

Washington State Executive Ethics Board

2425 Bristol Court SW, PO Box 40149, Olympia WA 98504-0149

Filing a Complaint

How to File a Complaint

If you believe that a state officer or state employee has engaged in activities that may be in violation of the state ethics laws, you can file a complaint with the Executive Ethics Board. The complaint form is available on our website—www.ethics.wa.gov.

When filing a complaint, you must include the following:

- The name of the person alleged to have violated the law and the employing agency;
- All facts that support your allegation;
- Any evidence you have to support your allegation;
- The names of individuals who witnessed the alleged violation or who otherwise have knowledge of the alleged violation.

When you file a complaint, you may request confidentiality. However, confidentiality is only guaranteed during the investigation. Once the investigation has been completed your name may be released unless you have indicated that releasing your name will

- Endanger your life;
- Endanger your physical safety; or
- Endanger your property.

A copy of the complaint will be sent to the employee's agency.

Investigative Process

Once Board staff receives your complaint, it is reviewed for completeness. If accepted, staff will conduct a preliminary investigation. During that phase, staff will determine if the Board has jurisdiction over the alleged action and individual.

If jurisdiction has been established, staff will then begin the investigation. Witnesses may be contacted. The employing agency may be asked to assist with the retrieval of documents if the complaint is about using the internet or email for personal use.

Once the witnesses have been questioned and all documents have been received, staff will begin analyzing all of the information. Staff then determines how to proceed with what it has found. The Executive Director may dismiss the complaint or recommend that the Board dismiss the complaint or find reasonable cause to believe a violation has occurred.

Executive Director Dismissal

The Executive Director may dismiss complaints if:

- The violation was not within the jurisdiction of the board;
- The complaint was unfounded or frivolous;
- The violation was inadvertent and minor;
- The matter has been cured.

The complainant and the Board members have an opportunity to seek review of the dismissal by the entire Board.

Reasonable Cause Determination

If the complaint does not fall within any of these categories, staff will recommend that the Board find or not find reasonable cause to believe a violation has occurred. If the Board does so, the matter is set for an enforcement hearing.

Enforcement Hearing

If an enforcement hearing is held, the alleged violator will be given an opportunity to defend him or herself. Staff will present any evidence obtained during the investigation.

The Board will determine if a violation occurred, and if so, they may impose a penalty, issue an order requiring payment of investigative costs and seek damages.

The penalties assessed are directed to the State General Fund. Payments for damages are given to the employing agency, and the Executive Ethics Board retains the funds for the investigative costs.

At any time during the investigative process, the parties may stipulate to a violation and penalty. The complainant will not be consulted during the negotiation phase.