A complaint may be filed with the commission by a person who has actual knowledge of an alleged ethics violation. Also, by approval of at least five commissioners, the commission may initiate a complaint alleging an ethics violation. Finally, a public agency, the legislature or a legislative committee may refer a complaint to the commission.

A respondent shall be notified within seven days of the filing of the complaint, unless it is necessary to protect the integrity of a criminal investigation.

If the executive director determines that the complaint is within the commission’s jurisdiction, the director shall have the general counsel initiate an investigation.

If the executive director determines that the complaint is outside the commission’s jurisdiction or is subject to referral to another state agency, the director may refer the complaint to the appropriate agency.

If the general counsel determines that the complaint is frivolous or unsubstantiated, the complaint shall be dismissed. The complainant and respondent shall be notified of the decision and reasons for the dismissal. The commission shall not make public a complaint that has been dismissed or the reasons for dismissal.

If the general counsel determines that there is probable cause, the executive director shall promptly notify the respondent of the finding of probable cause. The respondent shall be notified of the specific allegations in the complaint and that a public hearing will be set.
The notification, complaint, specific allegations being investigated and any response to the complaint shall be made public thirty days following notice to the respondent. The director may delay notifying a respondent and releasing information to the public if it is deemed necessary to protect the integrity of a criminal investigation.

If the general counsel and respondent reach a settlement on the complaint, the settlement shall be submitted to the commission for its approval. If approved, the complaint and terms of the settlement shall be subject to public disclosure.

Upon receipt of the general counsel's recommendation, the commission or hearing officer shall dismiss a complaint or set a hearing.

At any time before or during a hearing, the hearing officer may approve a disposition of a complaint agreed to by the general counsel and respondent, as approved by the commission.

Following a hearing, the hearing officer shall issue a written decision and include the reasons for the decision. The decision may include recommendations for disciplinary action against the respondent and the hearing officer may impose any fines provided by law.

The complainant or respondent may appeal a decision of the hearing officer within thirty days of the decision to the full commission. The commission shall hear the matter within sixty days of notice of the appeal and issue a decision within one hundred eighty days.

The commission shall publicly disclose a decision, including a dismissal or the terms of a settlement. The commission shall provide the decision to the complainant, the respondent and the:

- House of Representatives if the respondent is a public official who is subject to impeachment;
- Appropriate legislative body if the respondent is a member of the legislature;
- Respondent's appointing authority if the respondent is an appointed public official;
- Appropriate public agency if the respondent is a public employee;
- Public agency with which the respondent has a government contract if the respondent is a government contractor; and
- Secretary of State and the respondent's employer, if any, if the respondent is a lobbyist.