

Executive Ethics Board News

Shirley Battan, Chair
Gerri Davis, Vice Chair
Jan Jutte, Member
Earl Key, Member

June 18, 2021

The Executive Ethics Board (Board) met virtually on Friday, May 14, 2021 for their regular meeting. Board members present were Chair Shirley Battan and Members Jan Jutte and Earl Key. Others attending included: Kate Reynolds, Executive Director, Chad Standifer, Assistant Attorney General, Michelle Carr, Assistant Attorney General, David Killeen, Senior Investigator, and Bobby Frye, Investigator. Members of the public also attended.

Enforcement

In lieu of an enforcement hearing, the Board accepted stipulations from:

- **Michael Katze**, former faculty member with the University of Washington School of Medicine in the Department of Microbiology Primate Center, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act related to inappropriate use of state resources, conflicts of interest and special privileges. Evidence indicated that Mr. Katze had his staff perform personal errands and schedule personal appointments for him, used his state computer and cell phone extensively for his personal use, including pornography and had a personal relationship with a subordinate. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$25,000.
- **Karen O'Brien**, a Registered Nurse at the Washington Correctional Center with the Department of Corrections, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using her state computer to browse the internet for her personal benefit and gain, for storing hundreds of non-work related images on her state computer and downloading copies of novels on her work computer. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,000 with \$500 suspended.
- **Robert Woodard**, former IT Specialist 4 with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using state resources for private benefit or gain. Evidence indicated that Mr. Woodard misappropriated over \$65,000 in funds when he used state credit cards to buy fuel for his personal vehicles over several years. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$4,500.
- **Lisa Cutler**, Computer Technology Specialist at Clover Park Technical College, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using state resources for her private benefit and to support the Classified Union at Clover Park Technical College. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,500 with \$1,000 suspended.
- **Kamran Nemati**, faculty member with the College of Built Environment's Department of Construction Management at the University of Washington, may have violated the Ethics

Meeting agendas can be found at www.ethics.wa.gov under "Meetings."

The next meeting of the Executive Ethics Board is scheduled for July 9, 2021.

in Public Service Act by using state resources for his private benefit and gain. Evidence indicated that he worked full-time for a private engineering company and received payment for travel expenses he was not entitled to receive. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,000.

- **Robyn Hofstad**, Administrative Assistant 4 with the Department of Social and Health Services, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using state resources for private benefit or gain and for use in support of her outside business. Evidence indicated that Ms. Hofstad used her state computer to stream videos, pay bills and to store over 6,000 personal pictures. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$3,000 with \$1,500 suspended.
- **Maria McBride**, former Laundry Supervisor at the Coyote Ridge Correctional Center with the Department of Corrections, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by receiving pay for time not worked. Evidence indicated that Ms. McBride failed to submit leave for at least 53 hours during a 12-month review period. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,000.
- **Laura Ruge**, a Psychology Associate with the Department of Corrections, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using state resources for her private benefit and gain. Evidence indicated that over a 12-month period she used her state computer for personal use to include 1,524 pages of personal email communications. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,500 with \$1,000 suspended.
- **Eduardo Meza-Diaz**, Corrections Officer 2 with the Department of Corrections, may have violated the Ethics in Public Service Act by using state resources for private benefit or gain. Evidence indicated that over a five-month period he accessed the internet for personal use at least once on 93 different days. The Board levied a civil penalty of \$2,500 with \$1,000 suspended.

The Board found Reasonable Cause in EEB Case 2020-065 (Fithen), EEB Case 2020-066 (Hart) and EEB Case 2020-070 (Doyle).

The Board dismissed EEB Case 2021-002 (Leonetti), EEB Case 2020-062 (Hall), EEB Case 2020-063 (Bramhill), and EEB Case 2020-071 (Johnson).

The Board issued Final Orders of Default in EEB Case 2018-053 (Smith) and EEB Case 2020-010 (Fobes).

The Board reviewed four Executive Director Dismissals: EEB Case 2020-054 (Richardson), EEB Case 2020-068 (Sisko), EEB Case 2020-069 (Almli) and EEB Case 2021-007 (Keliikoa).

Board Action:

- A. The Board continued their scheduled review of advisory opinions (AO). The Board staff is facilitating this review by grouping like subjects together, so that the Board reviews all of the opinions on that subject at the same time, and completing a pre-review to provide the Board with context and recommendations. During their review the Board will determine if the AO should remain unchanged, be updated or archived. This round of reviews regarded

Meeting agendas can be found at www.ethics.wa.gov under "Meetings."

The next meeting of the Executive Ethics Board is scheduled for July 9, 2021.

Activities Incompatible, Financial Interests, and Assisting in Transactions and encompassed the following AOs:

- **Advisory Opinion 96-09:** Disclosure Requirements for Boards and Commissions
- **Advisory Opinion 96-09A:** Boards and Commissions
- **Advisory Opinion 97-03:** Outside Employment with a Regulated Entity
- **Advisory Opinion 97-11:** Financial Interests/Board Membership
- **Advisory Opinion 97-12:** Stock Ownership by State Employee
- **Advisory Opinion 97-13:** Financial Interests/Board Membership
- **Advisory Opinion 98-04:** Elective Office/Confidential Information
- **Advisory Opinion 98-07:** Outside Employment/Subcontracting
- **Advisory Opinion 98-08:** Conflict of Interest/Board Membership
- **Advisory Opinion 98-11:** Potential Conflicts of Interest Regarding Prospective Employment
- **Advisory Opinion 99-04:** Conflict of Interest/Spouse's Business Interest
- **Advisory Opinion 99-07:** Conflicts of Interest Regarding Board Membership
- **Advisory Opinion 00-04:** Outside Employment with Regulated Entity
- **Advisory Opinion 00-14:** Serving on the Board of a Non-state entity that is Seeking Funds from the State Employee's Parent Agency
- **Advisory Opinion 01-02:** Membership in Non-State Organizations that are Affected by State Agency Decisions
- **Advisory Opinion 01-03:** State Employee's Outside Business Relationship with an Agency Vendor
- **Advisory Opinion 01-04:** State Officer's Outside Business Relationship With An Agency That They Oversee
- **Advisory Opinion 02-03:** Conflicts Between the Regulatory and Proprietary Functions of an Agency Employees
- **Advisory Opinion 03-05:** Holding an Interest Beneficial or Otherwise in a Person Regulated by a Citizen Body Whose Members May be Selected from Identified Groups or Interests
- **Advisory Opinion 04-03:** Conflicts of Interest Related to Membership in Groups that are Sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources
- **Advisory Opinion 09-02:** Spouse Contracting with State Agency
- **Advisory Opinion 09-03:** Stock Ownership
- **Advisory Opinion 10-03:** Simulcast Races Wagering

The Board also approved an additional advisory opinion in the Use of State Resources category:

- **Advisory Opinion 99-02:** Operating a non-profit within an agency

Approved versions of policies will be uploaded to the Board's website at www.ethics.wa.gov.

Meeting agendas can be found at www.ethics.wa.gov under "Meetings."

The next meeting of the Executive Ethics Board is scheduled for July 9, 2021.