

HENRY COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



REPORT BY : OBRÉZIAH L. BULLARD, ESQ.



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ABOUT US

HENRY COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

In March 2021, Senate Bill 22 created Henry County's Board of Ethics. Henry County Board of Ethics performs trainings on the Code of Ethics, renders advisory opinions on whether certain conduct by county employees and officials would impose a violation of the code of ethics, and conducts investigations of alleged violations.

The Board of Ethics is an independent body of seven citizens who volunteer to ensure that the operations of Henry County remain transparent and operate with integrity. The board members were sworn in on January 22, and began receiving complaints in September 2022.



VISION AND MISSION

VISION



The Henry County Board of Ethics envisions a community where the highest ethical standards are upheld at every level of local government. We strive to foster a culture of integrity and accountability, ensuring that all Henry County employees and officials act with unwavering dedication to the well-being of the public.

MISSION



To ensure city officials and county personnel adhere to high standards of ethical conduct and accountability to promote confidence in government so that positions of public responsibility are acting for the benefit of the public.



MEET THE BOARD



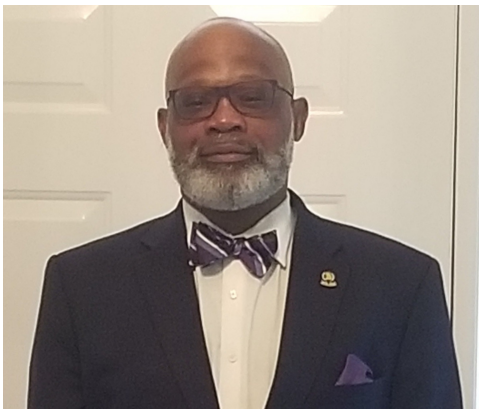
DESMOND MCLAIN

Chair
District 5



ETHEL O. MCCORNELL

District 1



CRAIG SIMMONS

District 2



LAURIN B. SMITH

District 3



MEET THE BOARD



VACANT
District 4



ANTONIO TAYLOR
Tax Commissioner
Appointee



CYNTHIA CORNOG
Tax Commissioner
Appointee



MEET THE BOARD



THOMAS LOREE
Superior Court Clerk
Appointee
Board Alternate



FELICIA HARRELL
Superior Court Clerk
Appointee
Board Alternate



MEET THE STAFF



OBRÉZIAH L. BULLARD
Ethics Officer



GLORIA BANISTER
Ethics Administrator

**“ANY TOOL CAN BE USED
FOR GOOD OR BAD. IT'S
REALLY THE ETHICS OF
THE ARTIST USING IT.” -
JOHN KNOLL**



A WORD FROM THE ETHICS OFFICER



Since assuming the role of the inaugural Ethics Officer in June 2022, our team has achieved remarkable progress, positioning us on par with, and arguably ahead of, neighboring counties. I am thrilled by our development and eagerly anticipate future growth as we raise public awareness about our existence, educate our employees on ethical standards, and diligently investigate alleged



violations. In the past year, our efforts have significantly bolstered community engagement, yet a surprising number of Henry County residents are unaware of the Board of Ethics' establishment. To address this, we actively participate in local events to enlighten residents about our functions and goals in fostering public transparency and trust.

Our training initiatives have exceeded expectations, with over 72.2% of county employees and officials successfully trained in the Code of Ethics.

The value of in-person training is undeniable. It offers individuals the opportunity to think critically about day-to-day challenges and enhance their ability to recognize and navigate ethical dilemmas. It enables officials and employees to delve into department-specific issues and promotes information retention through thought-provoking examples.



However, we recognize there are a few high-staffed departments and county boards that would benefit from a virtual platform. After much discussion, we are on the brink of launching virtual options tailored for these groups. This will enhance our ability to provide efficient training while providing an appropriate alternative.

We have been consistently attempting to navigate the intricacies of the Code of Ethics, also known as SB22, which has revealed areas that require improvement within the code. We are working diligently with the county and local legislatures to enhance SB22 and make it more effective for our community. The county's unwavering support has been crucial in helping to facilitate the goals of the Code of Ethics.

Resistance to change is inevitable, often fueled by the fear of the unknown. While the first year of the Ethics Office faced resistance, a growing understanding of its function has led to increased openness among employees and officials. Many now express appreciation for the ethical training.



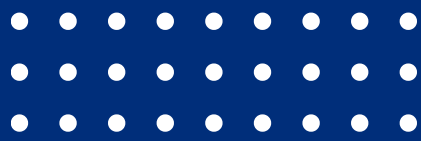
While ethics may not be a typical conversation starter, it is the cornerstone of a strong county. I am enthusiastic about the Ethics Board's continued collaboration with the county to demonstrate that "Henry Cares. Henry Committed." is not just a motto, but a steadfast commitment to ethical governance and community strength.

Ethically Yours,

Obréziah L. Bullard, Esq.

Obréziah L. Bullard
Ethics Officer

**“A MAN WITHOUT ETHICS
IS A WILD BEAST LOOSED
UPON THIS WORLD.” -
ALBERT CAMUS**



SUMMARY OF THE YEAR

BOARD MEETINGS

The Ethics Office coordinated and facilitated 11 board meetings and 2 special called meetings, established a virtual platform, and timely established and posted meeting agendas and meetings in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. The office coordinated and facilitated the replacement of two board members.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

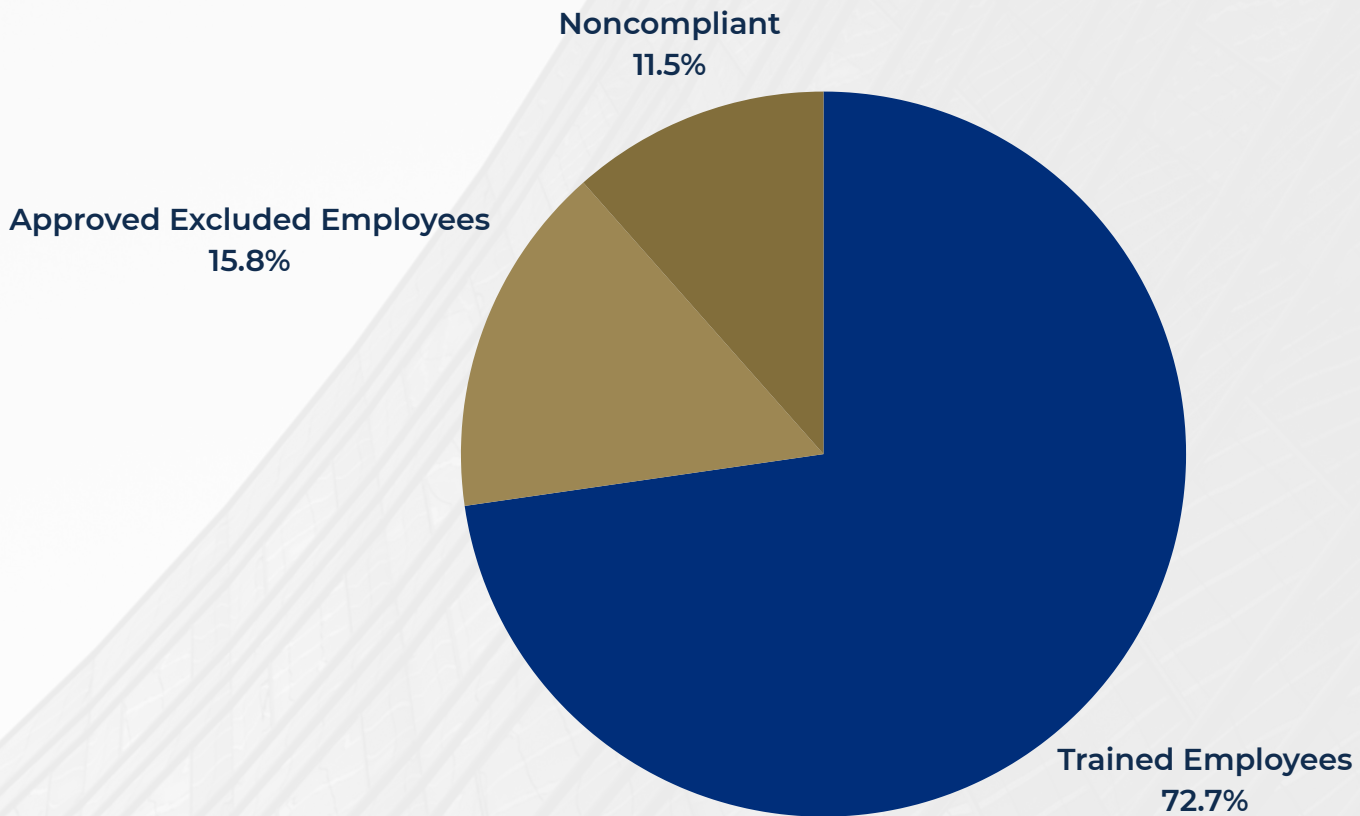
The Ethics Office participated in Trick or Treat on the square to increase public awareness about the office. Establish social media platforms to keep the community updated on the board's functions and activities.

DISCLOSURES

The Ethics Office received 3 disclosures and provided advisory opinions on each of those disclosures.



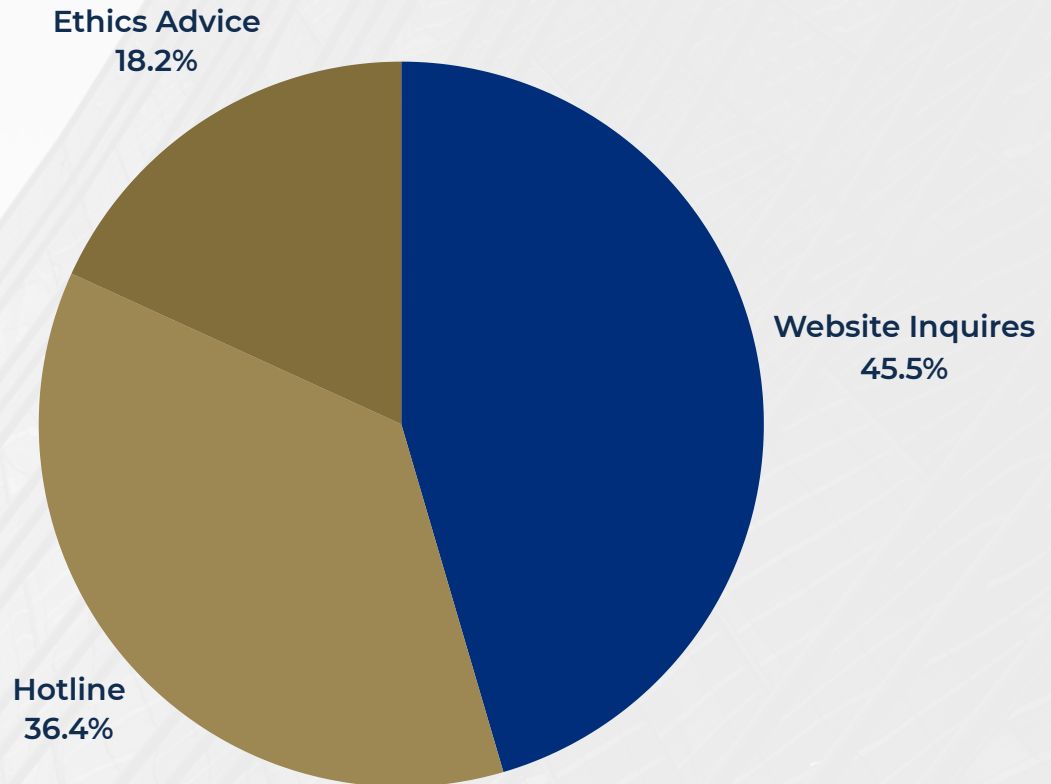
TRAINING COMPLIANCE



The Ethics Office has provided training to more than **1,289** officials and employees. The training sessions were tailored to the specific needs of each department, providing guidance on how to handle department-specific dilemmas. Some employees were approved to have their training deferred until the virtual model was completed, and they are known as "approved excluded employees".



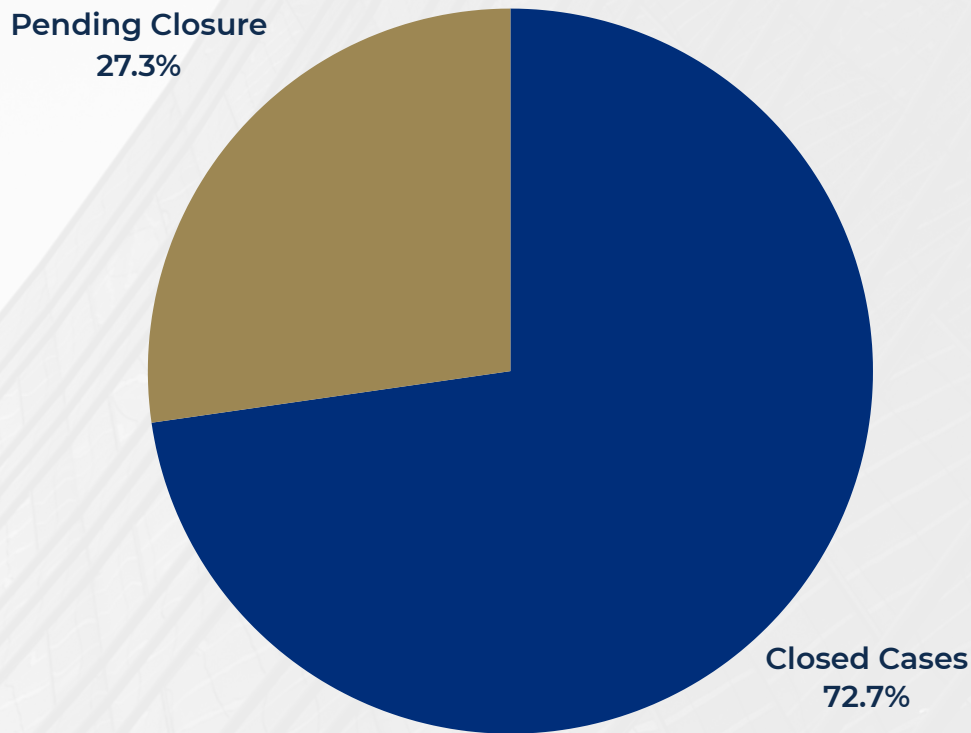
OFFICE ENGAGEMENT



The Ethics Office has been actively working to ensure that all officials and employees have access to training, advice, and the ability to make ethical complaints online, via the integrity hotline, or by directly contacting the Ethics Officer. To date, there have been **10** inquiries made through the website, **8** calls made to the hotline, and **4** requests for ethical advice.

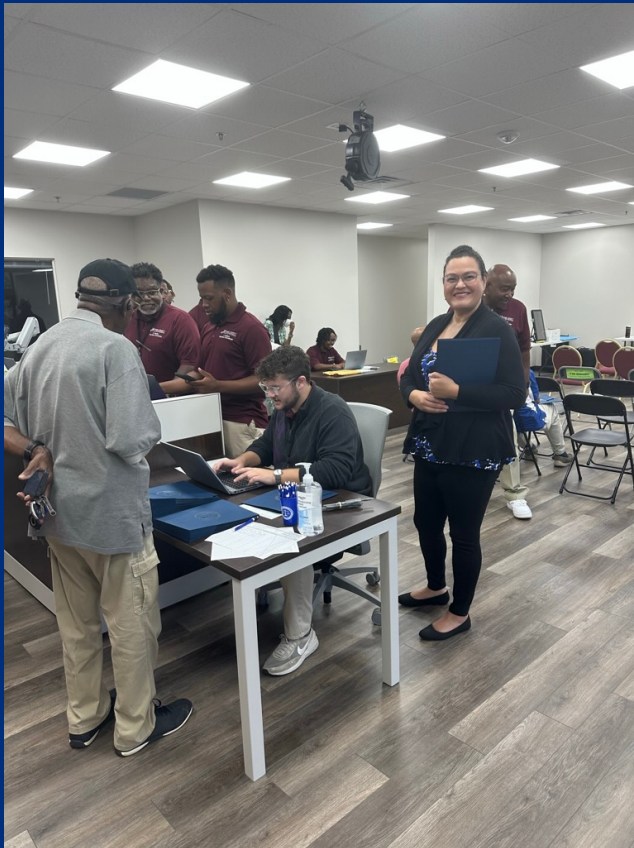


ENFORCEMENT



The Ethics Office has received a total of **11** complaints. Of these, **7** have been resolved and closed, while **3** are still under investigation or awaiting a final hearing. There are also three pending cases from when the Ethics Office started accepting complaints in September 2022. Two of these cases have been consolidated with one of the 2023 pending cases, and the other will be before the board at the continuation of final hearings.





**“GREAT PEOPLE HAVE
GREAT VALUES AND
GREAT ETHICS.”
-JEFFREY GITOMER**



UPCOMING INITIATIVES

VIRTUAL TRAINING

The Ethics Office has recently developed a virtual training module for departments with an abundant number of employees. We are collaborating with Human Resources to upload the training onto PowerDMS, which will make it easier for employees to access, and the Ethics Office to manage trainings.

TRAINING NEW EMPLOYEES

The Ethics Office has created a training program that educates many current officials and employees on the Code of Ethics. Moving forward, we will work with Human Resources to provide specialized training for new employees during their new hire orientation.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

It has been proven that community outreach is crucial in educating the public about the board's functions. The Ethics Office is committed to continuing to engage in community service events and providing accountability through transparency.



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