

## Senate approves new South Carolina Ethics Commission members

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COLUMBIA — After more than two months without having a state Ethics Commission, the Senate on Tuesday approved eight new members tasked with investigating accusations of wrongdoing by South Carolina’s public officials.

The House approved the nominees on May 4.

“I’m pleased that the General Assembly has taken now the final step to approve the full commission charged with the responsibility of ruling on complaints submitted by citizens to the State Ethics Commission,” interim Executive Director Steve Hamm said.

According to the ethics law passed by the General Assembly last year creating the new independent panel of investigators, the eight commissioners — selected by Gov. Henry McMaster and the House and Senate Republican and Democratic caucuses

— were to be seated by April 1. The previous commission was disbanded March 30.

Hamm said he hoped to be able to hold a training session for the new commissioners sometime next week. Within the next month, he said they should be ready to determine if the more than 50 cases warrant further investigation.

The new Ethics Commission is accepting complaints against legislators for the first time. Cases against House and Senate members previously had gone straight to their respective ethics committee, meaning members policed their colleagues.

The commission can refer potential criminal violations to the state Attorney General's office. On more technical violations, commissioners can issue fines or, in the case of legislators, forward complaints to the House and Senate ethics committees.

The new commissioners are:

- Brian Barnwell of Eastover, who served on the commission that was disbanded in March, nominated by McMaster
- Donald Gist of Columbia, an attorney and former member of the S.C. Commission for the Blind, nominated by the Senate Democratic Caucus
- Donald Jackson of Ware Shoals, who serves on the S.C. Department of Consumer Affairs, nominated by the House Republican Caucus
- Victor Li of Columbia, who runs a law practice, nominated by the House Democratic Caucus
- Brandolyn Pinkston of Columbia, former administrator of the S.C. Department of Consumer Affairs, nominated by McMaster
- Rick Reames of Camden, former S.C. Department of Revenue director, nominated by the Senate Republican Caucus
- Childs Thrasher of Columbia, commercial attorney and former assistant Attorney General, nominated by McMaster
- Ashleigh Wilson of Columbia, attorney and former assistant Attorney General, nominated by McMaster

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