



Ohio Ethics Commission Releases New Gift and Entertainment Guidelines for State Government Employees and Public Officials

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The Ohio Ethics Commission recently issued a bulletin outlining gift and entertainment guidelines for state government employees and public officials. The bulletin reminds public employees and officials that they must take into account the value of the item given as well as the source of a gift or entertainment. Public employees cannot accept gifts or entertainment from “prohibited sources”, defined as any individuals, companies, organizations or other entities that do business with the agency, are regulated by the agency or have interested matters before the agency.

It is common for state government employees or public officials to have personal friends who are or work for a “prohibited source.” When this occurs, the public position supersedes the friendship and gifts of a substantial value from prohibited sources are not allowed. However, so long as the personal friend is not a “prohibited source,” the bulletin reminds public employees that gifts from personal friends are permitted. When defining a personal friendship, the commission suggests the following criteria:

- The duration and nature of the pre-existing relationship;
- If the individual has commonly exchanged gifts with the giver prior to becoming a state government employee or public official;
- Whether the giver personally paid for the gift or entertainment or sought reimbursement from its business entity;
- If the giver also gave the same or similar gift or entertainment to other state government employees or public officials.

Regardless of the relationship, the commission reminds financial disclosure statement filers that the source of all gifts/entertainment valued over \$75 must be disclosed.

The guidance can be found on the [Ohio Ethics Commission website](#).



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