

Submitter: Denice Searcy
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4177
NO on HB 4177

I am opposed to this bill for these reasons

1.) Extended procedural requirements:

Complainants must now provide “specified documentation” before complaints are even considered filed, and must wait through a 90-day grievance process with the public body first .

This creates multiple hurdles before reaching the Oregon Government Ethics Commission.

2.) Forced court route for certain complaints:

If the complaint alleges violations by commission members themselves, complainants must proceed directly in court rather than through the commission .

This eliminates the administrative option entirely for those cases, requiring citizens to bear the cost and complexity of litigation.

3.) Longer timeline: The grievance filing window extends from 30 to 90 days, but the mandatory pre-filing grievance process adds significant delay before formal action can begin.

4.) New “Cure” Provisions That May Reduce Accountability: The bill creates multiple ways for public bodies to avoid penalties by “curing” violations, including simply acknowledging the error and promising to do better in the future. This could reduce deterrence if bodies know they can avoid consequences through procedural corrections.

5.) Combined effect: These changes shift power away from complainants and toward public bodies, potentially making it harder for citizens with limited resources to pursue legitimate violations while giving officials more ways to avoid accountability. The current statute and guidance draw a bright line, requiring deliberations and decisions to be made in public. The changes to section 5 do nothing but sow confusion.

Officials can submit their questions to OGEC, which can work with DOJ on answers. In sum, the new wording opens the door to confusion on the part of well-meaning members of public bodies. It does nothing to improve a law that serves Oregon well. I respectfully ask the committee to oppose the bill.