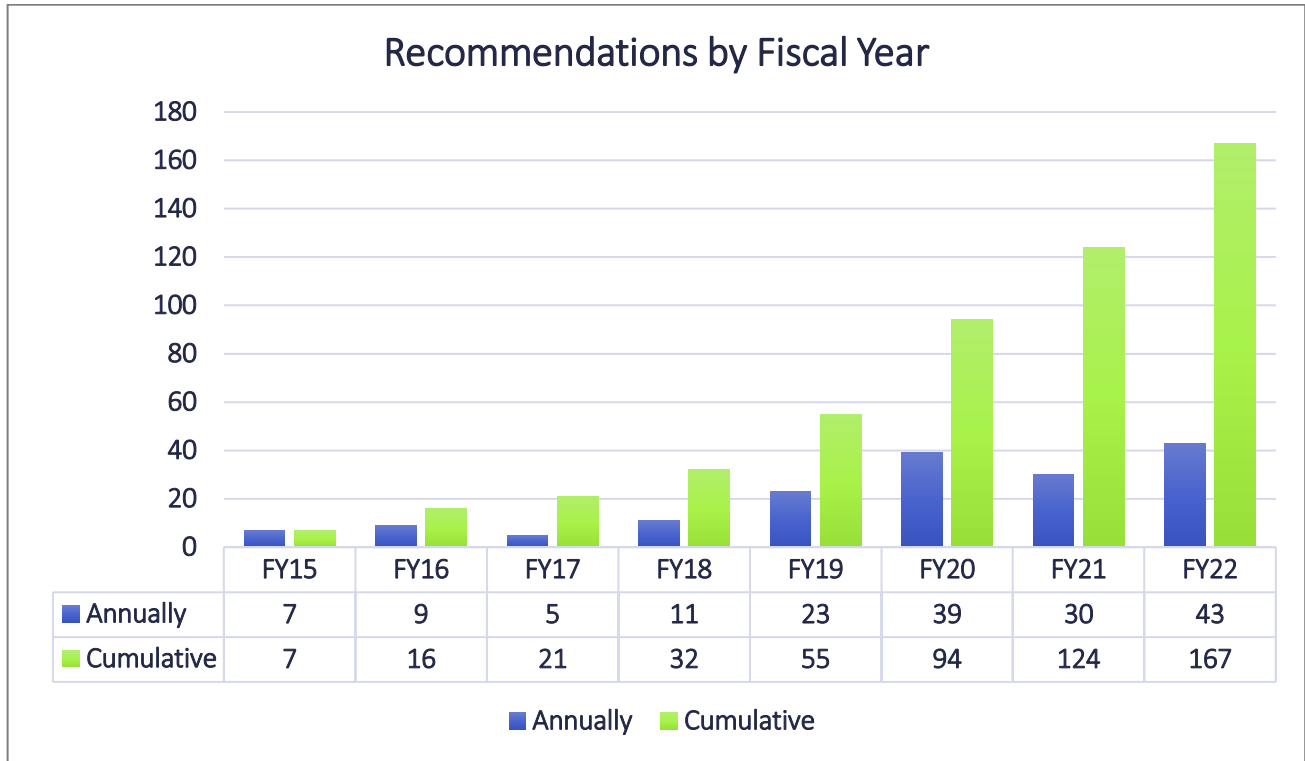
- To provide comprehensive intake, processing, investigation, management, adjudication, analysis, reporting of allegations of fraud, waste, abuse, illegal acts, and operations review in County government and make necessary recommendations to executive and legislative officials to promote efficiency and accountability in County government.
- To complete the County Ethics Code required 5-year Quality Assurance Review (last one was done in 2019).
- To implementation of the county's Language Access Program (LAP) within OEA.
- To conduct additional community outreach and education activities (in conjunction with the Office of Community Relations).
- To continue to promote disclosure of the outside business and monetary interests of County government employees/officials and real-time notice of lobbying activity directed towards County government.
- To continue to provide ethics advice and legal reviews to officials and employees to ensure compliance with the County's Ethics Code.
- To continue to provide comprehensive reviews of deficiencies in County government to ensure compliance with policies and evaluate the effectiveness of internal controls.



OEA Executive Director Turner at the OEA information table set up at the annual Bowiefest event in Bowie – June 2023.

## Recommendations and Actions Taken

In Fiscal Year 2023, the Office of Ethics and Accountability is providing additional recommendations to Executive Management and County Council Leadership. Actions taken in response to recommendations in Fiscal Year 2022 are also provided in the table below.



OEA Director Turner at Prince George’s County Jobs Fair hosted by the County Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) – Jan. 2023

Photo Credit: John M. Edmunds

## FY 2023 Highlighted Recommendations

#	Case No.	Case Details	Recommendation(s)	Date Issued
1.	N/A	N/A	Review, update and reissue Executive Order 13-2014 – Code of Ethics §2-294 – Financial Disclosure Statement Designated Filers for Agencies, Boards & Commissions	N/A
2.	N/A	N/A	Possible State Ethics Code clarifying legislation for State Financial Disclosure Statements (FDS) filing requirements with the County Board of Ethics/OEA in Prince George’s County for Bi-County Commissions (M-NCPPC, WSSC and WSTC)(Gen. Prov. Art. §§5-602, 5-822 — 5-832).	N/A
3.	N/A	N/A	Possible County Ethics Code §2-294(b) clarifying legislation for Bi-County Commissions (M-NCPPC, WSSC and WSTC) to provide their State Financial Disclosure Statements (FDS) to the County Board of Ethics/OEA.	N/A
4.	N/A	N/A	People’s Zoning Counsel – Provide Contact Information on County Council and M-NCPPC websites	N/A
5.	N/A	N/A	Agency Cable Bill Review by Cable Commission & OIT – Possible consolidation of service to reduce cost to the County	N/A
6.	22-0412	<b>Case Type:</b> FWAI (Illegal Act) <b>Agency/B/C:</b> DPIE <b>Subject:</b> Inspector accused of illegally removing signage (feather flags) from private property <b>Disposition:</b> Unsubstantiated	I. The Director of DPIE review with the inspectors through training or written instructions, agency practices and procedures for code enforcement involving any right-of-way to ensure alignment with the County Code	8/4/22
7.	23-0016e	<b>Case Type:</b> Ethics <b>Agency/B/C:</b> Council <b>Subject:</b> Alleged Abuse of Franking Privileges - Ethics Code §2-293(f) Use of Resources <b>Disposition:</b> Unsubstantiated	I. The County Council Administrator consider implementing a County policy for the Legislative Branch to govern elected officials’ use of franking privileges close to elections.	10/17/22

## FY 2023 Highlighted Recommendations (Con't)

#	Case No.	Case Details	Recommendation(s)	Date Issued
8.	23-0076e	<p><b>Case Type:</b> Ethics  <b>Agency/B/C:</b> OIT  <b>Subject:</b> Employee engaged in working unreported secondary and potentially engaged in this secondary employment during work hours.  <b>Disposition:</b> Partially Substantiated</p>	<p>1. The Director of OIT require Employee to submit a request for Secondary Employment within ten (10) days. If approved, the approval should clearly state Employee is prohibited from working secondary employment during Employee's County work hours or using County resources therewith.</p>	11/15/22
9.	23-0252	<p><b>Case Type:</b> FWAI  <b>Agency/B/C:</b> Housing Authority  <b>Subject:</b> Allegation that employee fraudulently used FMLA  <b>Disposition:</b> Referred</p>	<p>1. OEA, in consultation with the Office of Law (OOL) recommends that the alleged violation of the FMLA approval process is a matter to be referred to the Housing Authority of Prince George's County (HAPGC). It is further recommended that HAPGC, in coordination with the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), should be responsible for determining and administering any level of appropriate disciplinary action towards the Respondent, based on policy.</p>	6/8/23
10.	23-0262	<p><b>Case Type:</b> FWAI  <b>Agency/B/C:</b> Fire/EMS Department  <b>Subject:</b> A volunteer fire chief alleges that the Fire Chief's proposed and final disciplinary action for use of offensive language involving the Fire Chief in a social media post was not consistent, fair, reasonable, and equitable and that the Fire Chief could not be objective and fair in adjudicating the matter  <b>Disposition:</b> Unsubstantiated</p>	<p>1. While the Fire Chief has final authority in disciplinary matters under the County Code and General Orders involving career staff, volunteer leadership and members disciplinary actions, the Fire Chief should consider recusal from the disciplinary process and delegation of their authority pursuant to General Order #01-03, Section IIA(1) when they are the subject matter of the complaint to avoid a conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest.  2. OEA suggested that General Order #11-24, if and when reviewed and revised, to include specific timeframes for each stage of the disciplinary process in order to afford due process to those under investigation.</p>	6/2/23

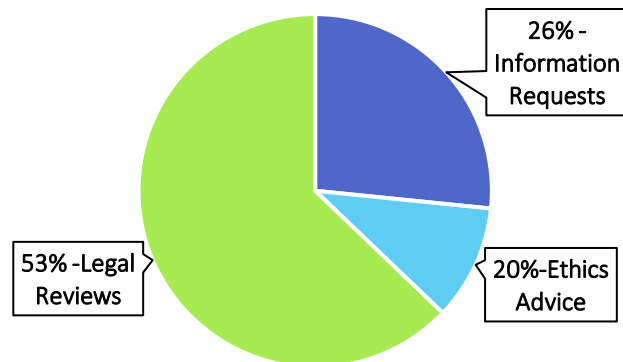


## Ethics Advice by the Office of Ethics and Accountability

The Office of Ethics and Accountability provides support to the Board in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Accountability, §2-303. The Office's Legal Counsel provides written and verbal advice to County officials, employees, agencies, and the public who seek advice regarding the application of the County's Code of Ethics.

The Office of Ethics and Accountability received a combined total of one hundred seventy-two (172) requests for Informal Ethics Advice, Legal Reviews or Information Requests in Fiscal Year 2023. Ninety-two (92) involved legal reviews; forty-five (45) involved requests for information; and thirty-five (35) involved informal ethics advice. The informal ethics advice, involved subject matter such as conflicts of interest; gifts/solicitation/fundraising; secondary employment; and Financial Disclosure Statements. Other Types of Informal Ethics Advice, which includes advice pertaining to post-employment, political activity, prestige of office, lobbying, honorarium and other related matters.

FY2023 Informal Ethics Advice, Legal Reviews, and Information Requests



Board of Ethics Chair Cassandra Burckhalter and OEA Executive Director Turner testifying at the Prince George's County Council's Fiscal Year 2024 Committee Budget meeting, April 2023.

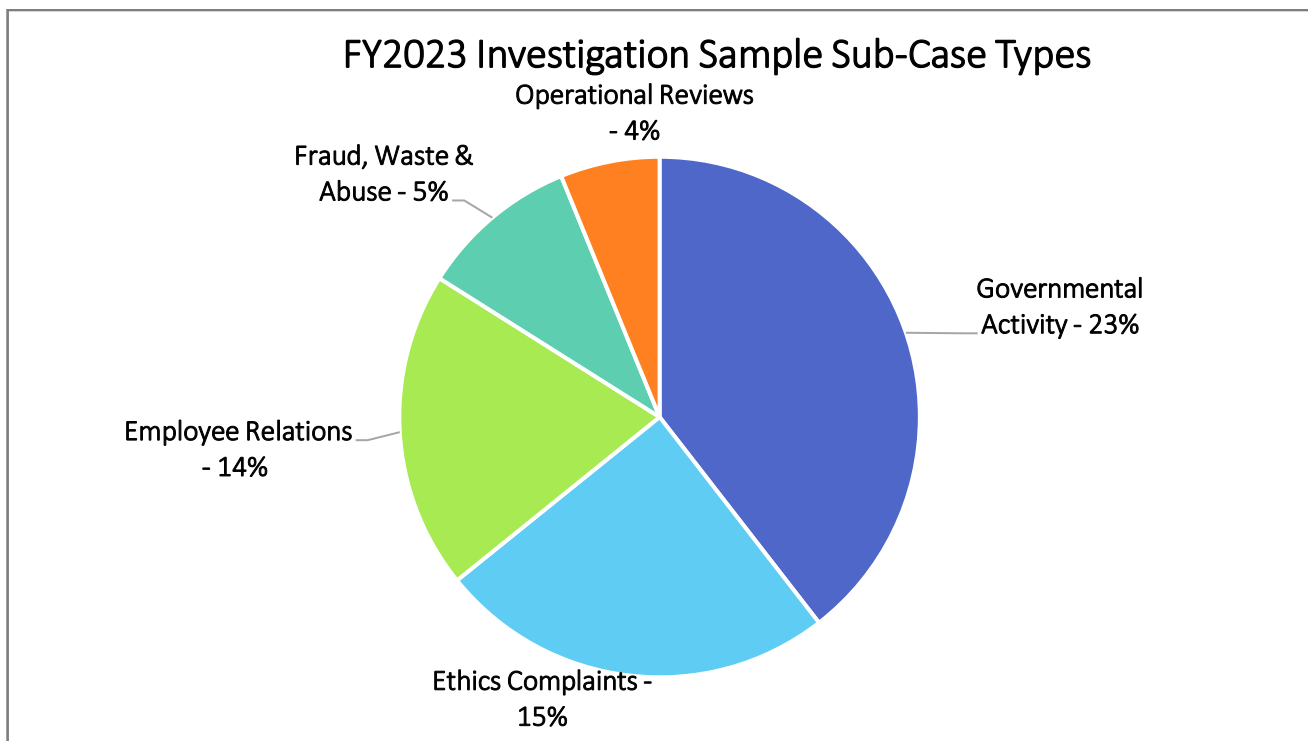
Photo Credit: John M. Edmunds

## FY 2023 Investigations

The Office of Ethics and Accountability is authorized pursuant to the County's Ethics Code, §2-303 to conduct criminal, civil and administrative investigations; to provide information and evidence that relates to criminal acts to appropriate law enforcement officials; to initiate reviews of operations of County government as deemed appropriate; to investigate complaints from any source or upon its own initiative concerning alleged fraud, waste, abuse and service deficiencies; and to conduct joint investigations and projects with the Office of Audits and Investigations as well as other oversight, public safety or law enforcement agencies.

The Office of Ethics and Accountability does not prosecute criminal conduct. However, criminal conduct discovered by OEA during its investigation of a complaint or tip is referred to the appropriate prosecuting authority in accordance with the County's Ethics and Accountability Code. Moreover, the Office of Ethics and Accountability does not administer personnel matters or seek to resolve personnel conflicts that have existing procedures in place to address. Although allegations may be unsubstantiated, many of the investigations may result in the issuance of recommendations to Executive and Legislative Leadership to address appearances of conflicts of interests, policy gaps, and operational deficiencies.

During Fiscal Year 2023, OEA conducted sixty-nine (69) investigations involving concerns with government activities (16), alleged fraud, waste, abuse or illegal activity (5), ethics complaints (11), employee relations matters (10), and operational reviews (3). Investigations comprised twenty-five percent (25%) of all case types, and the below chart displays additional details related to investigation outcomes. Additional categorization is used to segregate the matters under investigation and the chart below outlines Investigation Sub-Case types.





## Lobbyists Disclosures and Annual Reports

The Office of Ethics & Accountability conducted a review of all Lobbyists' 2022 Registration & Disclosure Forms and 2022 Annual Report Forms. In Calendar Year 2022, our Office processed two-hundred and seventy-six (276) registration forms and Annual Reports from sixty (60) total registered lobbyists. As of July 2023, our Office has processed three-hundred and sixty (362) registration forms from seventy-seven (77) total registered lobbyists for Calendar Year 2023.

A list of lobbyists registered and their expenditures with the Office of Ethics and Accountability in calendar years 2022 and 2023 (as of July 30) and their clients can be found on the OEA's website.

The following is the summary of Lobbyists' Annual Reports filed with the Board of Ethics for Calendar Year 2022. Total expenditures for 2022 lobbying activities were \$2,113,483.77. This is an approximately 66% increase from the 2021 total expenditures of \$1,268,753.37. The summary of sub-categories on the 2022 Lobbyists' Reports are as follows:

Lobbying Activities	Total Expenditures
Total compensation paid to the lobbyist not including expenses reported under (B) through (I) below, salaries, compensations, or reimbursed expenses of the staff of the lobbyist:	\$2,113,483.77
Office expenses of the lobbyist not reported in (A):	\$441.64
Professional and technical research and assistance not reported in (A):	\$0
Publications which expressly encourage persons to communicate with Prince George's County officials or employees:	\$0
Fees and expenses paid to witnesses:	\$0
Meals and beverages for Prince George's County Officials or employees or their spouses or dependent children:	\$0
Special events in which all members of the Council or standing committee are invited:	\$12,075.74
Expenses for food, lodging, entertainment of officials or employees for a meeting which was given in return for participation in a panel or speaking engagement at the meeting:	\$0
Other gifts to or for officials or employees or their spouses or their dependent children:	\$0
Other expenses:	\$0
Subtotal of A through F:	\$2,113,925.41
Subtotal of G through J:	\$12,075.74

