



THE OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JOINT LEGISLATIVE ETHICS COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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Ohio Senate

General Government Committee

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Operating Budget Testimony FY 2024/2025

H.B. No. 33

***Joint Legislative Ethics Committee/Office of the
Legislative Inspector General***

Tony Bledsoe

Executive Director/Legislative Inspector General

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member

DeMora and members of the Committee, my name is Tony Bledsoe. I am the Executive Director of the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee (JLEC) and the Office of the Legislative Inspector General (OLIG). I appreciate the opportunity to come before you to present JLEC's budget proposal for the next biennium.

The Office of the Legislative Inspector General is accountable to the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee.

The OLIG is responsible for the implementation of Ohio Revised Code Chapter 102—the state's ethics laws as it pertains to state legislative officials and employees, including: Members and employees of, and candidates for, the Ohio General Assembly. Additionally, the OLIG is

responsible for the regulation of state-level lobbying activity.

Public corruption at the local, state and national level damages public confidence in our democracy. My written budget testimony has always focused on our advisory and regulatory roles. That remains true today. However, I believe it is important for me to clearly and publicly begin by stating that although JLEC is not a law enforcement agency; we have worked closely and continuously with the Public Corruption Task Force since 2006. We are a partner to the Task Force. This partnership is possible because the JLEC members long ago gave the OLIG independence to work directly and confidentially with law enforcement.

Turning to our advisory role, we continue to focus on the prevention of ethics violations. Legislators and legislative staff have come to rely upon prompt answers from the OLIG as they consider various courses of actions. This willingness to seek guidance is a reflection of the proactive approach most in the Ohio General Assembly take to ethics compliance.

We not only provide legal advice on various ethics issues; we also distribute and review financial disclosure statements for the General Assembly. All financial disclosure statements are available for public viewing at our website. We continue to provide personalized answers to filers on their filing questions. By working with candidates

and legislators before they file, we increase the accuracy and completeness of the information provided to the public.

As part of its ethics compliance program, the OLIG conducts multiple training sessions. All legislative employees attend either bi-annual or annual ethics trainings. Newly hired employees attend a training session soon after their hire date. Caucus specific training is conducted for all Members at the beginning of a General Assembly.

The majority of OLIG resources are dedicated to regulating the lobbying activity of 1,300 lobbyists representing over 2,000 lobbying clients at the state level. The OLIG is responsible for lobbying compliance relative to attempts to

influence legislation, executive agency decisions, and the investment decisions of the five state retirement systems. We are also responsible for maintaining a database of the names of individuals banned from lobbying in Ohio.

To provide you with a statistical overview of our work, I can report in calendar year 2022, we answered over 2,000 substantive ethics and lobbying questions. The OLIG reviewed and processed over 40,000 filings including: lobbying registrations, lobbying activity and expenditure reports, post-employment disclosure statements as well as financial disclosure statements. These filings along with various search features are available at the JLEC website ohiolobbying.com.

When created in 1994, the OLIG had six employees. Currently we have five employees, as a position has been vacant for three years. Due to rising personnel costs, we noted to the House of Representatives a need for additional funding. The House included an annual increase of \$87,717.00 to our General Revenue Funding bringing the total GRF funding to \$713,000. The House included language that this amount shall be used to hire an additional attorney. The JLEC respectfully requests general revenue funding for Fiscal Years 24 and 25 of \$713,000.00 annually. We also request our annual spending authority from the JLEC lobbying fee account remain at \$150,000.00 and at \$10,000.00 from the JLEC Investigative Financial Disclosure Fund. We will make every effort to utilize less than the spending authority.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 33 and answer your questions.