

Public Campaign Finance Board Hires First Staff

ALBANY, NY (05/25/2021) - The newly created Public Campaign Finance Board today approved four people to lead the new Public Campaign Finance Unit at a meeting convened remotely with the six commissioners and staff. Cheryl L. Couser and William J. McCann were appointed Co-Program Directors for the new unit. Nicholas R. Cartagena was appointed Special Counsel to the unit and Robert Eckels was appointed Assistant Program Director.

These are the first hires for the Public Campaign Finance Board which earlier this year appointed Cardozo Law School Professor, Ekow N. Yankah as chair and former Minority Leader of the State Assembly, Brian M. Kolb as vice-chair.

"I am very pleased to announce these appointments," said Commissioner Yankah. "We are working hard to find the best people to lead this effort and Cheryl Couser and Nick Cartagena are very experienced and hard-working in the Elections community. Given our collective view of the difficulty of the task ahead, we are fortunate to have such qualified people within our organization already."

"The PCFB continues to work in a very open and cooperative manner," stated Commissioner Kolb. "These bi-partisan appointments are the fruit of those efforts. Bill McCann is one of the most knowledgeable and experienced campaign finance attorneys in the state. I am pleased to have him on our staff."

"Bill McCann and Bob Eckels are mainstays in the regulatory world of Campaign Finance disclosure," said Commissioner Peter Kosinski. "They both understand what it takes to make a program like this successful. We need experienced people to lead candidates through a complex process and ensure the public knows how its money is being spent."

"All four appointees have served the State Board admirably for many years," stated Commissioner Douglas Kellner. "They are excellent selections to lead this important new venture for New York State. The State Legislature has high hopes for this program and it has entrusted it to the State Board and Public Campaign Finance Board to launch it together. Their diligence and experience will help ensure a successful outcome."

From 2017-2021, Cheryl L. Couser served as the Deputy Director of Public Information at the State Board of Elections. In this position, Mrs. Couser worked on election security issues, grant administration and as a spokesperson for the Board. She first joined the State Board in 2008 as Compliance Specialist, managing the Board's Compliance Unit which oversees campaign finance issues. In 2014, Mrs. Couser served as Project Co-Lead in implementing the 2014 pilot program on public financing for the Office of State Comptroller. Prior to that, Mrs. Couser began her career in New York State government in 1999, when she was appointed as a committee assistant in the New York State Assembly. She worked as an Analyst on the Consumer Affairs and Protection Committee and as the Principal Policy Analyst for the New York State Assembly Committee on Governmental Operations. In that role, Mrs. Couser was responsible for the oversight of approximately 20 state agencies. Her areas of knowledge include Homeland Security and Emergency Management, State Procurement Policy, Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE), Open Government Laws and State Ethics Laws. Mrs. Couser is a graduate of SUNY Cortland and received a master's degree in public policy from the University at Albany.

William J. McCann, was appointed Special Deputy Counsel at the New York State Board of Elections in 2000, working primarily in the areas of campaign finance and Election Law compliance. In this capacity, Mr. McCann served as Project Co-Lead on the development and implementation of all aspects of the 2014 Public Financing Pilot Project for State Comptroller. Prior to that he worked at Empire State Development as chief program counsel to the iconic I LOVE NY program. He is a 1986 graduate of the University at Albany, State University of New York, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude* in American History and Teacher Education. He also earned a Master of Science in Educational Administration and Policy Studies from U-Albany in 1987. After completing a post-graduate fellowship in the New York State Senate, serving as the Richard J. Roth Fellow, Mr. McCann attended Albany Law School, where he earned his Juris Doctor in 1991. An avid Jazz fan, Mr. McCann has for more than 35 years hosted an award-winning Saturday morning jazz program on the U-Albany radio station, 90.9FM, WCDB.

Nicholas R. Cartagena was appointed as Deputy Counsel to the New York State Board of Elections in 2016. In this position, Mr. Cartagena provided legal representation and support for the Board; developed and monitored legislative initiatives for the Board; and responded to inquiries from local boards of elections, local governments and the general public regarding the administration and application of the Election Law and campaign finance regulations. Mr. Cartagena was also an attorney with the Department of Health for three years providing litigation defense and program support to various Medicaid programs. He also worked for Program and Counsel for the New York State Assembly for five years, where he was counsel to the Health committee and Mental Health committee. Additionally, after law school, Mr. Cartagena worked in private practice for five years. He is a graduate of SUNY New Paltz and Fordham Law School.

Robert Eckels was appointed to the New York State Board of Elections in 2007 as a Confidential Auditor. Mr. Eckels went on to become a Compliance Specialist, where he managed the day to day activities of the Campaign Finance unit. He is a graduate of Siena College and resides in Slingerlands with his wife and two daughters.

The Public Campaign Finance Board was created by the State Legislature in 2019 as a result of action by a Blue Ribbon Commission appointed in the state budget of 2019-2020 to study public campaign finance reform in the state. The Board is charged with the responsibility of administering a program of public matching funds for candidates for state office beginning with the 2024 general election. The Board is made up of the four commissioners of the State Board of Elections plus three appointments, one each by the Governor, the Democratic leaders and the Republican leaders in each house of the Legislature. The Governor's appointment is currently vacant.

If you have any questions about this press release, please contact John Conklin at the Public Information Office, 518-474-1953; or by email at: INFO@elections.ny.gov.

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