

School Ethics Commission Meeting Public Session Minutes

February 24, 2026

Chairperson Bender called the regularly scheduled meeting of the School Ethics Commission (Commission or SEC) to order at 9:33 a.m.

Notice of the meeting was provided to the State House Press Corps and the Secretary of State and filed as required by the Open Public Meetings Act.

I. Roll Call¹

| Roll Call | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Present | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| Absent | | X | | | | X | X | 3 |

Also, in attendance were Brigid Martens, Director; Dana Jones and Jeannine Pizzigoni, staff members for the Office of School Ethics; and Anna Toor, Deputy Attorney General (DAG).

II. First Public Comment

At the start of the meeting, Chairperson Bender explained to the public how the meeting would be conducted. More specifically, Chairperson Bender explained that the public would be afforded the opportunity to provide public comment; the Commission would then adjourn to executive session; the Commission would return to public at approximately 12:00 p.m.; at that time, members of the public would be afforded another opportunity to provide public comment; and then the Commission would vote on matters pertinent to its business.

Director Martens also advised the public as follows: individuals wishing to provide public comments/statements during Public Comment regarding a matter pending before the Commission are asked not to litigate the merits of their case as the Commission's review of matters is limited to the written submissions; and everyone in attendance is asked to exercise an appropriate degree of decorum as this is a public forum.

9:35 a.m. Sheldon Epstein, Respondent in the matter docketed as C65-25, noted his attendance, but did not offer a public statement/comment.

¹ Due to inclement weather and a delayed opening for State offices, the Commissioners and the staff attended the meeting virtually.

9:35 a.m. Jennifer Lewis-Gallagher, one of the Complainants (C77-20) in the Consolidated matter docketed as C75-20, C76-20, C77-20 and C79-20, noted her attendance, but did not offer a public statement/comment.

9:35 a.m. Debra DeFelice, one of the Complainants (C75-20) in the Consolidated matter docketed as C75-20, C76-20, C77-20 and C79-20, noted her attendance, but did not offer a public statement/comment.

III. Executive Session

At 9:43 a.m., the following Resolution was read:

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act (*N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq.*) authorizes the Commission, a public body, to meet in Executive Session under certain circumstances; and

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act requires that the Commission adopt a Resolution at a public meeting to go into Executive Session; and

Now therefore be it resolved that, consistent with the provisions of *N.J.A.C. 10:4-12(b)*, the Commission will adjourn to Executive Session to discuss matters which, by statute, are regarded as confidential and also to discuss matters possibly involving litigation: C56-25; C70-25; C71-25; C74-25; C75-25; C76-25; C77-25; C79-25; C80-25; C82-25; C86-25; C90-25; C92-25; C75-20, C76-20, C77-20 and C79-20 (Consolidated); C54-25; C55-25; C57-25; C58-25; C60-25; C62-25; C64-25; C65-25; C67-25; C69-25; A03-26; A04-26; A05-26; C79-17; C91-17; C100-25; C107-25; C117-25; C137-25; C139-25; C03-26; C08-26; C09-26; Doctrines of Necessity submitted by the Monroe Township and Ridgewood Boards of Education; Discuss the status of C75-24; Consider whether to place C111-25 in abeyance; and Consider whether to place C115-25 in abeyance; and

Now therefore be it further resolved that the Commission will return to open session to conduct business at the conclusion of Executive Session.

Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss the matters set forth in the foregoing Resolution.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

IV. Return to Public

At **12:07 p.m.**, a motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to return to public session for the purpose of receiving public comment/testimony, and to vote on matters discussed in Executive Session (as appropriate).

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

V. Complaints to Review

C56-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C70-25 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C71-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C74-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C75-25 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C76-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C77-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C79-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C80-25 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C82-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C86-25 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C90-25 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C92-25 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to draft a decision as discussed.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

VI. Decisions to Adopt as Written²

C75-20, C76-20, C77-20 and C79-20 (Consolidated) Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C54-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

² Director Martens briefed the Commission on each matter.

C55-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C57-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C58-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C60-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C62-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C64-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C65-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C67-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

C69-25 Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adopt the decision as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

VII. Advisory Opinions

A03-26 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to adopt the advisory opinion as written.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

A04-26 Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to table the advisory opinion for further discussion.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

A05-26 Motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to table the advisory opinion to request additional information.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

VIII. Administrative Dismissals

- C79-17** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C91-17** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C100-25** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C107-25** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C117-25** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C137-25** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C139-25** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C03-26** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C08-26** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.
- C09-26** This matter was on the agenda for informational purposes only.

IX. Other Business

Doctrines of Necessity submitted by the Monroe Township and Ridgewood Boards of Education. These matters were on the agenda for informational purposes only.

Discuss the status of C75-24. Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to rescind the probable cause notice.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

Consider whether to place C111-25 in abeyance. Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to place the matter in abeyance.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

Consider whether to place C115-25 in abeyance. Motion was made by Dennis Roberts, and seconded by Patricia Gois, to place the matter in abeyance.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

X. Minutes

Motion was made by Patricia Gois, and seconded by Mark Finkelstein, to adopt the minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting (public and executive) conducted on January 27, 2026.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

XI. Second Public Comment

12:21 p.m. Sheldon Epstein, Respondent in the matter docketed as C65-25, once again noted his attendance, but did not offer a public statement/comment.

XII. Adjournment

At 12:24 p.m., a motion was made by Mark Finkelstein, and seconded by Dennis Roberts, to adjourn.

Vote

| Vote | Robert Bender | Michael Carucci | Mark Finkelstein | Patricia Gois | Dennis Roberts | Carol E. Sabo | Richard Tomko | Total |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Yes | X | | X | X | X | | | 4 |
| No | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Abstention | | | | | | | | 0 |

Submitted by:

Jeannine Pizzigoni

Approved by:

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission