

# The COE

PALM BEACH COUNTY COMMISSION ON ETHICS NEWSLETTER

## Spring 2025

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics is to foster integrity in public services, to promote the public's trust and confidence in that service, and to prevent conflicts between private interests and public duties.

### The ONE Ethics Movement

The Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics and the Office of the Inspector General were both established in 2010. The ONE Ethics movement speaks to our collective and collaborative efforts to provide independent and objective oversight of ethics in our local government.

COE Hotline:  
877-766-5920



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### 15 Years of Fostering Integrity: Why Ethics Still Matters

Fifteen years ago, Palm Beach County voters made a powerful and decisive decision—choosing to establish the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics, an independent watchdog agency to foster transparency, integrity, and accountability in local government. This decision marked the beginning of a vital mission — one that remains as relevant and important today as it was back then, reminding us that ethical leadership is essential to public trust.

As we celebrate this 15-year milestone, we reflect on why ethics still matters—now more than ever.

“Ethics is the foundation of public trust in government. Abiding by a code of ethics keeps local government transparent and accountable and gives the community confidence that decisions by public servants are made with integrity and for the benefit of all.”

- *Christie Kelley, Executive Director*

“Erosion of ethics is akin to erosion of a foundation. You can try to build on it, but if not promptly addressed, the entire structure is destined to fail.”

- *Abigail Irizarry, Investigator*

“Being an ethics investigator is of utmost importance, and I approach each case with impartiality and fairness. This approach is fundamental to the process and to the spirit of the very code that holds public employees and elected officials to a higher standard of conduct.”

- *Mark Higgs, Investigator*

“Serving the public is a privilege, especially when it involves ensuring ethical behavior by public officials and employees. This duty adds a layer of meaning to the service, because the work directly impacts the trust and well-being of the community we represent.”

- *Rhonda Giger, General Counsel*

“Ethics forms the cornerstone of county government by building trust, fostering accountability, and ensuring that every decision serves the public good—not personal interests. When ethical leadership leads the way, it empowers communities and upholds the promise of responsible government.”

- *Gina Levesque, Intake & Compliance Manager*

“It takes every one of us to build this culture of ethics throughout Palm Beach County. Not only what we say matters to our community but our actions demonstrate what we value and how we serve others.”

- *Lizabeth Martin, Education Manager*

# Celebrating Some of the Talented Individuals Who Power Our Success

## GINA LEVESQUE



the front lines of an emergency, Gina is always ready to tackle the next challenge.

We're lucky to have Gina on our team for 15 years. She brings not only her knowledge but also her commitment to excellence.

When you think of someone who embodies dedication, integrity, and a wealth of experience, think of Gina. With over 25 years in the legal and law enforcement fields, Gina has been an invaluable part of our organization since its inception in 2010. Gina manages the Intake and Compliance section and helps shape our mission and values.

As if that was not impressive enough, Gina is a Certified Fraud Examiner and also contributes her expertise to the All Hazards Incident Management Team for the SE Florida Region. Whether at the office or on

she became the first female awarded the Investigative Star of the Year for the DCF Office of Inspector General.

As a COE investigator, she handles confidential, time-sensitive investigations, assessing allegations of unethical behavior with precision and care. She is a certified Inspector General Investigator, a certified Forensic Interviewer, and a Certified Fraud Examiner.

We are proud of Abigail. She brings and demonstrates unmatched skills, passion, and dedication to every investigation she handles!

## ABIGAIL IRIZARRY



Abigail joined us in 2016 and has significantly impacted the team over the past 9 years. She contributes extensive knowledge from years of experience as an award-winning investigator for the State of Florida. Abigail's exceptional contributions to investigative work was recognized in 2015 when

### Thank You to the PBC Graphics Department!

A big shoutout to **Janet Rodriguez-Basluke, Marcy Blackwell, and John Johnson** for their fantastic work on our 15th anniversary logo and continued support with our publications. Their creativity and dedication helped make this milestone extra special — Thank You!

## Advisory Opinions

As with an inquiry and complaint, requests for an Advisory Opinion are sent to the intake manager for processing.

The intake manager reviews the question to confirm it falls within the scope of the Code of Ethics. Once confirmed, the request is entered into our project tracking system, a file is created, and the matter is assigned to the general counsel.

The general counsel then reviews the request and determines what portion of the Code of Ethics applies to the information provided.

Written guidance is then drafted outlining what actions are permitted, or not permitted, under the Code without resulting in a violation.

The Advisory Opinion is then presented to the Commission for its approval at its next public meeting. Once approved by the Commission, the Advisory Opinion is published on our website and a copy is sent to the individual who submitted

## 2024 Achievements

### Legal Affairs

- Requests for assistance from the public received: 680
- New advisory opinions published: 17
- Average number of days to complete advisory opinions: 7

### Enforcement

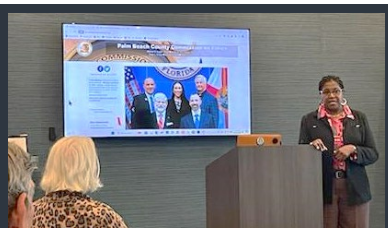
- Inquiries initiated: 4
- Complaints investigated: 22
- Gift forms reviewed: 1,055
- Voting conflict forms reviewed: 100

### Education and Outreach

- In-person training sessions completed: 18
- Website views: 48,677
- Municipal meetings attended: 42



**Over 550  
Published  
Advisory  
Opinions**



## Book a Speaker

The COE offers training programs designed to enhance ethical insights, knowledge, and skills for civic-minded individuals and groups. Led by our ethics experts, we provide opportunities to learn more about the role of ethics in our community, what we do, and how you can help our efforts to foster a culture of integrity, respect, and ethical behavior in public service. We are excited to offer this opportunity to your civic, professional, business, or educational groups or organizations.

For more details or if you would like to schedule a speaker, contact us.

## Upcoming Events

- **May 2025: It's our 15 Anniversary!**
- **Extra! Extra! Read all about it: PBC TV Program Guide**
  - Learn more about the COE and check out this month's Ethics Awareness Puzzle.
  - Get the facts and stats on this month's community bulletin.
- **Breaking News: 15th Anniversary Special Edition**
  - That's not all. For the past 15 years, the COE has proven that a Code of Ethics can improve the public's trust. Get the history and learn the facts, Palm Beach County has come a long way.
  - Catch a glimpse of our COE Commissioners, who volunteer their time and expertise, at work for YOU.
- **We're Social, too. And, trying something new with YouTube**
  - Hear what our COE Commissioners have to say and what they hope for our future.
  - Watch as we celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> work anniversary of our very own, Gina Levesque, with a Day-in-the-Life video.
  - Follow us from May 1–10 on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) for special posts and trivia.
- **Not enough?**
  - Our website is undergoing a gradual redesign, too—and now, you can find our 15-year history and see the COE's historical timeline.



**The COE**  
Palm Beach County  
Commission on Ethics  
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West Palm Beach, FL 33401

### Contact us:

**Email: [ethics@pbc.gov](mailto:ethics@pbc.gov)**

**Phone: 561-355-1915**

**Website: [www.PalmBeachCountyEthics.com](http://www.PalmBeachCountyEthics.com)**

### Connect with us:

**@pbccoe** X 

Got Ethics? When faced with a possible ethical dilemma, local public officials and employees are encouraged to follow the *Ask First, Act Later* motto. The COE staff is available to help you understand your responsibilities under the Code of Ethics. See our FAQ page online.