



## STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### State Ethics Commission files lawsuit against former WNMU President Joseph Shepard for misuse of public funds

*Albuquerque, NM, July 2, 2025* – The New Mexico State Ethics Commission has filed a civil enforcement action against Dr. Joseph Shepard, the former president of Western New Mexico University (WNMU), for violations of the Governmental Conduct Act.

The Governmental Conduct Act requires public officials to treat their positions as a public trust and prohibits the use of public resources for private interests. It also prohibits officials from using government property or funds for any purpose other than what is authorized by law. The Commission alleges that Shepard used his position as the president of WNMU to redirect a capital project from building an ADA-compliant access ramp to constructing an extended patio so it could be used for his daughter's wedding. The patio was completed shortly before the wedding at a cost exceeding \$177,000 in public funds, which came from legislative appropriations that had been allocated for instruction and faculty support at the university.

Misusing public funds for personal purposes violates the principles behind the Governmental Conduct Act, which is designed to ensure public funds are spent lawfully and that public resources are used for the benefit of the people of New Mexico.

“When public officials use public funds for private purposes, it undermines public trust,” said Jeremy Farris, Executive Director of the State Ethics Commission.

“That trust is essential because it ensures that government serves the people, not the private interests of those in power.”

The Commission’s complaint seeks civil penalties under the Governmental Conduct Act. It also seeks restitution to recover the public funds spent on the patio and return them to WNMU.

[Click here to read the State Ethics Commission’s complaint.](#)

### **About the State Ethics Commission**

The State Ethics Commission is an independent, constitutional state agency with the authority to enforce civil violations of New Mexico’s governmental ethics and disclosure statutes, including the Governmental Conduct Act. The Commission is comprised of three Democratic Commissioners, three Republican Commissioners, and one independent Commissioner who is registered as “decline to state.”

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For more information about the State Ethics Commission, please visit [sec.nm.gov](http://sec.nm.gov).