

Section 36-25-3**State Ethics Commission - Creation, composition, qualifications, appointment, terms of office, vacancies, officers; annual reports; compensation; applicability of chapter to members, officers, etc.; director and staff.**

(a) There is hereby created a State Ethics Commission composed of five members, each of whom shall be a fair, equitable citizen of this state and of high moral character and ability. The following persons shall not be eligible to be appointed as members: (1) a public official; (2) a candidate; (3) a registered lobbyist and his or her principal; or (4) a former employee of the commission. For purposes of this section, a public official shall not be deemed to include a part-time municipal judge and a registered lobbyist shall not be deemed to include a person whose lobbying activities are limited to providing public testimony to a legislative body or regulatory body or committee thereof. No member of the commission shall be eligible for reappointment to succeed himself or herself. The members of the commission shall be appointed by the following officers: the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, or in the absence of a Lieutenant Governor, the Presiding Officer of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives and shall assume their duties upon confirmation by the Senate. The members of the first commission shall be appointed for terms of office expiring one, two, three, four and five years, respectively, from September 1, 1975. Successors to the members of the first commission shall serve for a term of five years beginning service on September 1 of the year appointed and serving until their successors are appointed and confirmed. If at any time there should be a vacancy on the commission, a successor member to serve for the unexpired term applicable to such vacancy shall be appointed by the Governor. The commission shall elect one member to serve as chair of the commission and one member to serve as vice chair. The vice chair shall act as chair in the absence or disability of the chair or in the event of a vacancy in that office.

Beginning with the first vacancy on the Ethics Commission after October 1, 1995, if there is not a Black member serving on the commission, that vacancy shall be filled by a Black appointee. Any vacancy thereafter occurring on the commission, shall also be filled by a Black appointee if there is no Black member serving on the commission at that time.

(b) A vacancy in the commission shall not impair the right of the remaining members to exercise all the powers of the commission, and three members thereof shall constitute a quorum.

(c) The commission shall at the close of each fiscal year, or as soon thereafter as practicable, report to the Legislature and the Governor concerning the actions it has taken, the name, salary, and duties of the director, the names and duties of all individuals in its employ, the money it has disbursed, other relevant matters within its jurisdiction, and such recommendations for legislation as the commission deems appropriate.

(d) Members of the commission shall, while serving on the business of the commission, be entitled to

receive compensation at the rate of fifty dollars (\$50) per day, and each member shall be paid his or her travel expenses incurred in the performance of his or her duties as a member of the commission as other state employees and officials are paid when approved by the chair. If for any reason a member of the commission wishes not to claim and accept the compensation or travel expenses, the member shall inform the director, in writing, of the refusal. The member may at any time during his or her term begin accepting compensation or travel expenses; however, the member's refusal for any covered period shall act as an irrevocable waiver for that period.

(e) All members, officers, agents, attorneys, and employees of the commission shall be subject to this chapter. The director, members of the commission, and all employees of the commission shall not engage in direct partisan political activity, including the making of campaign contributions, on the state, county, and local levels. The prohibition shall in no way act to limit or restrict such persons' ability to vote in any election.

(f) The commission shall appoint a full-time director. The director shall serve at the pleasure of the commission and shall appoint such other employees as needed. All such employees, except the director, shall be employed subject to the provisions of the state Merit System law, and their compensation shall be prescribed pursuant to such law. The employment of attorneys shall be subject to subsection (h). The compensation of the director shall be fixed by the commission, payable as the salaries of other state employees. The director shall be responsible for the administrative operations of the commission and shall administer this chapter in accordance with the commission's policies. No regulation shall be implemented by the director until adopted by the commission in accordance with Sections 41-22-1 to 41-22-27, inclusive, the Alabama Administrative Procedure Act.

(g) The director may appoint part-time stenographic reporters or certified court reporters, as needed, to take and transcribe the testimony in any formal or informal hearing or investigation before the commission or before any person authorized by the commission. The reporters shall not be full-time employees of the commission and shall not be subject to the Merit System law and may not participate in the State Retirement System.

(h) The director may, with the approval of the Attorney General, appoint a competent attorney as legal counsel for the commission. The legal counsel shall be of good moral and ethical character, licensed to practice law in this state, and a member in good standing of the Alabama Bar Association. The legal counsel shall be commissioned as an assistant or deputy attorney general and shall, in addition to the powers and duties herein conferred, have the authority and duties of an assistant or deputy attorney general, except, that his or her entire time shall be devoted to the commission. The attorney shall act as an attorney for the commission in actions or proceedings brought by or against the commission pursuant to any provisions of law under the commission's jurisdiction, or in which the commission joins or intervenes as to a matter within the commission's jurisdiction, or as a friend of the court or otherwise; provided however, nothing in this chapter shall be deemed as a direct grant of subpoena power to the commission.

(i) The director shall designate in writing the chief investigator, should there be one, and a maximum of six full-time investigators who shall be and are hereby constituted law enforcement officers of the State of Alabama with full and unlimited police power and jurisdiction to enforce the laws of this state pertaining to the operation and administration of the commission and this chapter. Investigators shall meet the requirements of the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Act, Sections 36-21-40 to 36-21-51, inclusive, and shall in all ways and for all purposes be considered law enforcement officers; provided however such investigators shall only exercise their power of arrest as granted under this chapter pursuant to an order issued by a court of competent jurisdiction.

(Acts 1973, No. 1056, p. 1699, § 17; Acts 1995, No. 95-194, p. 269, §1.)