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Hawaii News

Ethics panel seeks public input on how best to achieve goals

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The State Ethics Commission is asking the public to share ideas on how it can best promote integrity in government, inviting written comments and active participation at its meeting Thursday.

The commission, made up of five volunteers and a professional staff, has faced some rough going over the past year, as two of its decisions sparked strong opposition and were set aside.

With a new executive director at the helm, commissioners have decided to seek public input on their mission and operations. The commission is charged with educating state employees on their ethical duties and enforcing the state Ethics Code and Lobbyists Law.

"We thought we would take a look at both the goals of the organization and some of our existing policies to see if there are things that we ought to change or other ways that we can best ensure the highest ethical standards in state government," said Dan Gluck, who became executive director in August.

"I would love for people to submit written testimony in advance," he said. "Whatever input we get from the public would be of great interest to the commissioners."

The agenda for the meeting includes an item, "Strategic Planning," which is billed as a public discussion of how the commission should foster integrity in government.

That could include whether to seek changes in state laws, pass administrative rules to interpret the ethics laws, or focus enforcement in a particular area.

The commission is seeking input from the public as well as state officials, lawmakers, lobbyists and nonprofit organizations.

Also on the agenda for the meeting are updates on the two controversial cases that triggered lawsuits, one by the Hawaii State Teachers Association and the other by a charter school administrator.

In the first, a state judge sided with the teachers union, saying the commission should have gathered public input before issuing advice that kept teachers from traveling free as chaperones on student field trips they arranged with tour companies.

In the second, a commission ruling against a charter school employee was overturned by the Hawaii Supreme Court because there were conflicting provisions in the law at the time on the ethical duties of charter school employees.

The meeting will be at 10 a.m. Thursday in Suite 960, American Savings Bank Tower, 1001 Bishop St. Written testimony may be sent to ethics@hawaiiethics.org. People who have questions may call 587-0460.