

\$65K allocated to deal with backlog of Nevada ethics issues

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A state board this week approved a \$65,000 request from the state Ethics Commission to hire an attorney to help reduce a two-year backlog of unpublished opinions.

The Board of Examiners, made up of Gov. Brian Sandoval, Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto and Secretary of State Ross Miller, approved the request submitted by Caren Jenkins, executive director of the state Ethics Commission.

The request to tap a legislative contingency fund to pay the salary of an attorney for six months must now be approved by the Legislature's Interim Finance Committee, which meets today.

"I know that it's unusual to fund a position at this level, but I fear that without immediate attention to the backlog we'll never catch up," Jenkins told the board.

The Ethics Commission is adding to the backlog as it hears and decides more cases, she said. There are approximately 60 opinions that need to be written.

The emphasis for the commission has been hearing matters and rendering decisions, Jenkins said. The backlog has been an issue for some time, but has recently hit a critical stage, she said.

The commission sought two additional positions from the 2011 Legislature but the request was not funded due to other demands on scarce tax revenues.

Sandoval asked if there systemic issues with the operation of the commission that could help reduce the backlog.

Jenkins said such changes are being considered. But even with the implementation of successful streamlining efforts, the agency will not be able to catch up with the backlog, she said. The commission has a meeting set for Wednesday where the issue will come up for further discussion, Jenkins said.

“It’s not just money, I guess is the bottom line,” Sandoval said. “I’m going to vote to support this today but I would like to see some demonstration by the commission that it is seeking to improve its efficiencies and efficacy as well.”