

**RE: Legislative Proposal Regarding Ethics Commission Procedures**

Dear Charles County Commissioners,

On behalf of the Ethics Commission, I am writing to express our opposition to the legislative proposal submitted by Mr. Derrick Terry that would require the public disclosure of all Ethics Commission decisions, rationales, and investigative findings, regardless of the outcome. While we fully support transparency and accountability, this legislative proposal conflicts with both our governing procedures as well as the Charles County Code and Maryland law.

The Charles County Ethics Commission Rules of Procedure, Section IV: Complaints, Paragraph B, states:

“All complaints are confidential unless the Commission issues a final finding of a violation.”

This standard is further supported by Charles County Code, § 170-4K(8), which provides that:

“The proceedings, meetings, and activities of the [Ethics] Commission in connection with a complaint are confidential and may not be disclosed, except as provided in this section.” (i.e. only after the finding of a violation)

These provisions are consistent with the Maryland Public Ethics Law, State Government Article, § 15-407, which similarly requires that:

“Except as provided in this section, the proceedings, meetings, and activities of an ethics commission in connection with a complaint are confidential and may not be disclosed.”

It is imperative to highlight the Maryland Public Ethics Law ensures consistency across state and local ethics bodies in how complaints are handled.

Requiring disclosure of all investigative findings, including those that are dismissed or otherwise found not to be a violation, would directly conflict with the law and would require Charles County to act in a manner inconsistent with all other Maryland state and local ethics bodies. Such a change also exposes individuals to reputational harm without due cause or process, and undermines confidence in the confidentiality assurances that are essential to encouraging the filing of legitimate ethics complaints.

It is also important to emphasize that the Ethics Commission already fulfills its mandate to provide transparency and accountability as appropriate and permitted by law. When violations are substantiated, our findings are made public on the County’s website.

As you know, the Ethics Commission is comprised of community members, appointed by the Charles County Commissioners, who volunteer their evenings to ensure that the Charles County Code of Ethics is adhered to by all under its purview. We meet regularly, follow the transparency mandates of the Open Meetings Act, comply with all confidentiality requirements, and, among other duties, investigate all complaints presented to us. We arrive at decisions and opinions fairly and impartially based upon the facts before us and are not unduly influenced by county employees or elected officials, the complainant, or other outside force.

We, as Charles County residents, are committed to upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct, accountability, and public trust of our elected officials and county employees while also protecting the fairness and integrity of the complaint process.

Please accept this submission as our formal opposition to this legislative proposal. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

*Shara Hendler*

Shara Hendler (Sep 18, 2025 17:27:57 EDT)

Shara Hendler  
Chair, Charles County Ethics Commission