



## New York State Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government

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### Commission On Ethics and Lobbying in Government Announces Key Staff Appointments

*Filling Critical Positions with Experienced, Dedicated Public Servants Advances Fulfillment of Oversight, Compliance, Training & Enforcement Efforts, Improves Transparency*

**ALBANY, NY (Feb. 21, 2023)** — The Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government (COELIG) today announced new staff appointments that will bolster its ongoing education and enforcement work, while improving outreach to stakeholders, lawmakers, and members of the public.

These staffing changes come as the commission ramps up its expanded ethics training programs for lobbyists and clients and executive branch officials and employees, and continues its work to enforce state ethics and lobbying laws.

Keith C. St. John has been named the commission's General Counsel, Emily DeSantis has been appointed Director of Communications and Public Affairs and Public Information Officer, Carol Quinn has been named Director of Lobbying, Michael Sande has been appointed Director of Ethics and Kavita K. Bhatt has been appointed Deputy General Counsel.

A full list of appointments appears below.

"We continue to build a strong team of highly talented and motivated individuals who are dedicated to ensuring elected officials and those who seek to influence them are adhering to the highest ethical standards," **said COELIG Executive Director Sanford Berland.** "I am pleased to see our staff grow and look forward to working with both existing and new employees to fulfill our broad and far-reaching responsibilities in as transparent a manner as possible."

"A staff that is not only experienced, but also committed to promoting and protecting strong ethics at all levels of government is essential to the success of our mission," **said the Commission's interim chair, Frederick A. Davie.** "I am

confident these appointees will work tirelessly to help safeguard and promote more ethical government both in Albany and statewide.”

The new appointees include:

**Keith C. St. John** has been appointed **General Counsel**. A longtime public servant, going back to his days as a member of the Albany Common Council and the first openly gay Black person elected to public office in the country when he joined the Council in 1989, Mr. St. John has been co-acting general counsel/director of ethics since COELIG’s founding last year. He previously served as deputy counsel and director of ethics for the former Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE) since 2017, after nearly two decades with the New York State Senate. A Westchester County native, Mr. St. John received his Juris Doctor from Cornell Law School and holds a bachelor’s degree in economics from Vassar College.

**Kavita K. Bhatt** has been appointed **Deputy General Counsel**. Ms. Bhatt joined JCOPE in 2018 as an associate attorney in the Advice & Guidance Unit and was tasked in September 2022 with overseeing COELIG’s Investigations Unit. There she crafted a strategy to advance more than 100 matters carried over from JCOPE. Prior to JCOPE, Ms. Bhatt served in the Office of General Counsel for the MTA-New York City Transit Authority, representing the authority in all aspects of labor and employment litigation and serving as lead attorney for several contract negotiations. Ms. Bhatt holds a J.D. from Fordham University School of Law and an undergraduate degree from the Binghamton University School of Management.

**Emily DeSantis** has been appointed **Director of Communications and Public Affairs and Public Information Officer**. She brings 18 years of communications experience to the commission, most recently serving as assistant commissioner for public affairs at the New York State Education Department. Ms. DeSantis previously held a similar role at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and has held positions as deputy director of communications for the environment in the Governor’s Office and as deputy press secretary for the State Comptroller. Ms. DeSantis earned a master’s degree in public relations from Syracuse University and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Massachusetts.

**Carol Quinn** has been appointed **Director of Lobbying**. The co-acting general counsel and acting director and deputy director of lobbying for COELIG since its inception, Ms. Quinn first joined JCOPE in 2015, leading the former commission’s efforts to propose, adopt and revise its Comprehensive Lobbying Regulations and launch and enhance its online lobbying application. Most recently, she worked to launch COELIG’s new and improved online ethics training for lobbyists and clients and has overseen the commission’s review of lobbying filings to ensure compliance with the Lobbying Act. A former assistant counsel for the Governor’s Office of Regulatory Reform, Ms. Quinn also has served as a private consultant for various education reform and charter school operation organizations. Ms. Quinn received

her Juris Doctor from Western New England School of Law and holds bachelor's degree in English/Communications.

**Michael Sande** has been appointed **Director of Ethics**. Sande joined JCOPE in 2014, beginning as an associate counsel in the Ethics Unit and most recently serving as deputy director of ethics since 2017. A veteran of both public and private legal services, including as an attorney for the New York City Administration for Children's Services and a private defense attorney in New York state and federal courts, Mr. Sande earned his J.D. from Cornell Law School.

**Mariana Cadiz** has been appointed **Acting Director of Administration**. Ms. Cadiz has spent her career in New York state service providing support in all fiscal and human resource-related matters, beginning with the New York Temporary State Commission on Lobbying in 2001, as an administrative assistant before serving as assistant director of administration for JCOPE and then as deputy director of administration.

**Megan E. Mutolo** has been appointed **Deputy Director of Lobbying**. Prior to joining JCOPE as an associate counsel in 2020, Ms. Mutolo served as a senior attorney for the New York State Department of Health, handling and advising on a variety of matters, including environmental health and compliance, early intervention, and state aid, and reviewing and drafting regulations and proposed legislation. She previously was a legislative fellow for state Senator Kemp Hannon and holds a J.D. from Albany Law School.

**Marlena Diaz** has been appointed **Deputy Director of Learning Innovation Administration**. Ms. Diaz first joined the Lobbying Education Unit at the New York State Temporary Commission on Lobbying in 2006 and went on to hold positions with the Commission on Public Integrity and JCOPE, ultimately being named assistant director of communications. During her tenure at JCOPE, Ms. Diaz has focused her efforts on data transparency, website redesign and producing instructional material for state employees and the lobbying community.

**Lori A. Donadio** has been appointed **Managing Principal Investigative Analyst**. With her extensive experience in legal, investigative, and enforcement matters, Ms. Donadio will serve as a liaison between the Commission's various units. She began her career in state service nearly 18 years ago as a confidential legal assistant for the New York State Temporary Commission on Lobbying and worked as a principal investigative analyst for the predecessor agency. Ms. Donadio holds an associate degree in applied science and a paralegal degree. Prior to her state tenure, she worked as a paralegal in the private sector.

In addition, COELIG's Compliance Unit has appointed **Syed Hassan** as **Compliance Auditor**. Mr. Hassan most recently served as lead specialist, corporate for GE. He holds an

ABA certificate in lending compliance and a B.S. in Economics with minors in Finance and Statistics from Government College University in Pakistan.

Also, COELIG's Lobbying Division has promoted Brian Keough and Christian Milazzo to the position of Lobbying Filings Specialist.

**Brian Keough** joined JCOPE in 2018 and has served as an assistant filings specialist for both JCOPE and COELIG. Mr. Keough holds a bachelor's degree from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

**Christian Milazzo** joined JCOPE in 2018 and has served as an assistant filings specialist for both JCOPE and COELIG. Mr. Milazzo holds a bachelor's degree from Southern Connecticut State University.

COELIG's Lobbying Division has hired two new **Assistant Filings Specialists - Michaela Ruth and Nathaniel Hathaway:**

**Ms. Ruth** holds a B.S. from California State University, Bakersfield and most recently served as an electronic health records specialist II for Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services in California.

**Mr. Hathaway** holds a B.A. from the University at Albany. He previously held a coordinator position at Marshalls.

The Financial Disclosure Statements Unit has hired **Lillian Garland as an Assistant Filings Specialist.** Ms. Garland has extensive experience working in state and municipal government – including stints with the State Education Department, the Higher Education Services Corporation, and the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery. She holds a bachelor's degree in human services from Empire State College.

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