

Cook County
Board of Ethics

Annual Ethics Report

2021



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From the Chair

Greetings:

The Cook County Board of Ethics is pleased to provide this 2021 Annual Report to Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, all Cook County employees, and the residents of Cook County.

The Board of Ethics' mission is to promote and support the highest ethical standards and integrity within Cook County government and to instill public confidence and trust in County officials, employees, and its programs. We do this through training and outreach to ensure that all employees and officials are aware of the requirements imposed by the Ethics Ordinance, issuing advisory opinions interpreting those requirements, and strong enforcement when violations occur.

This past year continued to challenge us in unexpected ways, but it was also a year of transition and achievement. In January, the Board settled the *Berrios v. Board of Ethics* lawsuit for \$100,000.00. More important than the monetary fine, however, the Illinois Court of Appeals decision upheld the constitutionality of the Ethics Ordinance and confirmed that all County employees and elected officials are subject to it. We will continue to aggressively investigate credible claims of ethics violations and have reinstated audits of campaign finance limits and lobbyist filings to ensure that they comply with the law.

From the Chair

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In addition, the Board welcomed a new Executive Director and a new Deputy Director. Among their goals is to promote awareness of ethical compliance and requirements throughout the County. To this end, an outreach and training coordinator was hired. We have already updated several ethics guides and disclosure forms, including guidance on prohibited political activities, campaign regulations for political candidates, and permissible printed promotional materials, with more to come next year.

We are proud to report that 99.3% of employees under the Office of the President (OUP) completed annual ethics training. We also began robust training for new employees in the OUP and in the Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court. We expect to expand training to all County supervisors, elected officials, and vendors in 2022.

Finally, after some delay, we welcomed the State of Illinois' new ethics laws. Though not perfect, we believe they are a step in the right direction. We look forward to working with President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners to pass amendments to our Ethics Ordinance that will conform to the State's amendments, update and enhance our ethical standards, and make the Cook County Ethics Ordinance a model for jurisdictions across the state and country.

Thank you to all the Cook County officials, employees, and residents who support our work in ensuring fair and honest government in Cook County.

Respectfully,



Thomas W. Szromba
Chair, Cook County Board of Ethics

About the Board of Ethics

Who We Are

The Cook County Board of Ethics is responsible for enforcing the **Cook County Ethics Ordinance**.

The Ethics Ordinance requires all Cook County officials and employees to abide by a Code of Ethical Conduct which sets forth general directives to **ensure fair and honest government** in Cook County.

The Board of Ethics works toward **public confidence and trust**.

What We Do

The Board enforces the Code of Ethical Conduct by investigating complaints of alleged violations, conducting compliance audits, issuing advisory opinions, and providing ethics training sessions. The Board issues confidential formal and informal advice to County officials, employees, contractors, and campaign donors on compliance with the County's Ethics Ordinance.

The Board enforces and advises on the following areas:

- Fiduciary duty
- Improper influence
- Receiving and soliciting gifts and favors
- County-owned property
- Confidential information
- Conflicts of interest and interest in County Board business
- Representation of other persons
- Employment of relatives
- Prohibited political activity
- Contributions limits
- Newsletters, brochures, Public Service Announcements, and promotional material
- Financial disclosures



About the Board of Ethics

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Meet the Board

The Board of Ethics is composed of five members appointed by the President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners with the advice and consent of the Cook County Board of Commissioners.



Thomas Szromba was appointed a member of the Board of Ethics in March 2016 and has acted as chair since October 2020. He is Principal Senior Counsel in the Law Department of The Boeing Company, where he conducts and supervises internal investigations, responds to government inquiries, and manages litigation in which Boeing is involved. Before joining Boeing, Tom was an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Chicago. While a federal prosecutor, he tried several criminal cases, concentrating in financial and securities crimes. Before joining the DOJ, he was with the Enforcement Division of the Securities and Exchange Commission in Chicago, ending his time there as Senior Trial Counsel. While at the SEC, he investigated and tried numerous securities fraud cases and was awarded the Stanley Sporkin Award. Tom began his career as a law clerk to U.S. District Judge Harold A. Baker and then in private practice with a commercial law firm in Washington, D.C. He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the New York University School of Law.

Von Matthews currently is a Senior Vice President & Head of Global Fraud Risk for the Northern Trust Company, with global responsibility for fraud prevention and investigations oversight, and policy and program development/implementation. Von has over 40 years experience in corporate fraud investigations, and received his Bachelor's Degree in Law Enforcement Administration from Western Illinois University, and his MBA/Financial Fraud Examination, from the Graham School of Management, St. Xavier University. Previous professional experience includes the roles of Vice President & Regional Investigations Manager for Fifth Third Bancorp, and Manager of Fraud Investigations for Spiegel Inc. Von is a Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) and has been a member of the Cook County Board of Ethics since 2016; Board member of the Midwest Fraud Investigators Network (MFIN); Coordinator of the Financial, Law Enforcement, and Government Group (FLAGG) networking group of bank fraud investigators and multiple law enforcement and governmental agencies. Von is also an Advisory Board Member for Breakthrough Urban Ministries, a not-for-profit organization serving residents of the East Garfield Park community in Chicago, IL.



Antara Nath Rivera currently serves as Arbitrator for the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission where she presides over trials, pre-trials, and settlement conferences. Previously, she was the Chief of General Prosecutions of the Enforcement Unit at the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. She oversaw licensure cases for a wide variety of professions. Ms. Rivera also served as an Administrative Law Judge for the Arizona Office of Administrative Hearings in which she presided over cases ranging from licensure for the Arizona medical board to Social Security and Medicaid benefits. Ms. Rivera also served in the Maricopa County Attorney's Office as the Deputy County Attorney in the Special Victims Division, at the Illinois Department of Insurance as an Investigator for the Workers' Compensation Fraud Unit, and as an Assistant State's Attorney for the Criminal Prosecutions Bureau of the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Illinois and Juris Doctor from Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School.



About the Board of Ethics

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Dr. Susan Gaffney is a retired Associate Professor of Public Administration and the former Program Coordinator for undergraduate Political Science and graduate Criminal Justice, Political and Social Justice and Public Administration in the College of Arts and Sciences at Governors State University. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History from Northern Illinois University, a Master's in Public Administration from Governors State University, Master of Arts in Geography from Chicago State University, and a Doctorate of Philosophy in Urban Planning and Public Policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Dr. Gaffney teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Research Methods, Public Planning, Urban Government, American National Government, Ethics for Public Administrators, Public Policy Analysis, Data Analysis, and Organizational Theory in the Public Sector. Prior to her appointment to the Public Administration faculty, Dr. Gaffney held numerous positions in academia and nonprofit organizations that focus on service to the public. Her career began at Northern Illinois University, where she held the position of Assistant Director Admissions. While pursuing her graduate studies, she worked as an academic advisor, researcher, and administrative assistant at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Malcolm X College. Her nonprofit background focuses on employment and training, at-risk youth, and community development. Dr. Gaffney has conducted numerous workshops on customer service in the public sector, diversity in academia, city manager leadership, and organizational sustainability.



Justice Marcus R. Salone, Ret. is retired as Presiding Justice of the Illinois Appellate Court, First District, and 3rd Division. The youngest of seven, Justice Marcus R. Salone was born into CHA public housing, raised on Chicago's Westside until going away to college. A proud product of the Chicago Public School system, his formal education was interrupted by a stint in the United States Army, which included a tour in the Republic of Viet Nam. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois at Chicago, in 1974. In what he describes as the single most important event in his life, a life in which he experienced many challenges and celebrations, Justice Salone married Valee, in 1976. Two years later the couple enrolled at The John Marshall Law School and passed the Illinois State Bar examination in 1981. In the same year, after serving ten years as a Chicago Police Officer, Justice Salone started his legal career as a Cook County Assistant State's Attorney. In 1983 he joined Valee in forming The Law Offices of Salone and Salone. From 1983 until his appointment as an Associate Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County in 1991, Justice Salone's practice was limited to real estate matters and criminal defense. He served as a Judge in the Criminal Division of the Circuit Court from 1993 until March 2011. In that capacity, he presided over criminal matters ranging from felony theft to death penalty cases. He is credited with pioneering what was later codified into law as Deferred Prosecution. On March 8, 2011, the Illinois Supreme Court appointed Justice Salone to the Illinois Appellate Court. While he has realized tremendous satisfaction serving as a judge, the most rewarding individual case of his entire legal career was the successful defense of a young man accused of murdering his three children.

2021 Highlights by the Numbers

10
Investigations

27
Advisories

100% Timely
Investigation
Closure Rate

19,712 Views
on Ethics
Reminder
Emails

416 New
Employees
Trained

99% Annual
Ethics Training
Completion by
Offices Under
the President*

35 Ethics
Trainings

\$24,327 in
Excessive
Campaign
Contributions
Returned

600+
Procurement
Contracts
Reviewed

*As of 11/20/21

Report on Ethics Advisories

One of the key functions of the Board of Ethics is to render advice to Cook County officials, employees, and others governed by the County's Ethics Ordinance. The Board and its staff provide this advice in confidential formal and informal advisory opinions.

The Board may issue formal opinions in response to specific questions or on its own motion. These opinions are legally binding on those governed by the Ordinance. Additionally, Cook County officials, employees, and others governed by the County's Ethics Ordinance may request informal advice from the Board of Ethics staff on routine issues.

In 2021, the Board issued two formal opinions, 25 informal opinions and responded to 257 routine questions. Formal opinions are made public, in full text, with names and other identifying information redacted out. Informal opinions are not made public but are logged, kept, and used for training and future advisory purposes. The subject of advisory requests and inquiries inform changes to informational and educational materials, which are updated regularly.



Click [here](#) to read the Board's latest Advisory Opinions!



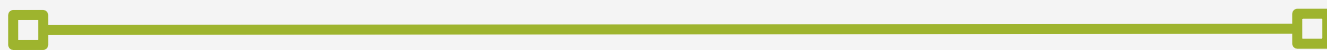
Report on Ethics Advisories

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The leading categories for advisory opinions were: Post-employment Restrictions; Dual Employment; Gifts; Conflicts of Interest; Limitations of Contributions to Candidates and Elected Officials; and County-funded Newsletters, Brochures, Public Service Announcements, and Promotional Materials.

The Board received requests from Cook County Board Commissioners; Cook County Treasurer's Office; Bureau of Technology; Risk Management; Facilities Management; Cook County Public Defender's Office; Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court; Department of Economic Development; and Cook County Department of Highways and Transportation.

The value of ethics advisories cannot be understated, as they contribute to a constantly refined understanding of the County's Ethics Ordinance in an everchanging professional landscape.



Cook County Incorporation of State Ethics Bill Updates

On October 8, 2021, Illinois Governor Pritzker certified State Ethics Bill (SB539), codified as Public Act 102-0664. The State Ethics Bill's main impacts on County ethics include regulation of lobbying activity, (e.g. restrictions on County officials conducting lobbyist activities) and changes to economic interest disclosure statements submitted by County elected officials.

As of publish date, the Board of Ethics has been in collaboration with members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and other stakeholders, to update and amend the County's Ethics Ordinance. The final changes are intended to align with the State's new ethics amendments, clarify provisions, and strengthen ethics provisions. We look forward to implementing the new amendments in 2022.

Audits and Trainings

The Board of Ethics is responsible for several audits throughout the year to ensure compliance with the County's Ethics Ordinance. The Board reviews campaign contributions, lobbyist registrations, procurement records, and other available data sources to affirm broad compliance.

For example, the Board of Ethics audits campaign contributions, known as D2 Audits, to affirm that they are within the limits established in Section 2-585. This procedure includes:

- Reviewing public campaign contribution disclosure records from the Illinois State Board of Elections to determine whether contributions to candidates for County office and County elected officials follow Cook County's campaign contribution limits.
- Sending formal notices to the contributor and campaign committee of the excessive contribution.
- Receiving additional information about the contributions, requesting corrective action, and, when necessary, pursuing formal actions, such as fines.

The Board of Ethics reviews procurement contracts and State's Attorney's Office settlements over \$500,000.00 before Cook County Board of Commissioners approval. The Board also reviews gift disclosures, post-employment waivers and certification, and salvage donations.



Audits and Trainings

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The Board of Ethics presents annual ethics training and develops ethics guides and educational materials to promote knowledge and awareness of the Ethics Ordinance.

During 2021, the Board facilitated 32 trainings regarding the Ethics Ordinance to new employees in multiple Cook County Government departments. The Board gave trainings to groups, such as onsite contractors, and on special topics, including prohibited political activities during election season. The Board regularly updates trainings for employees of Offices Under the President and lobbyists.



The Board released new educational materials regarding prohibited political activities during election season, Cook County campaign regulations for political candidates, and limitations on the creation and distribution of newsletters, brochures, public service announcements, and promotional materials by Cook County employees, appointees, and officials.

Click [here](#) to access the Board's collection of ethics guides and disclosure forms!



Conclusions

From our yearly review, the Board of Ethics presents the following conclusions:

1. A significant amount of the Board of Ethics' work is to encourage compliance, which is done primarily through education and confidential advice. This work is essential to ensuring that public trust is maintained.
2. The Cook County Board of Commissioners is considering updates and amendments to the Cook County Ethics Ordinance in light of the State of Illinois' amended ethics laws.
3. Frequent and continued education for County officials, employees, and others who are subject to the Ethics Ordinance is imperative to encourage conduct within the highest ethical standards and create a culture of asking prior to acting.



The Board presents the following goals for 2022:

- The commencement of a training campaign for all County supervisors, elected officials, and vendors.
- The implementation of a data-driven Case Management System, which will increase the efficiency and integrity of our ongoing investigations and audits.
- The development of a Strategic Plan, with accompanying refined Mission and Vision for the Board of Ethics.

Acknowledgements

This work would not be possible without the efforts of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Cook County elected officials, Cook County employees, and, especially, the people of Cook County.

We thank you for your efforts in making Cook County a place of honest and ethical conduct.



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Antara Nath Rivera

Hon. Marcus Salone

Thomas Szromba, Chair

Staff

Sisavanh Baker, Director

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Jarrie Brown, Investigator

Aviva Cahn, Investigator

Jason Jones, Investigator

Kisha Johns, Administrative Analyst

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