

**OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES
OF THE
PALM BEACH COUNTY COMMISSION ON ETHICS (COE)
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
JANUARY 8, 2026**

**THURSDAY
1:30 P.M.**

**WEISMAN GOVERNMENTAL CENTER
COMMISSION CHAMBERS**

MEMBERS:

Michael S. Kridel, Chair
Peter L. Cruise, Vice Chair
Michael H. Kugler
Rodney G. Romano
Kristin A. Vara-Garcia

COMMISSION ON ETHICS STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Higgs, COE Investigator II
Abigail Irizarry, COE Investigator II
Christie E. Kelley, COE Director III
Gina A. Levesque, COE Intake and Compliance Manager
S. Lizabeth Martin, COE Communication and Education Manager

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE STAFF PRESENT:

Danielle Freeman, Deputy Clerk

I. Call to Order

The vice chair called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Vara-Garcia led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Roll Call

Present: Vice Chair Peter L. Cruise, Commissioner Michael H. Kugler,
Commissioner Rodney G. Romano, and Commissioner Kristin A.
Vara-Garcia

Absent: Chair Michael S. Kridel

IV. Introductory Remarks

No introductory remarks were made.

V. Approval of Minutes from December 5, 2024

MOTION to approve the minutes. Motion by Commissioner Vara-Garcia, seconded by Commissioner Romano, and carried 4-0.

VI. Processed Advisory Opinions (Consent Agenda)

- a. RQO 26-001
- b. RQO 26-002
- c. RQO 26-003

MOTION to approve the consent agenda. Motion by Commissioner Kugler, seconded by Commissioner Vara-Garcia, and carried 4-0.

VII. Items Pulled from Consent Agenda

- a.

No items were pulled from the consent agenda.

VIII. 2025 Annual Report Overview Presentation

Ms. Kelley provided a slideshow presentation of the 2025 Annual Report, which included an overview of the mission and strategic plan; education and outreach events; achievements; COE trainings; and upcoming projects for 2026.

Ms. Kelley expressed appreciation to the Public Affairs Department for their support with the 2025 Annual Report and to COE staff for their efforts throughout the year.

Commissioner Romano thanked COE staff and noted it was a pleasure working with everyone.

Commissioner Romano asked whether a metric existed to track complaints submitted to the COE that could not be addressed due to HB1957. Ms. Kelley explained that the pre-inquiry check process allowed staff to review and monitor complaints to determine which could be addressed.

Commissioner Vara-Garcia stated that she looked forward to reading the annual report in its entirety.

Commissioner Kugler echoed the sentiments expressed by his colleagues. He also asked if there was a plan to educate the public more regarding the COE.

Ms. Kelley said Ms. Martin continued to look for ways to bring awareness to the COE with her outreach efforts.

IX. Executive Director Comments

Ms. Kelley reported the following updates:

- More than 500 attendees visited the COE's booth at a recent job fair.
- Trainings were conducted at various municipalities.
- Ms. Martin had attended the COGEL conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where she learned about different tools to implement in her education and outreach events.
- An update on Mr. Book's appeal was provided, and more information would be forthcoming.

Ms. Kelley wished everyone a happy new year.

X. Commission Comments

No comments were made.

XII. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

XIII. Adjournment

At 1:47 p.m., the chair declared the meeting adjourned.

APPROVED:



_____ Chair/Vice Chair