



# STATE OF WISCONSIN *ETHICS BOARD*

James R. Morgan  
Chairman  
Paul M. Holzem  
David L. McRoberts  
Dorothy C. Johnson  
Richard Warch  
Courtney L. Hunt

On the capitol square at:  
44 EAST MIFFLIN STREET, STE 601  
MADISON, WISCONSIN 53703-2800  
Phone: 608/266-8123  
Fax: 608/264-9319  
ethics@ethics.state.wi.us  
<http://ethics.state.wi.us>

Roth Judd  
Director

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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*for further information contact*  
ERIK HAYKO  
608-266-8175  
[erik.hayko@ethics.state.wi.us](mailto:erik.hayko@ethics.state.wi.us)

### **Ethics Board to enable citizens' online search of officials' financial interests**

The Ethics Board will build on its commitment to make information more readily available through the use of technology by developing a website that will enable state public officials, heads of state agencies, legislators, members of the press, and the general public to learn about the financial relationships of every state public official, state agency, and legislative committee in Wisconsin.

Development of the web site is being made possible by a \$75,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation. The Joyce Foundation supports efforts to improve the quality of life and democratic institutions in the Great Lakes region.

Lawrence N. Hansen, Vice President of the Joyce Foundation, said, "The Ethics Board is a proven leader in using technology to enhance citizen access to government. We are confident that, with this grant, the Ethics Board will build on its past success in an important area."

Wisconsin's Code of Ethics for State Public Officials requires that a state official file annually a statement identifying the official's financial relationships. Each statement lists the official's and the official's family's employer(s), customers and clients, investments, and creditors.

The web site will enable individuals and organizations to review the financial interests of a specific legislative committee or state agency prior to a hearing or consideration of major issues to ensure the absence of any conflicting interests. Attorneys will be able to view a presiding judge's financial interests prior to trial to ensure there are no conflicts that would disqualify the judge. The press and public will be able to determine if government decision-makers have personal interests in public matters.

The Ethics Board's Director, Roth Judd stated, "more than 25 years ago, the legislature determined that this information should be available to the public. The availability of this information online will ensure that public officials, reporters, and the general public have convenient access to the information in a simple, searchable format. It will take important information out of filing cabinets and into citizens' homes and offices."

Lawrence N. Hansen said, "We are very pleased to be able to facilitate the creation of this important new information tool. The Ethics Board has demonstrated that information technology can have a positive effect on the formation of public policy."

The Ford Foundation has previously honored the Wisconsin Ethics Board for its creation of the country's most comprehensive lobbying reporting system.

Roth Judd said, "This is a tremendous honor for the Ethics Board and the State of Wisconsin, as the grant enables the development of a financial disclosure website that no other state can rival."

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