

**ETHICAL PRACTICES BOARD**

**First Floor South, Centennial Building . 658 Cedar Street . St. Paul, MN 55155-1603**

Issued to:

Robert E. Wetherille, Jr., Lobbyist  
Minnesota State Fire Department Association  
3600 Edmund Boulevard  
Minneapolis, MN 55406

**RE: Gifts to Officials**

**ADVISORY OPINION #189**

**SUMMARY** =

189. The provisions of Minn. Stat. § 10A.071 apply to the Minnesota State Fire Department Association, a lobbyist principal, and prohibit the association from distributing calendar books to officials. The Minnesota State Fire Department Association should review the applicability of Minn. Stat. § 471.895, a statute that is not within the jurisdiction of the Ethical Practices Board and with regard to which the Board may not issue advisory opinions, if the calendar books are offered to local officials.

**FACTS**

As a lobbyist for the Minnesota State Fire Department Association ("the Association"), you ask the Ethical Practices Board for an advisory opinion based upon your statement of the following facts and information provided:

1. The Association, a lobbyist principal, represents about 600 fire departments in Minnesota, both full time and volunteer departments.
2. The Association has prepared, published, and distributed a calendar book in the past to provide the names and addresses of the Association officers and directors to interested parties.
3. You supplied a sample of the calendar book, which covers 1995 and 1996 and is enclosed in a plastic cover.

**QUESTION ONE**

May the Association, a lobbyist principal, give the calendar book to a legislator, an official as defined in Minn. Stat. § 10A.071, subd. 1?

## OPINION

No. A lobbyist principal is prohibited from giving a gift to an official, and an official is prohibited from accepting a gift from a lobbyist principal. If the Association receives contemporaneously from the legislator consideration of equal or greater value in return, then the book is not a gift. Minn. Stat. § 10A.071.

## QUESTION TWO

May the Association, a lobbyist principal, give the calendar book to an employee of the legislature, an official as defined in Minn. Stat. § 10A.071, subd. 1?

## OPINION

No. A lobbyist principal is prohibited from giving a gift to an official, and an official is prohibited from accepting a gift from a lobbyist principal. If the Association receives contemporaneously from the legislative employee consideration of equal or greater value in return, then the book is not a gift. Minn. Stat. § 10A.071.

## QUESTION THREE

May the Association, a lobbyist principal, give the calendar book to a local elected person who is an official as defined in Minn. Stat. § 10A.071, subd. 1?

## OPINION

No. A lobbyist principal is prohibited from giving a gift to a local official, including an elected official, in a metropolitan governmental unit, and the official is prohibited from accepting a gift from a lobbyist principal. If the Association receives contemporaneously from the local elected official consideration of equal or greater value in return, then the book is not a gift. Minn. Stat. § 10A.071. See the definitions of local official and metropolitan governmental unit, below. The Association should review the applicability of Minn. Stat. § 471.895, a statute that is not within the jurisdiction of the Ethical Practices Board and with regard to which the Board may not issue advisory opinions, if the calendar book is offered to local officials. See copy attached for your reference.

## QUESTION FOUR

May the Association, a lobbyist principal, give the calendar book to an employee of the state who is a public official as defined in Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subd. 18?

## OPINION

No. A lobbyist principal is prohibited from giving a gift to an employee of the state who is a

public official, and the official is prohibited from accepting a gift from a lobbyist principal. If the Association receives contemporaneously from the public official consideration of equal or greater value in return, then the book is not a gift. Minn. Stat. § 10A.071. See the definition of public official, below.

#### QUESTION FIVE

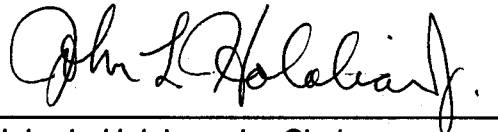
May the Association, a lobbyist principal, give the calendar book to an employee of a local government body?

#### OPINION

The Association should review the applicability of Minn. Stat. §471.895, a statute that is not within the jurisdiction of the Ethical Practices Board and with regard to which the Board may not issue advisory opinions, if the calendar book is offered to an employee of a local government body. See copy of this statute attached for your reference.

The Ethical Practices Board refers the requester to Advisory Opinion Nos. 141 and 167, in which the Board has answered similar questions.

Issued: 12-21-1994



John L. Holahan, Jr., Chair  
Ethical Practices Board

#### PERTINENT STATUTES

Minn. Stat. § 10A.01 DEFINITIONS provides:

...

Subd. 11. (a) "Lobbyist" means an individual:

(1) engaged for pay or other consideration, or authorized to spend money by another individual, association, political subdivision, or public higher education system, who spends more than five hours in any month or more than \$250, not including the individual's own travel expenses and membership dues, in any year, for the purpose of attempting to influence

legislative action or administrative action, or the official action of a metropolitan governmental unit, by communicating or urging others to communicate with public or local officials.

...

Subd. 18. "Public official" means any:

- (a) member of the legislature;
- (b) constitutional officer in the executive branch and the officer's chief administrative deputy;
- (c) member, chief administrative officer or deputy chief administrative officer of a state board or commission which has at least one of the following powers: (i) the power to adopt, amend or repeal rules, or (ii) the power to adjudicate contested cases or appeals;
- (d) commissioner, deputy commissioner, or assistant commissioner of any state department as designated pursuant to section 15.01;
- (e) individual employed in the executive branch who is authorized to adopt, amend or repeal rules or adjudicate contested cases;
- (f) executive director of the state board of investment;
- (g) executive director of the Indian affairs intertribal board;
- (h) commissioner of the iron range resources and rehabilitation board;
- (i) commissioner of mediation services;
- (j) deputy of any official listed in clauses (e) to (i);
- (k) judge of the workers' compensation court of appeals;
- (l) administrative law judge or compensation judge in the state office of administrative hearings or referee in the department of jobs and training;
- (m) solicitor general or deputy, assistant or special assistant attorney general;
- (n) individual employed by the legislature as secretary of the senate, chief clerk of the house, revisor of statutes, or researcher, legislative analyst, or attorney in the office of senate counsel and research or house research;
- (o) member or chief administrative officer of the metropolitan council, regional transit board, metropolitan transit commission, metropolitan waste control commission, metropolitan parks and open spaces commission, metropolitan airports commission or metropolitan sports facilities commission;
- (p) the director of the racing commission, the director of the gambling control board, the director of the state lottery, and the deputy director of the state lottery;
- (q) director or the division of gambling enforcement in the department of public safety;
- (r) member or executive director of the higher education facilities authority; or
- (s) member of the board of directors or president of the Minnesota world trade center corporation.

...

Subd. 25. **Local official.** "Local official" means a person who holds elective office in a political subdivision or who is appointed to or employed in a public position in a political subdivision in which the person has authority to make, to recommend, or to vote on as a member of the governing body, major decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of public money.

**Subd. 26. Metropolitan governmental unit.** "Metropolitan governmental unit" means any of the seven counties in the metropolitan area as defined in section 473.121, subdivision 2, a regional railroad authority established by one or more of those counties under section 398A.03, a city with a population of over 50,000 located in the seven-county metropolitan area, the metropolitan council, a metropolitan agency as defined in section 473.121, subdivision 5a, the Minnesota state high school league, and Minnesota Technology, Inc.

**Subd. 28. Principal.** "Principal" means an individual or association that:

(1) spends more than \$500 in the aggregate in any calendar year to engage a lobbyist, compensate a lobbyist, or authorize the expenditure of money by a lobbyist; or

(2) is not included in clause (1) and spends a total of at least \$50,000 in any calendar year on efforts to influence legislative action, administrative action, or the official action of governmental units, as described in section 10A.04, subdivision 6.

Laws of 1994, Ch. 377, Sec. 5, created Minn. Stat. § 10A.071 CERTAIN GIFTS BY LOBBYISTS AND PRINCIPALS PROHIBITED which provides:

**Subdivision 1. Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Gift" means money, real or personal property, a service, a loan, a forbearance or forgiveness of indebtedness, or a promise of future employment, that is given and received without the giver receiving consideration of equal or greater value in return.

(c) "Official" means a public official, an employee of the legislature, or a local official of a metropolitan governmental unit.

**Subd. 2. Prohibition.** A lobbyist or principal may not give a gift or request another to give a gift to an official. An official may not accept a gift from a lobbyist or principal.

**Subd. 3. Exceptions.** (a) The prohibitions in this sections do not apply if the gift is:

(1) a contribution as defined in section 10A.01, subdivision 7;

(2) services to assist an official in the performance of official duties, including by not limited to providing advice, consultation, information, and communication in connection with legislation, and services to constituents;

(3) services of insignificant monetary value;

(4) a plaque or similar memento recognizing individual services in a field of specialty or to a charitable cause;

(5) a trinket or memento of insignificant value;

(6) informational material of unexceptional value; or

(7) food or a beverage given at a reception, meal, or meeting away from the recipient's place of work by an organization before whom the recipient appears to make a speech or answer questions as part of a program.

(b) The prohibitions in this section do not apply if the gift is given:

(1) because of the recipient's membership in a group, a majority of whose members are

not officials, and an equivalent gift is given to the other members of the group; or

(2) by a lobbyist or principal who is a member of the family of the recipient, unless the gift is given on behalf of someone who is not a member of that family.

Laws of 1994, Ch. 377, Sec. 6, created Minn. Stat. § 471.895 CERTAIN GIFTS BY INTERESTED PERSONS PROHIBITED which provides:

Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Gift" has the meaning given it in section 10A.071, subdivision 1.

(c) "Interested person" means a person or a representative of a person or association that has a direct financial interest in a decision that a local official is authorized to make.

(d) "Local official" means an elected or appointed official of a county or city or of any agency, authority, or instrumentality of a county or city.

Subd. 2. **Prohibition.** An interested person may not give a gift or request another to give a gift to a local official. A local official may not accept a gift from an interested person.

Subd. 3. **Exceptions.** (a) The prohibitions in this sections do not apply if the gift is:

(1) a contribution as defined in section 211A.01, subdivision 5;

(2) services to assist an official in the performance of official duties, including by not limited to providing advice, consultation, information, and communication in connection with legislation, and services to constituents;

(3) services of insignificant monetary value;

(4) a plaque or similar memento recognizing individual services in a field of specialty or to a charitable cause;

(5) a trinket or memento of insignificant value;

(6) informational material of unexceptional value; or

(7) food or a beverage given at a reception, meal, or meeting away from the recipient's place of work by an organization before whom the recipient appears to make a speech or answer questions as part of a program.

(b) The prohibitions in this section do not apply if the gift is given:

(1) because of the recipient's membership in a group, a majority of whose members are not officials, and an equivalent gift is given to the other members of the group; or

(2) by an interested person who is a member of the family of the recipient, unless the gift is given on behalf of someone who is not a member of that family.