



City of Wilsonville Policy Position
Supporting HB 4159, HB 4161, and HB 4177 Related to the Government Ethics
Commission, official compensation, and public meetings:
Thoughtful, negotiated fixes to unintended consequences of ethics interpretations

February 18, 2026

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chair Elmer, Vice-Chair Pham, and Members of the House Committee on Rules:

On behalf of the City of Wilsonville, I am submitting this testimony in **strong support of HB 4159, HB 4161, and HB 4177**, the package of technical fixes and reforms to elements of Oregon's ethics rules and the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC).

While not directly engaged on the OGEC Workgroup, Wilsonville maintained close communications with our local government partners who did serve on the workgroup, including the League of Oregon Cities (LOC). We also appreciate Representative Sosa for his leadership of the workgroup to navigate a nuanced topic.

HB 4159, which ensures local government representation on the OGEC, and HB 4161, which clarifies food and beverage rules for elected officials and volunteers who are taking time away from work or family to serve their community, are straightforward technical fixes that received swift consensus in the workgroup.

HB 4177 seeks to resolve an issue with OGEC's interpretation of the legislative intent behind HB 2805 (2023). HB 2805 arose out of serious, evidenced violations of Oregon's longstanding and highly regarded public meetings laws. Wilsonville supports transparency and accountability in our public process, and we applaud the legislature for taking action with HB 2805 to strengthen and modernize Oregon's rules.

However, OGEC's overly broad interpretation of HB 2805 and its related regulations has hamstrung local governments' ability to do business and actually harmed public process, rather than improving it. Broad definitions in statute and administrative rule, conflicting interpretations from OGEC staff, and penalties imposed on elected officials who only received a communication rather than actively participating have led to our attorneys suggesting an extremely cautious approach where public discourse with elected officials is

discouraged. Essentially, local elected officials have been told: “if not in a public meeting, don’t talk to anyone.”

For example, the City is in the process of hiring a new City Manager and recently held a community meet-and-greet with the finalists. Attending such an event and interacting with constituents is a core function of being a city councilor. Yet we were all keenly aware that OGEC could, based on its recent interpretations, consider each and every person in that room to be an intermediary for serial communications. Additionally, councilors often meet with constituents for coffee or in a community space to discuss topics of interest to the constituent. Councilors have been advised not to include any other councilor (despite two members *not* constituting a quorum of our City Council) in case the community member discusses the same issues with other councilors. In fact, councilors have been advised to give constituents specific warnings about talking to other councilors in a manner that may inadvertently cause a violation of the new OGEC regulations and interpretations.

To put it bluntly: local elected officials are in fear of OGEC sanction from attending a tour of a local business, having coffee with a constituent, speaking with staff to gain clarity on an issue, and countless other functions important to having an engaged and educated city council. For the good of public process, for the good of transparency, for the good of Oregon, this untenable situation must change.

HB 4177 restores clarity and confidence with clearer definitions and functional guidance. Despite the alarmist, hyperbolic rhetoric from the OGEC Director at the February 17 hearing, HB 4177 protects transparency and public trust through continued allowance of public discourse. A quorum of decision-makers has the same transparency obligations, deliberations must still be held in public meetings, and purposeful serial communications are still illegal. HB 4177 strengthens the guardrails and makes a brighter line. Bad actors who cross the line will still be held accountable. But routine communications that benefit good governance, like speaking with constituents and the media, will be safeguarded.

For these reasons, the City of Wilsonville **supports HB 4159, HB 4161, and HB 4177** and respectfully urges the Committee to send them to the floor with a “Do Pass” recommendation. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,



Mayor Shawn O’Neil
City of Wilsonville