



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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Legislature Overhauls Ulster County Ethics Law

Ulster County Legislature Enacts Ethics Reform Legislation for Better Government and Greater Transparency

KINGSTON, NY—This evening, lawmakers voted to overhaul and improve Ulster County’s Ethics Law. The amended law is the culmination of a four-year bipartisan effort to strengthen the county’s ethics law.

“This law results from a nonpartisan effort to improve ethical standards in county government. Four distinct committee chairs led the redrafting process. Over the past four years, the same core team of legislators has worked together toward a common goal,” said Chair Bartels. “I commend the members of the Laws and Rules Committee, past and present, for their strong focus and perseverance in delivering ethics reform to the people of Ulster County,”

The new law, originally drafted in 2008, amends Ulster County Code Chapter 44, known as the “Ulster County Ethics and Disclosure Law.”

The new Ulster County Ethics Law compels more stringent financial disclosure and expands upon the financial disclosure required of county government officers, employees, consultants and commission and advisory board members—whether elected, appointed, paid, or volunteer.

The Ethics Law now requires filers to disclose if they have served as an officer of a political party, candidate’s campaign committee, or a political organization within the last five years. It also requires filers to disclose if they have served as an officer of a not-for-profit organization within the reporting year.

The revised Ulster County Ethics Law also creates a more balanced Ethics Board appointment process that preserves the authority of each branch of county government, as prescribed by the Ulster County Charter.

The Ulster County Ethics Law increases the Board of Ethics from five to seven members. Previously, all seven members of the Board of Ethics were appointees of the County Executive.

Under the new law, three members will be appointed by the County Executive, one will be nominated by the Chair of the Ulster County Legislature, one by the Majority Leader, and one by the Minority leader. The seventh member will be nominated by the Board of Ethics once all other members have been seated. All Board of Ethics appointments shall be confirmed by the Legislature.

The Ulster County Ethics Law will take effect upon filing with the Secretary of State. The prior Ethics Board will be dissolved and re-established by the terms and conditions set forth by the new law.



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Majority Leader Jonathan Heppner (Towns of Hurley and Woodstock, District 23), chair of the Laws, Rules, and Government Services Committee, said, “To truly have ‘good government,’ it is essential that we constantly strive to have the most balanced, transparent ethics law possible. As officials, it is incumbent upon us to earn the trust of those we are fortunate to serve.” Heppner adds, “I applaud the Legislature for their collaborative efforts to address our old ethics law and bring it up to a higher standard that adequately reflects our current government and circumstances.”

Minority Leader Kenneth J. Ronk, Jr. (Town of Shawangunk, District 13) said, “I’m thrilled that we have gotten a bipartisan agreement on the new and improved Ulster County Ethics Law. Without proper ethics, the public can never have faith and confidence that their government is working in the best interest of all citizens.” Ronk adds, “Ensuring that one person, or political party, cannot appoint all of the members of the Board of Ethics is key to ensuring trust in the decisions of the board, and the historic bipartisan process that led to this law does just that.”

Legislator John Gavaris (Town and Village of Wawarsing, District 15), member of the Laws, Rules and Government Services Committee, said, “Revising the Ulster County Ethics Law has been an arduous process. The Laws and Rules Committee, with the input of other legislators, elected officials, and others, has put a lot of time into making sure that this important legislation was done right. Everyone involved seemed to agree that it was better to sacrifice expediency for quality, and I believe it paid off.”

“The residents of Ulster County put a lot of trust in us to look out for their best interests and to abstain from self-aggrandizing or enrichment,” said Gavaris. “This law should help to bolster that confidence, by defining behavioral expectations, providing greater transparency, and ensuring effective oversight, which now applies to anyone who acts on behalf of Ulster County.” Gavaris notes, “The expanded disclosure statement is one of the key elements in having greater transparency and accountability. That will help in identifying and avoiding conflicts of interest.”

“Now that this law has passed, it is important that it continues to be a living breathing document. With the help of the Ulster County Ethics Board, which the Legislature can now nominate members to, I’m confident that we can make sure that happens.”

Ulster County Comptroller March Gallagher said, “I applaud the Ulster County Legislature for strengthening the Ulster County Ethics and Disclosure Law by requiring disclosure of not-for-profit board memberships and candidate campaign committee officer duties. Ulster County must remain vigilant in daylighting and addressing potential conflicts to ensure that taxpayers are adequately protected.”

Legislator Kevin A. Roberts (Town of Plattekill, District 12), deputy chair of the Laws, Rules and Government Services Committee, said, “The passage of this law represents the culmination of years of work. The ethical conduct of elected officials and officers is critical to maintaining public trust. This local law brings new levels of accountability.”

Legislator Aaron J. Lavine (Town of Saugerties, District 1), member of the Laws, Rules, and Government Committee said, “Transparency in government is absolutely essential. The people need to know that their government works on their behalf and not for special interests. The Ulster County Ethics Law accomplishes that disclosure goal and puts workable enforcement measures in place. This law is the culmination of years of tireless work by legislators of both parties working in a bipartisan to craft an ethics law that is effective and that can be seen as a model for other local governments and counties to follow.”

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Attachments