Highlights from 2018 COGEL Conference

Our City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection played host to the 40th annual conference of the Council on Governmental Ethics Laws (COGEL) in early December 2018. Approximately 750 federal, state and local government officials from all over the U.S., as well as Canada, gathered here for great food (Reading Terminal was a big hit!) and unique shopping (the holiday booths in Dilworth and LOVE Parks got rave reviews!).

And also for four days of sharing recent developments and “best practices” in government ethics, elections, open records, lobbying and campaign finance. Philadelphia was well represented at the COGEL conference from City Representative Sheila Hess giving her nobody-does-it-better welcome to the visitors to the Office of LGBT Affairs’ Executive Director Amber Hikes talking about her own experiences with sexual harassment to City Commissioner Al Schmidt recounting the City’s efforts to increase voter registration and get-out-the-vote.

Staff at the Philadelphia Board of Ethics participated in several break-out sessions, as moderators or panel members. Inspector General Amy Kurland presented on her office’s role in driving down corruption in Philly government and Chief Integrity Officer Ellen Mattleman Kaplan described the financial disclosure requirements for City employees. Deputy Chief Integrity Officer Krystle Baker and Chief of Staff to the Chief Administrative Officer Stephanie Tipton showcased their innovative “Bids Gone Bad” training, a must-do for all City employees with a hand in contracting and procurement processes. (If you haven’t taken this training, call our office to schedule a session.)

Finally, John Dean, White House counsel to Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal, reminded COGEL attendees why governments at all levels must continue to operate according to unassailable principles of integrity, transparency and accountability. Dean, a frequent CNN commentator, made no secret of his views on the ethical behavior of the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and wondered if the lessons of Watergate need re-learning nearly 50 years after the Watergate break-in riveted the nation.

Despite a near-unanimous plea to hold next year’s COGEL conference in Hawaii, Chicago is the next on tap.

Did You Know?

♦ Integrity Week’s 2018 Featured Speaker, Terry Mutchler was inducted into the National Freedom of Information Coalition’s State Open Government Hall of Fame for her lifetime work promoting in transparency.

♦ Want a second job? Not sure what to do? Read Executive Order 12-16 on Outside Employment, which regulates outside and self-employment by Executive Branch employees, here.

♦ You can view settlement agreements entered into by the City’s Board of Ethics online.

♦ The Office of Inspector General reports over $7 million in total savings and recovery in 2017 in its annual report, here.
Thoughts from our Intern: Alex Paparella

Alex is a graduate student pursuing a Masters of Arts in Philosophy at West Chester University.

There are many types of city employees. Those who work directly for the people, those who administer the works for the people, and those who ensure that the work is done with integrity and care for everyone. Each group is essential to the operation of the City of Philadelphia, but if any group operates without regard to ethics and integrity it puts the whole government in jeopardy. Philadelphia is fortunate enough to have invested in its ethics infrastructure and, through the work of the Chief Integrity Office, keeps the City operating by the virtues of fair play, integrity and transparency. Through the development of training and advising on matters of ethics, the Chief Integrity Office is an office which demonstrates to the public that the Administration and the City is dedicated to cultivating honest government for the future.

As the Intern to the Chief Integrity Office, I was able to explore the ethics hierarchy in Philadelphia and it is clear to me no other City department tackles ethics with a more proactive and preventative approach. I spent my time assisting the Office with projects and tackling my own research on the national standing of the City’s 66 year old political activity restrictions. I have found the office stands by the idea that the time to address ethics concerns is not just after the scandal has broken, but before projects are even proposed. The task at hand for the Chief Integrity Office is not only teaching City employees the ethics rules but instilling in their life and work a desire to act with virtue for the people of Philadelphia.

- Alex Paparella

Thanks for the praise, Alex. You were a great intern! If you know someone interested in interning with our office, contact Krystle Baker.