



Ethics Commission Shares Highlights From Second Annual Report

The North Dakota Ethics Commission published its 2026 Annual Report on August 31, 2026, highlighting significant growth in the Commission's workload and calling attention to the need for additional staff and resources to meet the growing demand for ethics oversight, education, and guidance.

The Commission's main duties include: adopting ethics rules in the areas of transparency, corruption, elections, and lobbying; processing complaints; conducting investigations; issuing advisory opinions; enforcing ethics laws through the statutory complaint process; administering disclosure requirements; and providing ethics education and outreach to North Dakota citizens and the regulated community.

Key Takeaways from the Annual Report:

- The Commission received a record 84 complaints in 2025, more than double the 41 complaints received in 2024.

- During the reporting period, the Commission received 34 complaints and closed or dismissed 43 complaints. During that same period, the Commission conducted fourteen investigations.

- Increased activity goes beyond complaints - disclosures of potential conflicts of interest, appearances of bias in quasi-judicial proceedings, and notices of social and educational events with state public officials have also steadily increased.

- The Commission adopted travel disclosure requirements for state public officials when they complete third-party-funded travel, with disclosures filed with the Commission.

- The Commission issued five advisory opinions addressing questions involving legislative travel, lobbying, and public officials' participation in sponsored events.

Education is prevention, but capacity is being redirected

The report also identifies a critical consequence of the increasing workload: resources that should be devoted to education and prevention are being redirected to process complaints and conduct investigations.

"Education is prevention. It is far more effective to help a public official understand an ethics requirement before a problem occurs than to address a violation after the fact," Ethics Commission Chair Pamela Sharp said. "But we cannot provide the level of education North Dakota needs while simultaneously absorbing a rapidly increasing complaint and investigative workload with limited staff."

The Commission is asking the Legislative Assembly to help build capacity

The Commission's policy recommendations identify the need for additional staff and resources to establish clear ethical standards and fulfill its education-first approach. The Commission is asking the Legislative Assembly to view staffing as

an investment in the state's overall ethics infrastructure, not simply as an increase in administrative capacity: "Additional staff would allow us to do more than process more complaints," Sharp said. "It would allow us to be proactive - to educate, advise, develop clear standards, respond to the public, and address ethics concerns before they became larger problems."

The takeaway from the Annual Report is straightforward: North Dakota's ethics system has grown, and its capacity needs to grow with it.

"North Dakotans created the Ethics Commission to serve the people of North Dakota," Sharp said. "Our responsibility is to make sure this constitutional institution works effectively. We are proud of what our small team has accomplished, but the numbers in this report make clear that maintaining the status quo is not sustainable."

Access the Full Annual Report

The 2026 Annual Report is available by visiting the Commission's website. The Commission invites members of the public to review this year's annual report, which provides detailed information about the Commission's workload, complaint activity, education and outreach, disclosures, advisory opinions, litigation, finances, and policy recommendations.