

PRODUCED AT THE DIRECTION OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATIVE ETHICS BOARD

2024 LEGISLATIVE ETHICS MANUAL



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Topic	Page
Table of Contents	iii
Contacting The Board or Obtaining Board Information	1
Mission of the Legislative Ethics Board	1
What is New?	1
Complaint Opinions	1
Advisory Opinions	2
Ethics Alerts	2
Introduction	3
Legislative Ethics Board Duties and Authority	3
Method of Operation	4
Topical Summary of Ethics in Public Service Law	4
Chapter 42.52 RCW	4
Legislative Declaration of Policy	4
Conflicts of Interest and Outside Compensation	5
Part-time employment by legislators	5
Lobbying by legislators	5
Lobbying by Legislative Staff	6
Contracts, grants, and employment situations with state agencies	6
Honoraria prohibited	7
Improper Use of Official Position or Public Resources - General Rule	7
Improper use of position - Special Privileges	7
Use of Resources: Use of Public Resources for Private Benefit of Self & Others - General Rule	8
Use of Public Resources: Congratulatory Letters or Letters Supporting a Grant Request	8
Use of Resources: Benefit of Self or Others	9
Use of Resources: Campaign Assistance Generally	9
Use of Resources: Comment on Ballot Measures	10
Use of Resources: Press Releases	12
Use of Resources: Mailing Restrictions	13
Use of Resources: Newsletters	14
Use of Resources: Altering Official Websites	14
Use of Resources: Fund Raising	15
Use of Resources: Confidential Information	15
Acceptance of Gifts and Payments for Expenses	15
Gifts - Meals Entertainment and Miscellaneous Items	16
Gifts - Conference and Seminar Travel Costs	16

RCW Section/Board Opinion Table **17**

Ethics in Public Service Act - 42.52 **19**

Ethics In Public Service Law **20**

Board Rules **35**

 Rule Number 1: Procedures 35

 Rule Number 2: “Measurable Expenditure” Defined 39

 Rule Number 3: Private Use of Public Resources 39

 Rule Number 4: Working Hours 41

 Rule Number 5: Infrequent Meals 41

 Rule Number 6: Penalties 43

 Rule Number 7: Harassment 43

 Rule Number 8: Board Procedures 43

 Statement of Administrative Practices 44

CONTACTING THE BOARD OR OBTAINING BOARD INFORMATION

All Board opinions and rules, as well as organizational information about the Board, are available on the Internet at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/LEB>

If you have questions, the Legislative Ethics Board counsel will help you by discussing your concerns and the possible actions that you can take within the limits of the ethics laws and rules. The House of Representatives and Senate have designated ethics advisers who can also assist you with such questions. If your situation is not clearly covered by the law or previous Board opinions, Board counsel or the designated ethics advisers can recommend that you seek a formal Advisory Opinion from the Legislative Ethics Board. You may also choose to seek such an opinion without obtaining informal advice. Staff informal advice is not binding on the Legislative Ethics Board; only formal Board Advisory Opinions have that effect.

To contact Board staff

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MISSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ETHICS BOARD

To fairly administer the Ethics Act and to always be aware of the long-term effects Board decisions may have on the legislative branch of government and the public trust.

To emphasize training and the use of ethics advisers so that whenever possible, questions may be addressed in an educational rather than a confrontational setting.

WHAT IS NEW?

Complaint Opinions

2023

In re Davis, 2023 – No. 1

Complaint alleged that Respondent violated [RCW 42.52.140](#) because she generally supported locating a methadone clinic in her district but was not involved with the operator of the clinic or in the siting of the clinic in her legislative district. There was no evidence that Respondent received anything of value from the clinic operator for her support of siting the methadone clinic in her district.

In re Dhingra, 2023 – No. 2

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.070](#) or [.160](#) were violated when, in response to a reporter's request for information, Respondent provided that reporter with data compiled by a person with whom the Complainant disagreed. The Complainant is not part of the "work environment" as that term has been interpreted by the Board under the harassment provisions of [RCW 42.52.070](#). Providing information that is not confidential to a reporter in response to a request is within the official duties of a legislator and not a violation of [RCW 42.52.160](#).

In re Reed, 2023 – No. 3

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.180](#) was violated when Respondent posted comments on her personal Twitter account from the House floor during floor action when that personal account contained campaign material. The Board, in finding reasonable cause, held that using a legislative computer while on the House floor during floor action to post comments on a personal Twitter account which contains campaign material is a violation of the Act.

In re Simmons, 2023 – No. 4

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.020](#) was violated because Respondent was employed by an organization that also employs a lobbyist. As long as the legislator does not oversee the work of the lobbyist or set the legislative agenda for the organization there is no violation.

In re Simmons, 2023 – No. 5

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.130](#) had been violated because Respondent accepted a \$1000 honorarium for participating on a panel to discuss her lived experience. Even though she was invited by a personal friend, while on the panel she discussed her legislative work. The burden of proof is on legislators to prove they were invited in their personal capacity by an organization that does not lobby the state legislature. Receiving the invitation from a friend on a personal email account is only one element in proving that one was asked in a personal capacity. If the legislator discusses his or her legislative work while on the panel, he or she cannot accept an honorarium.

In re Kloba, 2023 – No. 6

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.180](#) had been violated because Respondent posted a campaign endorsement on a personal Twitter account. The House does not currently allow official Twitter accounts for legislators; therefore, there is no violation.

In re McEntire, 2023 – No. 7

Complaint alleged that the [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated because Respondent posted or had someone else post on his personal social media account unflattering and false information about Complainant. The Board does not have subject matter jurisdiction over a legislator's personal social media account.

In re Slatter, 2023 – No. 8

Complaint alleged that the [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated because Respondent posted or had someone else post on his personal social media account unflattering and false information about Complainant. The Board does not have subject matter jurisdiction over a legislator's personal social media account.

In re Macri, 2023 – No. 9

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.020](#) was violated because Respondent was the member of a Board of Directors that employed a lobbyist. The Act was violated when Respondent voted as a member of the Board of Directors to approve the annual state legislative agenda.

In re Senn, 2023 – No. 10

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.020](#) was violated because Respondent was a member of the Board of Directors for a non-profit organization that employs a lobbyist. As long as the Respondent does not oversee the work of the lobbyist or set the legislative agenda for the organization, there is no violation.

In re Berry, 2023 – No. 11

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.020](#) was violated because Respondent is a member of the Board of Directors for a non-profit organization that employs a lobbyist. As long as the Respondent does not oversee the work of the lobbyist or set the legislative agenda for the organization, there is no violation.

In re Ibrahimovic, 2023 – No. 12

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated because Respondent used his position to prevent Complainant from meeting with the legislator for whom the Respondent works. There is no evidence that Respondent prevented the meeting from occurring.

In re McEntire, 2023 – No. 13

Complaint alleged that the [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated because Respondent posted or had someone else post on his personal social media account unflattering and false information about Complainant. The Board does not have subject matter jurisdiction over a legislator's personal social media account.

In re McEntire, 2023 – No. 14

Complaint alleged that the [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated because Respondent posted or had someone else post on his personal social media account unflattering and false information about Complainant. The Board does not have subject matter jurisdiction over a legislator's personal social media account.

In re Walsh, 2023 – No. 15

Complainant alleged the Act was violated because Respondent spoke at two rallies protesting the Supreme Court's ruling on transgender rights. Complaint administratively dismissed because facts provided were insufficient to find a violation.

In re Harmon, 2023 – No. 16

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.070](#) and [.160](#) were violated because Respondent used her legislative computer, her legislative title and the influence of a legislator's office to benefit herself and a close relative. The Act was violated by Respondent's use of legislative resources in this matter.

In re Dent, 2023 - No. 17

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated when respondent, who had previously supported the program complaint worked on, withdrew his support because of concerns with how the

program had been operated. A Legislator is not required to continue supporting programs he previously supported.

Advisory Opinions

Advisory Opinion 2022 – No. 1

It is not considered lobbying for staff to respond to an anonymous survey, required in legislation, about their views on collective bargaining because their responses are not designed to influence the passage or defeat of legislation. Other actions taken by staff in an attempt to influence the passage or defeat of legislation would be considered lobbying.

Advisory Opinion 2023 – No. 1

The board, because it could not reach a unanimous decision for the questions posed regarding legislative employee collective bargaining did not issue an opinion.

Advisory Opinion 2023 – No. 2

Legislature's depiction of his employment with the Washington Policy Center violates [RCW 42.52.020](#).

Ethics Alerts

December 2022 – Application of the Ethics in Public service Act (Act) to a Newly Elected or Appointed Legislator

A newly elected person is a "legislator" as that term is defined on [RCW 42.52.185](#) as soon as the election is certified by the Secretary of the State. For those appointed to fill a vacant legislative seat, they are considered "legislators" upon the effective date of their appointment. Once considered a legislator, whether appointed or elected, they are subject to the provisions of the Act.

2022

In re Kuderer, 2022 – No. 1

Complaint alleges that Respondent violated [RCW 42.52.160](#) by having Complainant's Twitter account removed. A legislator's personal social media account is not considered a public resource; therefore, there was no violation of the Act.

In re Klippert, 2022 – No. 2

Complaint alleges that Respondent violated [RCW 42.52.160](#) when the legislator used state resources to attend an out of state conference and his attendance was approved by House administration. There was sufficient legislative nexus in the topics addressed at the conference. Furthermore, Respondent introduced legislation on some of the topics addressed at the conference during the 2021 and 2022 legislative sessions.

In re Pedersen – 2022 – No. 3

Complaint alleged that Respondent violated [RCW 42.52.020](#) because he is a member of the Board of Directors for a national organization that does not lobby the state legislature. The mission of the organization is not to lobby or make policy recommendations to the state legislature. Although the Respondent was expected to fund raise for the organization, he did not solicit funds from lobbyists or their employers.

In re Dhingra – 2022 – No. 4

Complaint alleged that Respondent violated [RCW 42.52.020](#) because she is a member of the Board of Directors for a local organization that does not lobby the state legislature. The mission of the organization is not to lobby or make policy recommendations to the state legislature. Although the Respondent was expected to fund raise for the organization, she did not solicit funds from lobbyists or their employers.

In re Das, 2022 – No. 5

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.020](#) and [.140](#) were violated because Respondent sponsored legislation and a budget proviso on a topic she learned about through outside employment and, in the process of developing the legislation and proviso consulted with

the president of an organization considered to be an expert in the field. There was no evidence showing that either Respondent or the organization's president benefitted from Respondent's sponsorship of either the legislation or the proviso.

In re Das, 2022 – No. 6

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.180](#) was violated because Respondent asked legislative staff for donations to her campaign. The board, in finding a violation, stated that no actions could be more violative of the prohibition of using state resources to seek campaign donations than asking legislative staff for campaign donations.

In re Randall, 2022 – No. 7

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.180](#) was violated because Respondent posted on official social media that she had been given an award by an organization for her legislative work on issues important to that organization. If the award had sufficient legislative nexus, posting about it on official social media falls within the "normal and regular" conduct exception to the prohibition contained in [.180](#).

In re Sutherland, 2022 – No. 8

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated when Respondent tried to enter a building from which he had been removed a day previously because he had not followed the COVID protocols. Complaint further alleged that [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated when Respondent harassed a legislative employee by responding to the employee's question using several expletives. The Board found that Respondent violated [.070](#) by using his position as a legislator to try to enter a building from which he had previously been removed. The Board further found that when a legislator responds to a legislative employee by using expletives, the harassment provisions of [.070](#) have also been violated.

In re Kraft, 2022 – No. 9

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.070](#) (harassment) was violated when advocates for an organization met to discuss a piece of abortion legislation with the legislator and the legislator reacted by referring to the advocates as "baby-killers." The Board dismissed the complaint stating that the advocates are not part of the "work environment" as that term is used in [.070](#) because they do not make their living working with legislators or legislative staff.

In re Young, 2022 – No. 10

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.140](#) was violated because Respondent told Complainant he could make her issues with child protective services go away if she would agree to his political requests. Complaint was administratively dismissed because Complainant was unable to provide sufficient evidence.

In re House and Senate Staff, 2022 – No. 11

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.020](#) and [.160](#) were violated when legislative staff took sick leave in response to the failure of HB 1806 (bill that would have allowed legislative staff to collectively bargain) to pass. The Board, in finding a violation, held that it is a conflict of interest with legislative staff's official duties and a use of state resources for private gain for staff to have used sick leave in response to the failure of HB 1806 to pass.

In re Johnson, 2022 – No. 12

Complaint alleged [RCW 42.52.070](#) (harassment) was violated when a legislator, in a personal social media account, responded to a radio personality with a comment regarding law enforcement killing people and the executive director of a law enforcement association alleged harassment. There is no allegation that the Complainant or her board, which asked her to file the complaint, were harassed; therefore, the complaint was dismissed.

In re Walsh, 2022 – No. 13

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.070](#) was violated when Respondent became involved in an exchange with Complainant using his (Respondent's) personal Twitter account and Complainant states he was intimidated and harassed by the language used in

the Tweet. The "work environment" as used in [RCW 42.52.070](#) includes only those who make their living working with legislators and legislative staff. Complainant does not make his living this way; therefore, he is not covered by the harassment provisions of the Act.

In re Dhingra, Randall, Shewmake, Robinson, Lovelett, Thai, Bateman, Ramel, Lekanoff, Slatter, Rule, 2022 – Nos. 14 & 15

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.180](#), prohibiting the use of state resources for campaign purposes, was violated when legislators attended a campaign event organized by the Governor's staff using the state resources of other state agencies. In making a prospective ruling, the Board held that attendance at such an event using the resources of another state agency constituted the "indirect use of state resources" and violated [.180](#). The Board further ruled that legislators need to be cognizant of what resources are being used during campaign events when state agencies are involved.

In re Payne, 2022 – No. 16

Complaint alleged that [RCW 42.52.020](#) was violated when a legislative employee served as the Chair of the Thurston County Republican Party. There is no conflict if the legislative staff does not use public resources while performing her duties as chair of the local party.

INTRODUCTION

Washington legislators and legislative employees are subject to the "Ethics in Public Service Act" (chapter [42.52 RCW](#)), also called the "Ethics Act." The law states that "[e]thics in government are the foundation on which the structure of government rests."

This manual provides a summary of the ethics laws and principles which provide that foundation.

It is not possible to answer every question in one document, but many of the issues most often encountered by legislators and legislative employees are covered. The manual generally addresses legislators' and legislative employees' responsibilities and obligations regarding conflicts of interest and outside compensation; improper use of position or public resources; using public resources for campaigns; and acceptance of gifts and payments for expenses.

This manual may be used in the same manner as informal advice from Board staff or the designated ethics advisers. Although that advice does not represent the formal opinion of the Board, and is therefore not binding on future Board decisions, the Board will give weight to the fact that a person in good faith relied upon the advice from the designated ethics advisers, in consultation with Board staff. Ultimately, the provisions of the Ethics in Public Service Act determine whether or not particular conduct is a violation.

LEGISLATIVE ETHICS BOARD DUTIES AND AUTHORITY

The Board's activities fall into five broad categories:

(1) Training and education

The Board develops and distributes educational materials, and ensures that legislators and legislative employees receive training on ethics issues. Board staff provides informal advice on ethics inquiries, based on the ethics statutes and prior Board opinions.

(2) Rules and policies

The Board has the authority to adopt its own rules of procedure, and has done so (see Rules 8). The Board has also issued substantive rules regarding complaint investigations, process regarding administrative dismissals and public hearings. The Board has also issued rules interpreting the prohibitions on use of state facilities for

campaign or personal purposes, and on harassment under “special privileges.”

(3) Advisory Opinions

Either in response to a request, or on its own motion, the Board has authority to publish formal written advisory opinions addressing whether or not particular fact situations involve unethical conduct.

(4) Ethics Alerts

Occasionally, an important issue arises on which the Board believes it should advise legislators and legislative staff, but does not believe it warrants an advisory opinion. In these situations, the Board will issue an Ethics Alert to provide clarity or direction on an issue.

(5) Complaint proceedings

The Board can respond to complaints from any person, or can initiate complaints on its own motion. The Board can only act on complaints involving conduct by legislators or legislative staff that falls under the provisions of the ethics act and related legislative rules.

If the Board finds a violation, it may impose penalties, including the amount of any direct damages to the state, and a civil penalty up to \$5,000 per violation or three times the value of the item involved in the violation, whichever is greater. The Board can also recommend that further action be taken by the House or Senate bodies.

METHOD OF OPERATION

Meetings

The Board usually meets every other month. The Board’s proceedings are open to the public, except for the consideration of complaints, which is done in executive session.

Hearings

If the Board determines that there is “reasonable cause” to believe that a violation has occurred in a particular case, the matter may proceed to a formal public hearing.

Staff

The Board has one staff person who serves as administrator and legal counsel. Additional investigative and counsel staff have been used on a temporary basis when needed for complaint proceedings.

TOPICAL SUMMARY OF ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE LAW

Chapter 42.52 RCW

STATEMENT OF ETHICS POLICY (.900)

II. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- A. Activities in conflict with proper discharge of official duties (.020)
- B. Financial interests in private transactions with the state (.030)
- C. Assisting another person in transactions with the state (.040)
- D. Investments by those with authority over state investments (.190)

IMPROPER USE OF POSITION OR PUBLIC RESOURCES

- A. Confidential information: use for private benefit; improper disclosure or failure to disclose public information (.050)
- B. Special privileges obtained or granted for self or others (.070)
- C. Harassment, including sexual harassment (.070)
- D. Use of public employees, money, or property for private gain or personal purposes (.160)

- E. Use of public resources for election campaigns for persons or ballot measures (.180)
- F. Mailing restrictions during an election year (.185)

RESTRICTIONS ON COMPENSATION

- A. Employment after public service (.080)
- B. Compensation for official duties only from official sources (.110)
- C. Compensation for outside activities (.120)
- D. Honoraria (.130)

ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND PAYMENTS FOR EXPENSES

- A. “Gift” defined; exclusions listed (.010)
- B. “Reasonable expectation” rule: nothing of value that would be reasonably expected to influence judgement or action (.140)
- C. General limitation and guidelines on gifts; items presumed not to influence listed (.150)

CONSIDERATION OF OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Ethics law not a bar to providing testimony under oath (.060)
- B. Assistance to others that would otherwise be prohibited (.090)
- C. Recognizing constitutional principle of citizen legislature (.330)

BOARD AUTHORITY AND PROCEDURES

- A. Membership and compensation of Legislative Ethic Board (.310, .550)
- B. Authority and duties (.320)
- C. Citizen members restricted in political activity (.380)
- D. Subpoena authority (.390, .400)
- E. Complaints filed and investigated (.410, .420)
- F. Public hearings on complaints; use of administrative law judge (.430, .500)
- G. Judicial review (.440)
- H. Time limit for ethics violations (.540)

PENALTY PROVISIONS

- A. Monetary and other penalties imposed by ethics board (.480)
- B. Actions by the Attorney General (.490)
- C. Citizen actions to enforce campaign use statute (.460)
- D. Rescission of state action (.510)
- E. Disciplinary action (.520)
- F. Restrictions on agency appearances (.100)
- G. Violations by non-state employees (.170, .490, .530)

LEGISLATIVE DECLARATION OF POLICY

Government derives its powers from the people. Ethics in government are the foundation on which the structure of government rests. State officials and employees of government hold a public trust that obligates them, in a special way, to honesty and integrity in fulfilling the responsibilities to which they are elected and appointed. Paramount in that trust is the principle that public office, whether elected or appointed, may not be used for personal gain or private advantage.

The citizens of the state expect all state officials and employees to perform their public responsibilities in accordance with the highest ethical and moral standards and to conduct the business of the state only in a manner that advances the public’s interest. State officials and employees are subject to the sanctions of law and scrutiny of the media; ultimately, however, they are accountable to the people and must consider this public accountability as a particular obligation of the public service. Only when affairs of government are conducted,

at all levels, with openness as provided by law and an unswerving commitment to the public good does government work as it should.

The obligations of government rest equally on the state's citizenry. The effectiveness of government depends, fundamentally, on the confidence citizens can have in the judgments and decisions of their elected representatives. Citizens, therefore, should honor and respect the principles and the spirit of representative democracy, recognizing that both elected and appointed officials, together with state employees, seek to carry out their public duties with professional skill and dedication to the public interest. Such service merits public recognition and support.

All who have the privilege of working for the people of Washington state can have but one aim: To give the highest public service to its citizens.

Source: [RCW 42.52.900](#)

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OUTSIDE COMPENSATION

The Ethics Act contains several specific standards regulating activities outside of state legislative office or legislative employment. The guiding principle is that all legislators and legislative employees are prohibited from having obligations or interests that conflict with their official duties, whether or not the legislator or employee is compensated for the outside interest.

Legislators and legislative employees are specifically precluded from seeking or accepting job offers or compensation from outside sources for performing their official duties. [RCW 42.52.110](#)

Detailed standards and procedures are established for contracts between state agencies and legislators or legislative employees. Filing and approval provisions apply to most of these contracts.

Any legislator or employee who issues or supervises contracts in the course of his or her official duties is prohibited from having a personal financial interest in those contracts.

The Ethics Act also contains limits on employment after public service, where that employment creates an unauthorized conflict.

The following questions and answers are intended to provide further detail regarding:

- Special rules for legislative part-time employment;
- Lobbying by legislators and employees;
- Contracts with state agencies; and
- Honoraria.

Part-time employment by legislators

The Ethics Act recognizes that legislators are intended by constitutional design to have part-time official duties, and are presumed to have outside sources of compensation. [RCW 42.52.330](#). No such expectation applies to legislative employees. The current Ethics Board opinions have adopted some of the long-standing interpretations of the predecessor House and Senate boards, as well as prior legislative rules, related to this concept. See *Advisory Opinion 1995 - No. 1* (several older opinions addressing "improper means" have been retired.)

What is the general and primary rule for a legislative conflict of interest?

A legislator does not have an interest which is in conflict with the proper discharge of legislative duties if no benefit or detriment accrues to the legislator as a member of a business, profession, occupation, or group, to a greater extent than to any other member of such business, profession, occupation or group.

Is the purpose of outside compensation restricted?

Yes. A legislator shall not accept any remuneration other than legislative compensation for "legislative advice or assistance." See [RCW 42.52.110](#)

Is it a conflict of interest for a legislator to be employed by an outside organization that also employs a lobbyist?

No provided the legislator does not over see the work of the lobbyist

If a legislator's outside employment duties include fundraising on behalf of the outside employer, are there any restrictions on who may be contacted for donations?

Yes. It is a violation of the Act for legislators, even without the use of public resources, to solicit lobbyists or their employers for a donation to the legislators' outside employer. It is not automatically a violation of the Act for legislators, without the use of public resources, to solicit donations from non-lobbyists for the legislators' outside employer provided the legislators do not use their positions or their legislative titles in doing so. However, the Board cautions legislators whose outside employment requires fundraising because fundraising has the potential to bear substantial ethical risk. *Advisory Opinion 2020 - No. 2*.

Is it a conflict of interest for a legislator to serve on the Board of Directors for a non-profit organization? Does the answer change if the organization employs a lobbyist?

It is not a conflict of interest for a legislator to serve on an organization's Board of Directors as long as the Board does not oversee the work of the lobbyist or or set or oversee the legislative agenda. A legislator can remain on the Board in this situation but must recuse himself or herself from any decisions involving the lobbyist or the state legislative agenda. See *In re Pedersen, 2022 - No. 3*; *In re Dbingra, 2022 - No. 4*; *In re Slatter, 2023 - No. 8*

References:

[RCW 42.52.020](#)

[RCW 42.52.110](#)

[RCW 42.52.140](#)

[RCW 42.52.330](#)

Complaint Opinions [1995 - No. 2](#); [2011 - No. 1](#); [2019 - No. 1](#)

Advisory Opinions [1995 - Nos. 1, 4, 6, 11 and 16](#);

[1998 - No. 6](#); [2001 - No. 1](#); [2007 - No. 1](#).

Lobbying by legislators

Is there a restriction on outside employment of legislators that involves lobbying?

Yes, legislators are prohibited from holding the position of executive director or other administrative officer of a trade association or other similar organization which has lobbying as a principal activity.

Can legislators be employed by state or local governments?

Yes, unless the nature of the outside position creates a direct conflict with the office of state legislator. Examples of such conflicts include a legislator occupying the position of state agency director or legislative liaison of a state agency or trade organization that lobbies before the legislature.

Lobbying by Legislative Staff

What definition of lobbying is used in applying the Ethics Act?

The Board has adopted the definition found in [RCW 42.17A.005\(34\)](#). *In re Various House and Senate Staff, 2022 - No. 11*. Any action taken by legislative staff to influence the passage or defeat of legislation will be considered lobbying for purposes of applying the Ethics Act.

Can legislative employees lobby for or against particular legislation?

No. Lobbying by a legislative staff person may give rise to an ethics violation under [RCW 42.52.020](#) (conflict of interest) as actions incompatible with official duties (See also House Rule 7 and Senate Rule 6) and [RCW 42.52.160](#) (use of public resources for private gain).

Can legislative employees join organizations which take positions on legislation?

Yes, as long as the employee avoids holding a position with the organization which would involve active lobbying on legislative proposals. For example, many parents of school-age children belong to the Parent-Teacher Association, or Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTA or PTSA). Such membership is not a conflict with legislative employment, unless the employee holds the position in the outside organization of “legislative representative.” However, an employee who performs substantive and policy-related responsibilities in the area of K-12 education would have a conflict with his duties as a member of a local school board. *Advisory Opinion 1999 - No. 1*

What about attendance at rallies?

Many organizations hold “rallies” on the capitol grounds, especially during legislative sessions. Legislative staff cannot participate in a rally on the capital campus in their personal capacities; to do so would be considered lobbying which is prohibited under the Act. An employee can attend a rally if he or she is doing so as part of his or her official duties. See *Advisory Opinion 2022 – No. 1*.

Are legislative staff free to testify at hearings?

No. To testify at a hearing would be considered lobbying. It does not matter whether the legislative staff took annual leave to do so; it would still be considered lobbying as influencing the passage or failure of a bill is not an official duty of legislative staff. *Advisory Opinion 2022 – No. 1*.

References:

- [RCW 42.52.020](#) [RCW 42.52.330](#)
- Advisory Opinions 1995 - No. 1; 1998 - No. 6;*
- Complaint Opinion 2018 - No. 2*

Can legislative staff post their dissatisfaction with a bill on their private social media page?

No. To do so would be considered lobbying and would conflict with the staff’s official duty. *Advisory Opinion 2022 – No. 1*.

Can legislative staff engage in picketing on the capitol campus on their lunch break or after work hours to express their opinion about a bill?

No. To do so would be considered lobbying. *Advisory Opinion 2022 – No. 1*.

Contracts, grants, and employment situations with state agencies

Do the filing and approval requirements apply to all contracts and grants with state agencies?

Yes, the law applies to all contracts between legislators or legislative employees and state agencies, in Washington including employment situations, property leases, equipment sales, rentals, and other goods and services.

What qualifies as an agency?

An agency is any state board, commission, bureau, committee, department, institution, division, or tribunal in the legislative, executive, or judicial branches of state government. The term “agency” also includes all elective offices, the state legislature, those institutions of higher education created and supported

by state government, and those courts that are part of state government. [RCW 42.52.010\(1\)](#)

Can a legislator or legislative employee have a financial interest in a contract or grant with a Washington state agency?

Yes, but only if the following requirements are met:

- 1) The legislator’s or legislative employee’s contract or grant is awarded after an open and competitive bidding process has occurred in which more than one bid was received; or
- 2) The legislator’s or legislative employee’s contract or grant is awarded based upon an open and competitive bidding process in which the only bid received was that by the legislator or legislative employee and the contract or grant was approved by the Board before the execution of the contract or grant; or
- 3) The process for awarding the grant or contract was not open and competitive but the legislator or legislative employee has been advised by the Board that the contract or grant does not pose a conflict of interest.

Are spouses and state registered domestic partners covered?

Yes. Legislators and legislative employees are considered to have a financial interest when their spouses or registered domestic partners have employment, a grant or a contract with a state agency.

Are there any exceptions?

Yes, the Board has stated that the following categories of contracts do not require pre-approval:

- Contracts of such wide availability that there is effectively no competition among contractors, and no opportunity for favoritism, such as medical examiner contracts with the Department of Labor & Industries;
- Contracts where the financial interest in the individual transaction is insignificant, such as a retail sale of a small item at the posted price; or
- The contracting entity is a corporation or other business entity in which the legislator or legislative employee or his or her spouse or registered domestic partner has neither a controlling financial interest nor substantial management responsibility over the firm or the particular contract.

Are the filing requirements broader than the pre- approval provisions?

Yes. Even contracts which are awarded based on a competitive bid or proposal must be filed with the Board. The only exceptions to the filing requirement are the exceptions listed above.

Can the Board approve a contract for an employee who has official involvement with award or execution of the contract?

No, the law prohibits a legislator or legislative employee from having a financial interest in a contract that is made by the legislator or legislative employee, or is under his or her supervision. For example, it would be a violation of the Ethics Act for the spouse or registered domestic partner of an employee of LEG TECH to contract to provide computers, if the employee is responsible for awarding or administering the contract.

References:

- [RCW 42.52.030](#) [RCW 42.52.120](#) [RCW 42.52.906](#)
- Advisory Opinions 1995 - Nos. 9, 12 and 14;*
- 1996 - No. 3; 1997 - No. 1; 2001 - No. 1*
- Complaint Opinion 1999 - No. 5; 2005 - No. 5; 2011 - No. 1*

Honoraria prohibited

Legislators and legislative employees are prohibited from receiving an honorarium in connection with their official role. An “honorarium” is defined as money or any other thing of value offered for a speech, appearance, article, or similar activity. An honorarium is usually offered as a token of appreciation for a single appearance or writing, and is not the same as compensation under an employment agreement, such as a teaching arrangement. Payment for expenses incurred for a speech or appearance is not within the definition of “honorarium,” and can be accepted in most circumstances.

Speaking or writing on any legislative matter invokes the prohibition on honoraria. The Ethics Board presumes that invitations are issued to the legislator or legislative employee in an official role. To demonstrate that the honorarium is for purely personal activity, and therefore does not violate the Ethics Act, there must be a showing that the invitation is issued to the legislator or employee in a strictly personal capacity; that the topic is not related to legislation; and that the organization issuing the invitation is not active in legislative matters.

Receiving an invitation on a personal email account from a friend to speak at an event is only one element in proving that one was asked to speak in one’s personal capacity. If, while speaking, the legislator discusses any legislative work, the legislator cannot accept an honorarium because the legislator has converted what may have been a personal appearance into a legislative one. *In re Simmons*, [2023 - No. 5](#).

References:

[RCW 42.52.130](#)

Advisory Opinion 1998 - No. 4

IMPROPER USE OF OFFICIAL POSITION OR PUBLIC RESOURCES - GENERAL RULE

One of the guiding principles of the Ethics Act is that to maintain the public trust, persons occupying public positions may not use their positions for personal gain or private advantage, or to provide special privileges or exemptions for anyone else.

The use of public property, personnel, equipment, and other resources for personal gain or benefit is generally prohibited. Some narrow exceptions have been established by statute and through Board opinions.

Use of public facilities for election campaigns is strictly prohibited. Use of public facilities to support or oppose a ballot measure is also prohibited, with limited exceptions. Legislators and legislative staff are liable if they knowingly permit the use of public facilities for campaign purposes.

Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is prohibited. Likewise, it is an ethics violation to refuse to disclose information subject to public disclosure.

Improper use of position - Special Privileges

Improper Use of Position

No legislator or legislative staff may use his or her position to obtain special privileges or exemptions for himself, his spouse, child, parent or another. An exception applies if the activity is within the legislator’s or legislative staff’s scope of employment.

What activities fall within a legislator’s scope of employment or official duties?

Only as applied to legislators, activities that fall within a legislator’s scope of employment are those with a tangible legislative nexus and which include but are not limited to the following:

- Communications about a legislative proposal introduced in either the House or Senate;
- Information posted to an official legislative website or social media account about:
 - * emergencies;
 - * federal holidays, state or legislative recognized holidays and religious holidays;
 - * Information originally published on a government website about government resources; and
 - * Achievements, honors or awards of extraordinary distinction. [RCW 42.52.070\(2\)](#).

Appropriate legislative staff designees may engage in the above activities.

When may a legislator use his or her position to advocate?

A legislator may become an advocate for a constituent only when the constituent is involved in a dispute with a state governmental agency or official or if the constituent is seeking assistance on legislative issues. If either of these two conditions is present, there is a legislative nexus which permits advocacy.

Are there other limits on this advocacy?

Yes. Neither legislators nor legislative staff may use their positions or public resources to obtain a personal benefit or special privileges or exemptions for self or others. An example would be persistent communications with a state agency in an effort to direct agency contracts to a legislator’s family business. *In re Haler*, [2007 - No. 1A](#); *In re Hankins*, [2007 - No. 1B](#).

Short of advocacy, may a legislator use his/her position to be of assistance to others?

Yes. As stated above, assisting constituents falls within a legislator’s discretionary authority. There may be situations where it is appropriate to assist others but not to advocate for them. Examples include the use of public resources to act in an ombudsman capacity, to act as a mediator, or to perform a fact-finding function. A more complete list of examples may be found in *Advisory Opinion 2006 - No. 1*.

Are there examples of “going too far” in communicating with an agency or government official on behalf of a constituent?

In cases where advocacy is not permitted for lack of a legislative nexus, legislators must be careful in dealing with state agencies lest their involvement be viewed as an attempt to seek special privileges or exemptions. Some communications may be reasonably perceived as threatening and suggest that special treatment is being sought. These communications may be evidenced, for example, by a communication that the legislator chairs a committee which has jurisdiction over the agency’s programs, a legislator’s persistent communications on behalf of a constituent or other party, or a communication that favorable agency action is important to the legislator and the legislator will be disappointed if the favorable decision is not reached. Such communications are not in and of themselves evidence of improper use of position but are an indication that special privileges may be being sought.

A further example: A legislator may be asked by a constituent for information relative to a state contract. The legislator may contact the agency and inquire about the status of the contract review process. However, threatening the agency unless a decision favorable to the constituent is rendered could indicate that legislator’s position was being used to secure special privileges.

Has a legislator violated the special privileges section of the statute when he tries to enter a building the day after he had been removed for not complying with the COVID protocols?

Yes. Using his position as a legislator to try to enter the building was considered by the Board to have violated the special privileges prohibition.

Is harassment considered an improper use of position?

Yes. In 2019, the legislature amended [RCW 42.52.070](#) to include as a violation of the special privileges statute both harassment and sexual harassment.

To whom do the harassment provisions of [RCW 42.52.070](#) apply?

They apply only to those persons who are part of the legislative “work environment.” The Board has held that the “work environment” includes only those persons who make their living working with legislators and legislative staff. *In re Walsb*, [2022 - No. 13](#); *In re Kraft*, [2022 - No. 9](#).

Is there an example of harassment in the “work environment”?

The Board held that a legislator who responded to an inquiry from legislative staff using expletives was considered to have harassed the employee under .070(2). *In re Sutherland*, [2022 - No. 8](#).

References:

[RCW 42.52.070](#) [RCW 42.52.160](#)
Advisory Opinions [1995 - Nos. 1 and 17](#); [2006 - No. 1](#);
Complaint Opinions [1999 - Nos. 1 and 2](#); [2003 - No. 1](#);
[2005 - No. 7](#); [2006 - Nos. 1 and 4](#); [2007 - Nos. 2, 3 and 4](#);
[2008 - No. 6](#); [2009 - Nos. 2 and 3](#); [2016 - No. 4](#); [2017 - No. 42](#); [2020 - Nos. 6, 7, 8, & 12](#); [2021 - Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 \(harassment\)](#); [2022 - Nos. 9, 12, 13](#).

Use of Resources:

Use of Public Resources for Private Benefit of Self & Others - General Rule

Legislators and legislative employees are expected to use good judgment in protecting public resources and use the time, facilities and equipment entrusted to them for public purposes. The use of public property, personnel, equipment, and other resources for personal gain or benefit is generally prohibited.

Limited exceptions for personal use are provided when the use is incidental, infrequent, involves little or no cost to the state, does not interfere with performance of official duties, and is reasonable in light of the legitimate needs and expectations of the public work force.

Certain personal uses are strictly prohibited, regardless of cost or time involved:

1. any campaign related activity;
2. use of any property which has been removed from state facilities (without the permission of the proper authorities);
3. use of any consumable such as paper, envelopes or spare parts; and
4. any use by employees for a private business activity.

Special rules have also been established for use of telecommunication and computer equipment:

1. local telephone calls are permitted under the general rules, but any personal toll calls must be made using a personal cell phone;
2. personal email messages are treated under the same general rule as local telephone calls since they do not produce a usage charge to the legislature;

3. Internet access is generally subject to the same principles, but users may not send a message to a personal list-serve or other “posting,” nor may users access sites which constitute an inherent mis-use of state equipment, such as obscene or pornographic sites; and
4. no personal software or other computer products may be loaded, downloaded, or attached to legislative computers.

References:

[RCW 42.52.160](#) [Board Rule 3](#)
Complaint Opinions [1996 - No. 1](#); [1997 - No. 1](#);
[1998 - Nos. 1 and 2](#); [2001 - No. 1](#); [2003 - Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9](#);
[2005 - Nos. 1 and 2](#); [2006 - No. 8](#); [2020 - No. 7](#).
Advisory Opinion [2019 - No. 2](#)

**Use of Public Resources:
Congratulatory Letters or Letters
Supporting a Grant Request**

Many legislators send congratulatory letters to constituents who have achieved some noteworthy distinction. The ethics law limits such letters to an individual constituent who has received an award or honor of extraordinary distinction of a type that is insufficiently infrequent to be noteworthy to a reasonable person. These awards or honors include an international or national award such as a Nobel or Pulitzer prize, a state award such as Washington scholar; an Eagle Scout award or a Medal of Honor.

A congratulatory letter can be sent to an individual constituent who has received an honor or award if the individual constituent or someone on behalf of the constituent has requested the letter. When requested, the honor or award does not have to be extraordinary. If the mailing restrictions are in place, this letter cannot be sent, even if requested.

The ethics board has specifically advised that birthdays and regular graduations are not normally extraordinary achievements.

Before public resources may be used to send a congratulatory letter, the award, honor, or distinction which is the subject of the letter must meet the definition of “extraordinary.” “Extraordinary” is defined as going beyond what is usual, regular or customary; exceptional to a marked degree. See *Advisory Opinion* [2021 - No. 1](#).

Additional factors to consider in evaluating whether a particular award fits the statutory criteria are as follows: level of the award (national, state, or local); frequency or number of recipients; whether it is an “outside” award or simply an employment incentive recognition. The greater the number of recipients of an award, the more likely the award is not extraordinary.

These restrictions apply only to letters prepared and/or mailed at public expense. Members are free to congratulate whomever they wish by personal mail or email, phone calls, personal social media accounts, etc.

Can legislators use public resources for job reference letters, or to write in support of a local organization seeking a grant?

Legislators can use public resources to write reference letters for a constituent but only if the constituent has requested it. Public resources include the use of official stationery, legislative assistants, and legislative computers. Even if the legislator cannot use public resources with which to write a reference letter, he or she can always write a reference letter using personal stationery and can sign the letter using his or her legislative title.

If an organization located in the legislator’s district is seeking a grant from a governmental agency, the legislator may use public resources to write in support of the organization receiving the grant. If the organization is seeking funds from a private party or

organization, the legislator may not use public resources to write a letter in support of the organization.

References:

[RCW 42.52.160](#) [RCW 42.52.185](#) [RCW 42.52.187](#)
[Advisory Opinions 1995 - No. 17](#); [1996 - No. 7 \(opinion retired\)](#);
[2000 - No. 5](#); [2005 - No. 1 \(opinion retired\)](#).

Use of Resources: Benefit of Self or Others

Can a legislator post on an official website a photo taken by legislative staff depicting her at a rally supporting a particular cause?

Not without context accompanying the photo that establishes a sufficient legislative nexus. Generally, public resources cannot be used to support an outside private organization. *In re Claire Wilson*, [2021 - No. 5](#).

When can photographs of legislators be posted on official websites, social media or in newsletters or other legislative publications?

In determining whether the use of the photo violates the Act, the Board will review the context or words that accompany or explain the photo. A photo absent an explanation is a photo without context. The context or explanation accompanying the photo can also establish the required legislative nexus. If the photo is accompanied by words explaining that the member is shown at a legislative committee meeting, meeting with constituents or bill supporters in their office or speaking at a rally on the capitol steps – essentially depicting members in their official capacity – this explanation is the context that establishes the legislative nexus. [Advisory Opinion, 2021 – No. 2](#).

Is it a violation of RCW 42.52.160 for a legislator to photograph an email sent to his legislative account and post that photo on his personal Facebook account?

No. Use of the legislative computer system constitutes a de minimis use of public resources under [Board Rule 3](#). *In re McEntire*, [2021 - No. 7](#).

May a legislator use public resources to respond to a press inquiry about a lawsuit filed against the legislator in her official capacity?

Yes. There was no private benefit conferred upon the legislator when she issued a press release because she was acting in her official capacity. *In re Jenkins*, [2021 - No. 9](#).

Use of Resources: Campaign Assistance Generally

Use of public facilities for election campaigns is strictly prohibited. The Ethics Board has adopted a “zero-tolerance” policy for campaign-related personal use of legislative facilities, even if such use does not actually assist a campaign.

Use of public facilities to support or oppose a ballot measure is also prohibited, with limited exceptions. Supervisors and officers are liable if they knowingly permit the use of public facilities for campaign purposes.

“Normal and regular conduct” is exempt from the prohibition. (Ballot measures have additional specific exceptions, and are separately summarized below.)

Normal and regular conduct was recently defined by the legislature as including the following:

- Communications about a legislative proposal introduced in either the House or Senate;

- Information posted to an official legislative website or social media account about:
 - * emergencies;
 - * federal holidays, state or legislative recognized holidays and religious holidays;
 - * Information originally published on a government website about government resources; and achievements, honors or awards of extraordinary distinction. [RCW 42.52.070\(2\)](#).

The phrase “normal and regular conduct” has been interpreted over the years by the Board based upon individual fact patterns. The statutory change does not impact those prior Board interpretations unless they are inconsistent with the legislative changes.

For example, the Board recently held that a legislator posting on official social media that she had been given an award for her legislative work fell within the “normal and regular” conduct exemption to .180 as long as there was sufficient legislative nexus between the award and the legislator’s legislative work. *In re Randall*, [2022 - No. 7](#).

Are there any particular words or phrases which would “taint” a legislative publication?

Yes. In analyzing press releases, the Board has stated that language which is pejorative toward other legislators or impugns the character of other legislators or groups of legislators is suspect. Language that specifically refers to “candidates” or “campaigns” is normally considered a violation, regardless of context.

Do timing and distribution make a difference?

Yes. The Board has determined that language which could be a violation if published under other circumstances, was permissible where it was developed specifically for use during session by members in partisan debate.

In another example, the Board found that it would not be a violation for a member to use legislatively prepared material in connection with door belling, if the door belling was conducted on a legislative, rather than a campaign basis. The Board conditioned its finding on the assumption that the material was initially prepared for a legitimate legislative purpose, and that no such use would take place after June 30 (presumably this date would now be the first day of the declaration of candidacy filing rather than June 30) of an election year.

Are there any restrictions on campaign activities apart from use of legislative facilities?

Members and staff are free to engage in any campaign activity they wish as long as it does not involve legislative time, facilities or equipment. However, it is a violation to solicit contributions from legislative employees for legislative candidates, regardless of time or place. *See In re Das*, [2022 - No. 6](#).

Both the House and the Senate have very specific policies regarding staff involvement in campaign activity. In some respects, these policies are more restrictive than the Ethics Act.

May legislative employees engage in campaign activity in their off hours (evenings, weekends and vacation time) including employment, volunteer activities or as a candidate for public office?

Legislative employees may be employed by or volunteer for a campaign during their non-working hours. It is a “per se” violation of [RCW 42.52.020](#) for a legislative employee to run for a state legislative office. In determining whether running for a local, federal, statewide or judicial office violates [RCW 42.52.020](#), the Board will use the “functional” analysis: if the employee’s job duties or elected position can be structured or configured in such a way to avoid a conflict of interest, then there is presumably no violation of [RCW 42.52.020](#). *Advisory Opinion 2019 - No. 4A*.

Does the definition of “facilities” extend to the entire capitol campus?

No. Hallways and other public use areas outside the offices and legislative chambers are not covered by the prohibition if they are available to members of the public for such use. For example, the capitol steps are often used for political rallies without violating the prohibition.

Is the State Seal a “facility” as defined by the Ethics Act?

No, the Seal is not a “facility” for purposes of applying the Act’s prohibition on the use of facilities for campaign purposes but use of the Seal in a political campaign is prohibited by [RCW 43.04](#). The Legislature has specifically directed enforcement of this statute to the Office of the Secretary of State. Misuse of the Seal can result in criminal penalties.

Are legislative phone numbers and addresses “facilities” as defined by the Act?

Yes. These are facilities for purposes of applying the Act’s prohibition on the use of facilities for campaign purposes. The legislative hotline is considered a “facility” under the Act.

May a legislator’s legislative press releases or legislative newsletters be posted or embedded on her/his campaign web site?

No. Such posting would violate the prohibition on the use of the facilities of an agency (public resources) to assist a campaign.

May a legislator post legislative press releases or legislative newsletters on her/his private non-campaign web site?

Yes, however, if the site becomes a campaign site, the materials must be removed. A legislator’s campaign website or social media page may link to legislative materials if the link operates to take the user to a separate legislative webpage.

What is a campaign website?

Any website that contains campaign content, whether or not the website is the official campaign website, is considered a campaign website. *In re Stambaugh*, [2016 - Nos. 8 & 13](#).

Is attending fundraisers on a complimentary basis prohibited?

No, it is part of the normal and regular conduct expectation for legislators to appear at party and legislative events on a complimentary basis. Payment for such attendance by an entity other than the event sponsor would violate the gift laws, however. Members are cautioned that such complimentary attendance may require campaign reporting, under the law or rules of the Public Disclosure Commission. This exemption has not been extended to legislative staff.

Can a room in a legislative building on the capitol campus be reserved for a training by a political organization whose mission is to increase the number of women running for political office prohibited?

No. The use of a room in a legislative building on the capital campus by a political organization to conduct training for current and future candidates for office is a violation of [RCW 42.52.180](#). *Complaint Opinion* [2019 - No. 3](#).

What can legislative assistants do about member’s schedules?

Legislative assistants may undertake scheduling responsibilities for members, even when a scheduled event is for a campaign purpose. This includes calling back on the member’s behalf to accept an invitation. It also may involve several communications to settle on an appropriate time.

However, when dealing with campaign events, the assistants are limited to scheduling activities only. Planning, organizing, making arrangements, or inviting other participants for campaign events

are prohibited activities if they involve public facilities or are done during the LA’s work hours.

The authority for assistants to schedule campaign events is limited to only those events to which the legislator was invited, and not those to which the legislator is seeking an invitation.

Does the Term “legislative website” as used in [RCW 42.52.180](#) include official social media accounts or pages?

Yes. *Ethics Alert*, April 2020. See also [RCW 42.52.180\(4\)](#).

May a legislator use a photo taken by legislative staff in his or her campaign?

Yes, provided the legislator has first purchased the photograph. Videos taken by legislative staff may not be used in campaigns because they cannot be purchased. *In re Doglio*, [2020 - No. 10](#).

May a legislator display undated campaign posters from his former campaign in his legislative office?

No. A legislator’s official office is considered a public resource and cannot be used for campaign purposes. *In re Ericksen*, [2021 - No. 6](#).

Is it a violation of [RCW 42.52.180](#) for a legislator to speak at an event sponsored by the Executive branch and make campaign related comments?

Yes. The use of equipment and facilities provided by the Executive branch at a campaign related event is considered an “indirect use of state resources” under .180. *In re Dbingra, Randall, Shewmake, Robinson, Lovelett, Thai, Bateman, Ramel, Lekanoff, Slatter & Rule*, [2022 - Nos. 14 & 15](#).

When are newly elected or appointed legislators subject to the Ethics Act provisions?

The provisions of the Act apply to a person once they become a “legislator.” Newly elected persons are considered legislators once their election is certified by the Secretary of State. Appointed persons are considered legislators upon the effective date of their appointment. *Ethics Alert* [December 2022](#)

References:

- [RCW 42.17A.565](#) [RCW 42.52.180](#)
 - Complaint Opinions* [1996 - Nos. 8 and 10](#); [2000 - No. 7](#);
 - [2001 - No. 5](#); [2002 - No. 2](#); [2003 - No. 10](#);
 - [2004 - No. 3](#); [2006 - Nos. 5, 6 and 7](#); [2007 - No. 5](#);
 - [2008 - Nos. 3 and 4](#); [2009 - Nos. 1 and 2](#);
 - [2016 - Nos. 1, 5, 7, 8 and 13](#); [2017 - No. 41](#); [2018 - No. 1](#).
 - Advisory Opinions* [1996 - Nos. 2 and 11 \(retired\)](#); [1997 - Nos. 5 and 7](#);
 - [2000 - No. 2 \(opinion retired\)](#); [2004 - Nos. 1, 2 and 3](#);
 - [2009 - No. 1 \(opinion retired\)](#).
- Joint Rules of the House and Senate - [Joint Rule 4](#)

**Use of Resources:
Comment on Ballot Measures**

The ethics law prohibits use of legislative facilities to support or oppose a candidate, or a ballot measure. Because ballot measures are matters of public policy, public officials, including legislators, are allowed the following exceptions to the prohibition:

1. Legislators are permitted to make statements in support of, or in opposition to ballot measures at an open press conference or in response to a specific inquiry. [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(b\)](#). Although the “measurable expenditure” language in the statute could be interpreted as limiting the entire exception to instances where there is no measurable expenditure, the Board rejected that interpretation. It views the “measurable expenditure” language not as a limitation on a legislator’s right to speak out on ballot measures but as a direction to the Board to provide wide latitude to legislators who do

speaking out, especially when there is no measurable cost to the legislature.

- Legislators and staff are permitted to promote or oppose a ballot proposition if they do so by engaging in activities that are part of the normal and regular conduct of the legislature or legislative office. [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(c\)](#).

An example of conduct that falls within the normal and regular conduct exception is writing arguments for the voters pamphlet. The statute requires that committees be created to put together the arguments for the voters pamphlet and legislators appointed to those committees have historically used office equipment and legislative staff to write the voter pamphlet arguments.

Another example of normal and regular conduct regarding ballot measures is responding to ballot proposition inquiries from the media, constituents and other persons. These responses are a customary and proper function of legislators for which they also may use legislative equipment and staff to prepare responses. This normally occurs at a press conference or in response to a specific inquiry.

- Legislators are permitted to promote or oppose a ballot measure if their use of public resources to do so is de minimis. [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(d\)](#). De minimis use means no cost or an actual cost which is so small or insignificant and which does not interfere with the performance of the legislator's normal duties. The Board will narrowly construe this exception.

The most common questions and problems with respect to these exceptions are summarized below. Nothing prevents a legislator or legislative employee, on his or her own time and without any use of legislative staff or other public resources, from making statements about ballot propositions or otherwise supporting or opposing ballot propositions.

What is a ballot measure or proposition?

A ballot measure is any state or local government measure that is proposed to be submitted to the voters of the state or local government as soon as it is initially filed with the appropriate election officer of the state or local government prior to its circulation for signatures. As applied to state ballot measures, under this definition, a measure for which voter signatures are required to qualify it for the ballot will become a ballot proposition when the measure is filed with the Secretary of State.

A measure referred to the voters by the legislature either as a referendum or proposed constitutional amendment will become a ballot proposition when it passes the legislature. An initiative to the legislature is considered a ballot proposition when it is filed with the Secretary of State. During the legislative session, it is within the normal and regular conduct of a legislator to discuss an initiative to the legislature or argue for or against it as they would any other legislative measure. If the legislature does not enact the measure, it goes to the ballot to be voted on by the people. As soon as the legislative session during which the measure was considered adjourns, it is again considered a ballot measure and the restrictions in [RCW 42.52.180](#) apply.

Are Initiatives to the People and Initiatives to the Legislature treated differently under RCW 42.52.180?

No except during a legislative session, an Initiative to the legislature is within the "normal and regular" conduct of a legislator to discuss the initiative or argue for or against it as they would any other legislative measure (bill). [Advisory Opinion 1997 – No. 5](#).

What if a legislator is the initiator of the initiative?

While legislators are expected as part of their official duties to comment on matters that affect the state, they are not expected to use publicly sponsored and supported press conference to

initiate and promote ballot measures. A legislator involved in the initiation and promotion of an initiative is in no different position than a private citizen. While an initiative may eventually result in legislation, the legislator's official duties relate to consideration of such a measure during a legislative session, not promoting and obtaining signatures needed to bring the measure to the legislature. [Advisory Opinion 1997 – No. 5](#).

What type of activities would violate the law against assisting a ballot campaign?

Activities using public resources that directly assist a campaign for or against a ballot proposition, such as telephone calls to the campaign to assist it, strategy meetings in a legislative office, and advertising campaign information in a legislative newsletter, are strictly prohibited. None of the exceptions to the prohibition, such as the exception for statements made at an open press conference, may be used to actively and directly assist the campaign. In other words, although a legislator may make responsive statements about a ballot proposition at an open press conference, the legislator may not use public resources to conduct an open press conference to launch or otherwise actively and directly assist the campaign.

Is it a violation of the Act for a legislator to hold a hearing on a ballot measure in which the format of the hearing consists of debate between invited panelists who support and oppose the ballot measure?

Yes. While the stated intention of the hearing may not be the assistance of a ballot measure campaign, by providing an opportunity for a publicized and televised event, the committee is at least indirectly assisting the campaigns. Therefore, such a hearing would be prohibited by the general provision of [RCW 42.52.180\(1\)](#), unless it is covered by one of the exceptions.

Ballot measure committee hearings may be permissible if they have a clearly stated legislative purpose, present a public policy issue within the committee's jurisdiction, and are limited to objective information-gathering about the measure and its legal and policy implications. Hearings which are structured or conducted for or against a ballot measure would not be normal and regular, since they would be neither lawful nor customary.

In order to meet the requirement for objective information-gathering rather than being an opportunity for advocacy, the committee meeting should be structured as a "workshop" rather than a typical public hearing. Oral presentations by legislative staff would be permitted to the same extent that staff is currently authorized to provide written analysis. Other testimony would be restricted to presentations by experts not affiliated with the campaigns for or against the ballot measure.

The Board will apply rigorous scrutiny the closer a committee hearing on ballot measures is to the election upon which those ballot measures will be voted.

How broad is the exception for replies to direct inquiries?

This provision permits legislators to specifically state their views in response to questions. As noted below, they cannot go beyond their own views to urge a particular action by other voters, however. Legislative assistants can provide their member's positions to people who inquire, if asked, but should not discuss or argue with the inquirer about the merits of the measure.

To what extent can staff be involved in ballot measures?

To the extent a legislator is permitted to engage in conduct under an exception, it is also proper for legislative staff to assist legislators to engage in that conduct. Proper staff activity also includes analysis and explanation of ballot measures. It is "normal and regular" conduct for legislative staff to analyze and explain the content of a ballot measure as well as the arguments for and

against the measure. It is also “normal and regular” to explain and analyze the legal and policy options the legislature might consider if a ballot measure is approved by the voters. Any presentation or distribution of such information in any manner that suggests it is intended to solicit support or opposition to a measure is improper and would be a violation.

What about Voters’ Pamphlet arguments?

Legislators serve on committees appointed to write arguments for the voters’ pamphlet. The creation of these committees is required by statute and legislators appointed to them are authorized to use office equipment and legislative staff to write the voter pamphlet arguments.

Are there other examples of direct appeals for votes?

No. The use of public resources to make direct appeals to either vote for or against a ballot proposition goes beyond the scope of the exceptions and is therefore prohibited. Statements such as “Vote for Initiative 100” or “Support our children and vote against Referendum 100” would be violations.

Similarly, it is a violation to include an indirect appeal for votes in legislative material. Here is an example of an indirect appeal: “You will have an opportunity to vote on this measure in November. I am confident you will reject it.” In describing ballot measures in newsletters or other legislative material, legislators are required to choose between: “(1) encouraging voting and including only a balanced objective description of a measure; and (2) including direct comment on the merits of the proposal with no reference to voting on it, other than the fact that the bill is now a ballot measure” (*Advisory Opinion 1997 - No. 8*).

Can comments about ballot measures be included in official newsletters?

Comments that explain a ballot measure would be considered “normal and regular” conduct of a legislator and would be allowed. Extensive direct comment on the merits of a ballot measure which would be permitted in response to a specific inquiry, generally is not permissible in a newsletter. However, if the subject matter of the ballot measure was before the legislature in the immediately preceding session (initiative to the legislature) then the measure may be discussed in the newsletter to the same extent as the legislator may comment on any other legislation in a newsletter.

Advocacy statements included within an otherwise permissible newsletter are considered to be initiated by the legislator within the meaning of the exception in RCW 42.52.180(2)(d) and as long as they are de minimis are allowed. A short sentence or paragraph in a long newsletter would be permitted, as long as it does not include a direct appeal for a specific vote or campaign assistance. A newsletter or a significant portion of a page within a newsletter, devoted entirely to advocating or opposing a ballot measure would be a violation, unless the statements relate to the legislator’s actions or positions on an initiative to the legislature that was considered in the immediately preceding session.

Does that mean a legislator cannot explain why a ballot measure is good or bad in a newsletter?

No. It is proper to discuss the merits of a proposal within the context of a larger message if the same subject matter addressed in the ballot proposition was a bill in the preceding session. It would not be proper to devote an entire newsletter, or even a significant portion of a newsletter, to advocate for or against a ballot issue.

The general rule is that legislators will be given wide latitude to use public resources to respond to questions on ballot propositions, but little leeway to use public resources to initiate comments themselves. Also, less restrictive standards apply to comments initiated by a legislator on the substance of ballot propositions that were before the legislature than on initiatives directly to the people.

Are the areas accessible to the public off limits to legislators who may wish to comment on initiatives to the people or to initiatives to the legislature after the session has adjourned?

No. Public areas on the capitol campus are not covered by the prohibition against using public resources for campaign purposes as long as those areas may be used for campaign purposes by any member of the public on an equal access basis. The capitol steps, for example, are often used for political rallies without violating RCW 42.52.180. The rotunda, hallways and other public use areas outside the offices and legislative chambers are not covered by the prohibition in RCW 42.52.180. If a rental fee is charged for the use of a facility, it must be charged equally and consistently. In re Hunt, 2012 – No. 4.

What does the “normal and regular conduct” exception include?

The “normal and regular conduct” exception allows legislative staff to conduct their typical analysis and explanation of ballot propositions. It is normal and regular for legislative staff to analyze and explain the content of a ballot proposition, as well as the arguments for and against it. It is also normal and regular to explain and analyze the legal and policy options that the legislature might consider if the ballot proposition is approved or disapproved by the voters. However, if information is presented in a way that suggests it is intended to solicit support for or opposition to a ballot proposition (if it is one-sided, for example), the scope of the exception has been exceeded and a violation has occurred.

NOTE: The provisions of [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(d\)](#) defining in part the term “normal and regular conduct” does not apply to ballot measures.

Can legislators use public resources to prepare a “guest editorial” on a ballot measure?

Not if it would be an advocacy or opposition editorial. If a legislator’s “guest” editorial is a factual explanation of a ballot proposition and not an argument for or against it, then the legislator could use legislative staff and equipment to prepare it. However, if the editorial is an advocacy piece or includes a direct appeal for votes or campaign assistance, then legislative staff or equipment should not be used in its preparation.

References:

[RCW 42.52.180](#) [RCW 42.52.185](#) [Ethics Board Rule 2](#)
[Advisory Opinions 1995 - No. 18; 1996 - No. 11 \(retired\);](#)
[1997 - Nos. 5 and 9](#)
[Complaint Opinions 2000 - No. 9; 2012 - No. 4](#)

Use of Resources: Press Releases

During an election year, what criteria must a proposed press release developed using public resources meet to be considered “normal and regular” conduct?

The press release must meet 7 factors: timeliness of the response; proximity of the response to an election; relevance of the response to a legislative issue; source of initial statement; tone and tenor; triggering circumstance; and personal nexus. The Board recently added triggering circumstances and personal nexus as additional criteria that must be met. Triggering circumstances and personal nexus are of particular importance if a legislator is initiating the press release rather than responding to an issue in a press release. *Advisory Opinion 2020 - No. 1*

What is a triggering circumstance?

It is an urgent or emergency situation. An urgent situation is one requiring immediate action or attention. An emergency is a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action. Natural disasters like mudslides, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions would be considered emergencies permitting a

legislative response with the use of public resources. Emergencies would also include situations in which a recent revenue forecast is significantly lower than the previous forecast or a court opinion is issued that significantly impacts the legislature's work in some meaningful fashion.

What is meant by "personal nexus"?

It is not appropriate that every legislator initiate a responsive press release. The matter about which a press release is initiated must have a personal nexus between the content of the press release and the legislator who issued it. The question to be answered in determining whether personal nexus exists is whether the legislator issuing the press release has a special connection to the legislative issue which is the subject of the press release and if so, would the public expect to hear from this legislator about the issue? For example, the public would expect to hear from the chair or ranking minority member of the budget committee if there were a significant decline in state revenues or from the education committee chair if there were a court decision that significantly impacted education in some fashion.

Does this 7 factor test apply to the use of public resources to draft talking points and speeches during the election year freeze period?

Yes.

What criteria should be considered when staff post content to caucus websites and social media sites during the election year freeze?

Six of the seven factors apply: timeliness of the response; proximity of the posting to the election; relevance of the posting to a legislative issue and to the initial outside statement; the source of the outside statement; the tone and tenor of the response; and triggering circumstances. The personal nexus factor would not apply to caucus postings.

Use of Resources: Mailing Restrictions

Beginning with the passage of Initiative 134 in 1992, legislators had been restricted in mail sent out at public expense from December 1st in the year preceding the end of their terms. Enforcement of this statute was assigned to the Legislative Ethics Board by passage of the 1994 ethics law. In 2022, the legislature amended the mailing restriction statute by removing the restrictions on how many newsletters may be sent out and changing the date for imposition of the mailing restrictions from December 1 of the year preceding the legislator's election to the first day of campaign filing week (which usually occurs in May).

When are mailing restrictions in effect?

Beginning on the first day of the declaration of the candidacy filing period under [RCW 29A.24.050](#) preceding a legislator's final year in office and continuing until the general election is certified. These restrictions apply to legislators running for any public office, including running for re-election or retention.

Are all legislators affected?

No, only those who are "candidates" as defined by [RCW 42.17A.005](#) either because they are running for re-election or running for another public office making them candidates for re-election. Any legislator who has announced his or her retirement from elected office and who does not file a declaration of candidacy by the end of the candidacy filing period is not bound by the restriction. [RCW 42.52.185\(4\)\(a\)](#).

Do the restrictions apply only to "mass mailings" like newsletters?

No. The law prohibits the mailing of any "letter, newsletter, brochure, or other piece of literature" at public expense during the restriction period, unless the mailing fits a specified exception.

What about electronic transmission?

Electronic mail and facsimile transmissions are also restricted. However, telephone calls do not count as mail.

What are the other exceptions?

1. Letters to individual constituents who have contacted the legislator about a subject matter to which the legislator responds.
2. Letters to constituents who hold a governmental office with jurisdiction over the subject matter of the letter.
3. Congratulatory letters (see page 8 for a detailed discussion of this exception).
4. Letters to persons who are not constituents, provided that such letters meet the policies of the House of Representatives and Senate regarding out-of-district mailings.

Can legislators use standardized responses?

Yes, with conditions. If a member receives a large number of letters on the same topic, it is perfectly proper to use a standard textual response. The response must be tailored to respond only to the specific subject of the constituent's letter, however. Identical letters which address broad topics are considered "newsletters."

Also, in order to be considered as individual responses, each letter must be addressed to a particular person, with that person's name in the salutation.

What is a "contact?"

Legislators are authorized to send responses to constituents who have contacted them. Contacts include any communication which creates a normal expectation of a response. Examples are letters, telephone calls, hotline messages, electronic mail messages, and office visits.

What about town meetings?

Mere attendance at a town meeting is not considered a sufficient contact. If a constituent at such a meeting makes a verbal or written request for information, then the legislator may respond.

Is returning a questionnaire a "contact?"

No. In order to be considered a "contact" for the purpose of the exception, the constituent would need to check a box requesting information, or write in a comment.

What about multiple responses or "updates?"

The general rule is that one contact is sufficient to authorize one letter in response. Periodic updates are permitted if the constituent has requested continuing information and the updates are individually tailored to the subject matter upon which the constituent has requested updates.

References:

[RCW 42.52.185](#)

Complaint Opinion 1996 - No. 9; 2000 - No. 1

Advisory Opinions 1995 - Nos. 17 and 19; 1996 - Nos. 4, 7, (opinion retired) and 12 (opinion retired); 1997 - Nos. 3 (opinion retired) and 12; 2004 - No. 3; 2005 - No. 1 (opinion retired)

Use of Resources: Newsletters

One of the methods many legislators use to communicate with their constituents is the mailing of newsletters. The statutory prohibitions on personal and campaign use of public resources apply to newsletters, since they are developed, printed, and mailed at legislative expense. The following are some of the most frequently asked questions about newsletter timing and content.

What is a “newsletter?”

The ethics board has adopted the dictionary definition: a “report issued by a firm, governmental agency, etc. to keep employees or the public informed of pertinent matters,” or “a printed sheet... containing news or information of current interest to or bearing upon the interests of a special group” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, College Edition; Webster’s Third New International Dictionary). A legislative newsletter typically consists of a report to constituents on pertinent legislative matters, and may include information about opportunities to communicate with the legislator on legislative issues.

Can a newsletter include a questionnaire?

Yes, but only within specified limits:

1. During the election year, if the questions include a check-off for the constituent to request further information, a response is appropriate only if the questions are limited to specific bills or narrow topics rather than broad categories (“death penalty” rather than “crime;” “class size” rather than “education”).
2. Questionnaires cannot be designed to obtain demographic information, such as partisan affiliation, for use in a campaign contact list.

Can a newsletter include a “government guide?”

Yes. A newsletter can include a directory of addresses, email addresses and phone numbers for government officials, commonly called a “government guide.”

May a legislator include non-government entities in what is commonly referred to as a “government guide” or “public resource guide?”

Yes. The inclusion of the names, addresses, email addresses, phone numbers and/ or fax numbers, of organizations which provide some sort of educational or social service, would not violate the Ethics Act. It would, however, be an unlawful promotion of a non-government entity if a particular provider in a class of providers was selectively included or excluded.

What about partisan statements and their timing?

The expected and authorized content of newsletters includes a report to constituents on issues that the legislator will address or has been addressing in a legislative session. Since the members are elected on a partisan basis, it is acceptable to express their positions in partisan terms. It is not proper to include partisan material unrelated to state legislative issues and highly partisan material is subject to increasing scrutiny as an election draws nearer.

Do personal references present a problem?

Newsletters cannot include personal promotional material, since it could be interpreted as serving a campaign rather than a legislative purpose. Personal slogans, such as “your voice in Olympia,” generally fall into this category.

Negative references to other legislators are also prohibited, although it is permitted to criticize the opposing caucus’ actions or agenda.

What about voting records?

It is proper for a legislator to discuss his or her own voting record. However, it is not appropriate to comment on the voting record or stated positions of other individual legislators.

Can a newsletter include references to outside groups?

Yes, if an outside group is referenced in connection with a relevant legislative issue. Giving an outside group a “plug,” for donations, for example, would be an ethics violation as a use of public resources for private benefit.

What are the Board’s guidelines for newsletter comments on ballot measures?

- *Explanatory material* is always permitted.
- *Extensive direct comment on the merits* is not permitted, unless the subject matter was a bill in the preceding session.
- *Personal advocacy statements* on ballot measures are not permitted unless they are de minimis and there was a bill of the same substance in the preceding session.

A short sentence or paragraph is usually de minimis but an entire newsletter, or even most of a page, devoted to advocacy or opposition would be a violation, unless the statements relate to the legislator’s action or position on the same subject during the preceding session.

- *Voting record and legislative actions* on an initiative, referendum, or bill of the same substance in the preceding session may be discussed.
- *Appeals for votes* are prohibited.
- *Direct appeals* are always prohibited;
- *Indirect appeals* (like “You will have an opportunity to vote...”) are prohibited if combined with comments about the merits of a ballot measure.
- Fact of being a ballot measure may be stated.

References:

[RCW 42.52.160](#) [RCW 42.52.180](#) [RCW 42.52.185](#)

Complaint Opinions [1996 - Nos. 2, 3, 7 and 9](#); [1998 - Nos. 4, 5](#); [1999 - Nos. 3, 4](#); [2000 - No. 9](#); [2005 - No. 8](#); [2010 - No. 1](#); [2017 - No. 43](#)

Advisory Opinions [1995 - No. 19](#); [1996 - Nos. 4 and 12 \(Opinion retired\)](#); [1997 - No. 8](#); and [2000 - No. 1](#)

Joint Rules of the House and Senate - [Joint Rule 4](#)

Use of Resources: Altering Official Websites

Can a legislator alter his or her official website in an election year?

Yes, but only during certain periods. The official websites of legislators seeking reelection or election to any office cannot be altered beginning on the first day of the declaration of candidacy filing period ([RCW 29A.24.050](#)) through the date the general election is certified for that election year. [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(c\)](#).

Does the term “official website” include official legislative social media accounts like Facebook and X?

Yes. To ensure compliance with this requirement, official media accounts could be temporarily disabled or made inactive during this “freeze” period. *Ethics Alert* - [April 2020](#). See also [RCW 42.52.180\(4\)](#).

Can official websites contain discretionary materials prepared for a legislator in the course of his or her official duties as a legislator, including past newsletters and press releases?

Yes. To the extent that Board precedent directed that discretionary materials be removed from websites during the freeze period, those portions of the opinions are overturned. See *In re Nixon*, [2006 - No. 5](#); *Advisory Opinion* [2004 - No. 1](#); *Advisory Opinion* [2000 - No. 2](#).

Use of Resources: Fund Raising

May a legislator use public facilities to raise funds for charities?

Generally not. Certain “public benefit” uses may be identified by the House or Senate when there is a finding that the use complies with the following criteria: the use may not interfere with the performance of duties; it must be infrequent and incidental; and it must be performed at no cost or de minimis cost. The Board has acknowledged that workplace projects which meet all these criteria, such as assistance to the “legislative family” in time of need, Habitat for Humanity, and the Combined Fund drive, would be permissible, narrow exceptions to the prohibition. In each of these cases the Board has noted that at some point there has been an institutional decision to proceed and that all requirements have been met and that legislators and staff are free to participate or not.

Are there any restrictions on who a legislator or legislative employee may solicit, regardless of whether state facilities are used?

Yes. Lobbyists or lobbyist employers may not be solicited for any thing, including charities or good causes. The reason for this rule is the perception that refusal to participate could have negative consequences in terms of access and good will. The following exceptions have been granted by the legislature: the legislative renovation project; the state legacy project; information or educational meetings on legislative issues; the capitol furnishings preservation committee; a specific international trade account; hosting national conferences; tourism; the oral history program; the state flag account; the Gina Grant Bull legislative page scholarship account; a regional or national legislative association conference; the Billy Frank Jr. national statutory hall collection fund; and the Rosa Franklin legislative intern scholarship program.

May a legislator, on behalf of a charitable or non-profit organization, request donations at a fundraising event at which there may be some lobbyists in attendance?

Yes, if the request is not made on behalf of the legislator and most of the audience from whom donations are sought is comprised of persons who are not lobbyists. *Advisory Opinion 2019 - No. 1.*

May a legislator or legislative staff solicit a charitable donation on his or her private social media account?

Yes if the legislator or staff includes the following message with the donation request:

THE ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE ACT DOES NOT ALLOW ME TO SOLICIT CHARITABLE DONATIONS FROM LOBBYISTS OR LOBBYIST EMPLOYERS. IF YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS REQUEST AND ARE EITHER A LOBBYIST OR LOBBYIST EMPLOYER, PLEASE DISREGARD MY REQUEST TO MAKE A DONATION TO THIS CHARITABLE CAUSE. *Ethics Alert - April 2019.*

References:

[RCW 42.52.070](#) [RCW 42.52.140](#) [RCW 42.52.160](#)
[RCW 42.52.800](#) [RCW 42.52.801](#) [RCW 42.52.802](#)
[RCW 42.52.8021](#) [RCW 42.52.8022](#) [RCW 42.52.8023](#)
[RCW 42.52.8024](#) [RCW 42.52.803](#) [RCW 42.52.806](#)
[RCW 42.52.810](#) [RCW 42.52.820](#)

Use of Resources: Confidential Information

Is release of confidential information an ethics violation?

Yes. Legislators and employees have an obligation to keep confidential that information which is not available to the general public upon request, as well as information which the law requires to be kept confidential. [RCW 42.52.050](#)

What legislative information is “available to the general public upon request?”

For the legislature, “public record” includes: legislative records (which are defined as correspondence or records made by or submitted to legislative committees or subcommittees); financial records; personnel leave, travel, and payroll records; and other records designated by the House of Representatives or the Senate as public.

Individual legislative member offices are fully subject to the Public Records Act (PRA). The records maintained, used, possessed, or retained by member offices are all available, unless otherwise exempt under the PRA, to the general public upon request through the Senate and House public records officers. The legislature also provides public information through documents on the legislative websites and through the Legislative Information Center.

Is there a penalty for withholding public records?

Yes. It is an ethics violation to knowingly refuse to provide public records. The application of the public records law to legislative records is not always clear. If you receive such a request, you should immediately consult with the public records officers in either the House or Senate.

Is a bill drafting request information confidential?

Yes, if the requester asks for a confidential draft, the unauthorized disclosure of the substance of the request or the identity of the requester is a violation of the Ethics Act. Disclosure of otherwise confidential drafting requests is permissible to persons entitled by law or formal written legislative policy to receive information about confidential drafting requests. Limited disclosure to co-workers and administrative supervisors is permissible, but only to the extent necessary for supervision and workload decisions, or to obtain needed expertise. Disclosure to other legislators should not occur without permission of the person making the drafting request.

Are there limits on information which a legislator or employee might use for outside or subsequent employment?

Yes. A legislator or employee may not accept a job or participate in any business or professional activities which would require or induce him or her to disclose confidential information. Personal gain or benefit from the disclosure of confidential information, whether by the legislator or employee or another person, is also prohibited.

References:

[RCW 40.14.100](#) [RCW 42.52.010\(5\)](#)
[RCW 42.52.050](#) [RCW 42.56.010](#)
Advisory Opinion 1998 - No. 1
House and Senate telecommunication policies;
Complaint Opinions 2003 - Nos. 2 and 10; 2019 - No. 9

ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND PAYMENTS FOR EXPENSES

When the ethics law was substantially rewritten in 1994, one of the areas of greatest interest and discussion involved gifts. Between the extremes of “no cup of coffee” and “business as usual,” the Ethics Commission recommended, and the legislature passed, a gift provision that incorporates three basic considerations:

1. Any gifts that could reasonably be expected to influence legislators or staff in their votes, action or judgment are prohibited, as well as gifts to anyone with authority to purchase goods or services from the donor;
2. A general threshold of \$50 per calendar year either from a single source or a gift from multiple sources is established for gifts other than those which violate the reasonable expectation rule; and

3. A set of specified exceptions from the gift rule is established, which may be accepted without limit unless the context of the gift changes the presumption.

The following sets of questions are the most frequently asked with respect to meals, entertainment, travel, and educational expenses.

Gifts - Meals Entertainment and Miscellaneous Items

Are charity or community events subject to the \$50 limit?

No, not if the invitation to attend comes from the charitable, governmental, community or civic organization which is sponsoring the event. Directed admissions to such events by a lobbyist or lobbyist-employer are subject to the gift limits.

What if a lobbyist-employer other than a charitable, governmental, community or civic organization sponsors an entertainment event, and pledges a portion of the proceeds to charity?

In that case the gift law would still apply. Donating a portion of the proceeds to charity does not change the nature of the sponsoring organization.

Are meals subject to the \$50 limits?

There is an exemption for infrequent meals related to official business. The Board has interpreted this exemption to mean that the person purchasing the meal must be present, with an expectation that some legislative business will be discussed. These meals, if provided by lobbyists or lobbyists' employers, are limited to 12 per calendar year - See [Board Rule 5](#).

What about receptions and banquets?

There is a specific exception to the \$50 limit for hosted receptions, which does not include the business contact provision applied to meals. Banquets, which are typically seated and include a full meal, do not usually fit either exemption. The Board has determined that only two unique banquet-style events could be attended without violation: the Restaurant Association Gala and the AT&T museum night. Banquets do not violate the statute if they fall under the previously described charity or community event exemption.

Is the cost of food provided during a sports event exempt from the gift limit?

No, the gift analysis is applied to the full cost of the "event," which would include the value of the admission, plus food and beverages consumed during the performance or game. If a business meal is hosted separately from the entertainment event, the meal is not subject to the \$50 limit but would count toward the calendar year limit of 12 if provided by a lobbyist or lobbyist employer.

What are the reporting requirements for food and beverages?

Legislators and staff who file annual financial affairs statements with the Public Disclosure Commission are required to list instances when they receive food and beverage in excess of \$50. The reporting requirement applies to all such instances, not just business meals. The value of food and beverage provided for a legislator or employee's guest is attributed to the legislator or employee.

Are legislators and staff permitted to "buy-down" the cost of entertainment events, or other item subject to the gift limit?

Yes. If the recipient pays a portion of the cost of the item, the cost for gift limit purposes is reduced by the amount paid. Recipients should be aware that the Public Disclosure Commission requires the donors in such situations to report the full cost, however.

Can legislators or employees solicit donations of food and beverage for legislative events?

No, not if the person being solicited is a lobbyist or lobbyist-employer. This is a complete prohibition, regardless of value. Totally unsolicited gifts for such purposes are subject to the gift limits.

Are door prizes acceptable?

There is no formal opinion or specific statute on this question. It is best to follow a conservative approach, since door prizes are notoriously subject to manipulation. Legislators and legislative staff who attend these events should not accept such door prizes if the value of the prize is greater than \$50. Purchased raffle or lottery tickets are not usually subject to the same manipulation, so they would not ordinarily present a problem.

What about group discounts?

The ethics law exempts discounts available to "broad-based groups." The Board has stated that in order to meet this test, the discount or waiver must be available to some broad category of occupation or employee group. A listing of particular positions does not qualify, even if the list includes a large number of persons.

Is there an exemption for publications?

Yes, publications and subscriptions related to official duties are normally exempt from the gift limits. However, such items cannot be provided by lobbyists or lobbyist-employers unless they produce the material.

What about campaign contributions?

They are not "gifts." Acceptance and reporting of a permissible campaign contribution is not probative of any alleged violation of the Ethics Act. However, such contributions are subject to a "quid pro quo" analysis and the test is whether something specific is offered in exchange for something specific in return.

References:

[RCW 42.52.010\(9\)](#) [RCW 42.52.140](#) [RCW 42.52.150](#)
Complaint Opinions 2001 - No. 4; 2002 - No. 1; 2009 - No. 5;
Advisory Opinions 1995 - Nos. 3, 5 and 13;
1996 - Nos. 2, 10, 13 and 15; 1997 - Nos. 6 and 10;
1998 - Nos. 2 and 5; 2000 - No. 3; 2015 - No. 1; 2017 - No. 1

Gifts - Conference and Seminar Travel Costs

The definition of "gift" specifically excludes reasonable expenses in connection with a speech, presentation, appearance, or trade mission in an official capacity. Also excluded are enrollment and course fees, as well as reasonable expenses, for attendance at seminars and educational programs sponsored by governmental or nonprofit professional, education, trade, or charitable associations or institutions. "Reasonable expenses" means travel, lodging, and subsistence expenses incurred the day before through the day after the event.

Are legislative "tours" within the exception?

Tours, or other visits to acquaint legislators and staff with local conditions, meet the definition of an official appearance when the tours or visits are structured to provide legislators and employees information to assist them in performing tasks appropriate to their positions. Such events should be approved by the Secretary of the Senate or Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives. Legislators and staff should be cautious with respect to tours which involve significant expense; especially those costs that are not reasonably necessary for the educational aspect of the tour; or recreational activities.

Can assistance for seminar attendance be solicited?

Only from persons who are not lobbyists or lobbyist-employers. It is not a violation to ask the sponsor of a conference or seminar if there is a discount available to legislators or legislative employees.

Are there limits on seminar activities that can be complimentary?

Yes. The gift limits apply to activities which are not included in the basic conference fee. For example, if other attendees would pay \$75 extra to participate in a golf tournament, it would be a violation for a legislator or employee to play on a complimentary basis.

What if the sponsor wants to pay for spouse travel and lodging?

Such a payment would ordinarily be an ethics violation, because there is no educational or official purpose being served. The spouse’s travel could be considered separately if there is an independent business, family, or social relationship between the spouse and the donor.

References:

[RCW 42.52.010\(9\)](#) [RCW 42.52.140](#) [RCW 42.52.150](#)

Complaint Opinions - [2014 - No. 3](#); [2017 - No. 1](#)

RCW SECTION/BOARD OPINION TABLE

“C” indicates a *Complaint Opinion* “A” indicates an *Advisory Opinion*

42.52.010: Definitions.

- C [1995 - No. 2](#) (impact of section generally)
- C [1995 - No. 2](#) (subsection (19), transaction involving the state)
- C [2017 - No. 1](#) (subsection (9), gifts)
- A [1995 - Nos. 9](#) and [12](#) (subsection (4), beneficial interest)
- A [1998 - No. 1](#) (subsection (6), confidential information)
- A [1995 - Nos. 2, 10,](#) and [15](#); [1996 - Nos. 1, 2, 8, 9,](#) and [10](#) (subsection (10), gifts); [2002 - No. 1](#)
- A [1998 - No. 4](#) (subsection (11), honoraria)
- A [1995 - No. 10](#) (subsection (16-17), officer and employee)

42.52.020: Activities incompatible with public duties.

- C [1995 - Nos. 1, 2,](#) and [4](#)
- C [1999 - No. 5](#)
- C [2000 - Nos. 2, 3, 4](#) and [5](#)
- C [2005 - Nos. 5](#) and [6](#)
- C [2006 - No. 3](#)
- C [2011 - No. 1](#)
- C [2011 - No. 2](#)
- C [2017 - Nos. 12, 13](#) and [14](#)
- C [2018 - Nos. 2](#) and [3](#)
- C [2019 - No. 1](#)
- C [2022 - Nos. 3, 4, 5, 11, 16](#)
- C [2023 - Nos. 4, 8, 9, 10,](#) and [11](#)
- A [1995 - Nos. 1, 4, 6, 7](#) and [16](#)
- A [1996 - No. 5](#)
- A [1998 - No. 6](#)
- A [1999 - No. 1](#)
- A [2001 - No. 1](#)
- A [2020 - No. 2](#)
- A [2022 - No. 1](#)
- A [2023 - No. 2](#)

42.52.030: Financial interests in transactions.

- C [1995 - No. 2](#)
- A [1995 - Nos. 6](#) and [11](#)
- A [1997 - No. 1](#)

42.52.040: Assisting in transactions.

- C [1995 - Nos. 2](#) and [4](#)
- C [2005 - No. 6](#)

42.52.050: Confidential information.

- C [1996 - No. 1](#)
- C [2003 - No. 2](#)
- C [2003 - No. 10](#)
- C [2005 - No. 6](#)
- C [2008 - No. 6](#)
- C [2019 - Nos. 1](#) and [9](#)
- A [1998 - No. 1](#)

42.52.070: Special privileges.

- C [1995 - Nos. 1](#) and [4](#)
- C [2008 - No. 6](#)
- C [2008 - No. 3](#)
- C [1996 - No. 1](#)
- C [1999 - Nos. 1](#) and [2](#)
- C [2001 - No. 4](#)
- C [2006 - Nos. 1, 3](#) and [4](#)
- C [2007 - Nos. 1A, 1B, 2, 3](#) and [4](#)
- C [2009 - No. 3](#)
- C [2009 - No. 5](#)
- C [2011 - No. 1](#)
- C [2016 - Nos. 3](#) and [4](#)
- C [2017 - No. 42](#)
- C [2018 - Nos. 2, 3](#) and [4](#)
- C [2019 - No. 8](#)
- C [2020 - Nos. 3, 6, 7, 8, 12](#)
- C [2021 - Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4](#)
- C [2022 - Nos. 8, 9, 12, 13](#)
- C [2023 - Nos 2, 12, 16,](#) and [17](#)
- A [1996 - Nos. 5](#) and [11](#) (opinion retired)
- A [1997 - No. 6](#)
- A [1998 - No. 5](#)
- A [2006 - No. 1](#)
- A [2020 - No. 2](#)

42.52.110: Compensation for official duties or nonperformance.

- C [1995 - Nos. 2](#) and [4](#)
- C [2011 - No. 1](#)
- A [1995 - Nos. 1, 2](#) and [11](#)
- A [1996 - No. 9](#)
- A [1998 - No. 4](#)

42.52.120: Compensation for outside activities.

- C [1995 - No. 4](#)
- C [1999 - No. 5](#)
- C [2011 - No. 1](#)
- A [1995 - Nos. 2, 6, 9, 11, 12](#) and [14](#)
- A [1996 - Nos. 3](#) and [5](#)
- A [1997 - No. 1](#)
- A [2001 - No. 1](#)

42.52.130: Honoraria.

C [2023 - No. 5](#)

A [1998 - No. 4](#)

42.52.140-150: Gifts.

C [1995 - Nos. 2 and 4](#)

C [1999 - Nos. 1 and 2](#)

C [2001 - No. 4](#)

C [2002 - No. 1](#)

C [2009 - No. 5](#)

C [2011 - No. 2](#)

C [2013 - No. 1](#)

C [2014 - No. 3](#)

C [2020 - No. 8](#)

C [2022 - Nos. 6, 7, 14, 15](#)

C [2023 - No. 1](#)

A [1995 - Nos. 3, 10 and 13](#)

A [1996 - Nos. 1, 2, 8, 10, 13 and 15](#)

A [1997 - Nos. 6 and 10](#)

A [1998 - Nos. 2 and 5](#)

A [2017 - No. 1](#)

42.52.160: Use of persons, money, or property for private gain or benefit.

C [1996 - No. 1](#)

C [1997 - No. 1](#)

C [1998 - Nos. 1 and 2](#)

C [2001 - No. 1](#)

C [2003 - No. 1](#)

C [2005 - Nos. 1 and 2](#)

C [2006 - Nos. 1, 4 and 8](#)

C [2007 - Nos. 1B and 3](#) C [2008 - No. 6](#)

C [2009 - No. 2](#)

C [2009 - No. 5](#)

C [2011 - No. 2](#)

C [2014 - No. 2](#)

C [2015 - No. 2](#)

C [2016 - No. 14](#)

C [2017 - No. 42](#)

C [2018 - Nos. 2 and 4](#)

C [2019 - Nos. 4, 7 and 10](#)

C [2020 - Nos. 2, 7](#)

C [2021 - No. 5](#)

C [2022 - Nos. 1, 2, 11](#)

C [2023 No. 2 and 16](#)

A [1995 - Nos. 8 and 17](#)

A [1996 - Nos. 5 and 11 \(opinion retired\)](#)

A [2006 - No. 1](#)

A [2019 - Nos. 1 and 2](#)

A [2020 - No. 2](#)

A [2021 - No. 1](#)

Ethics Alert [May 2021](#)

Ethics Alert [August 2021](#)

42.52.170: Giving a thing of economic value in violation of other sections.

C [1995 - No. 4](#)

42.52.180: Use of public resources for political campaigns.

C [1996 - Nos. 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10](#)

C [1998 - No. 1](#)

C [2002 - No. 2](#)

C [2003 - No. 10](#)

C [2006 - Nos. 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9](#)

C [2007 - No. 5](#)

C [2008 - Nos. 3 and 4](#)

C [2009 - Nos. 1 and 2](#)

C [2010 - No. 1](#)

C [2010 - No. 2](#)

C [2010 - No. 3](#)

C [2010 - No. 4 and 5](#)

C [2010 - No. 6](#)

C [2011 - No. 3](#)

C [2012 - No. 1](#)

C [2012 - No. 2](#)

C [2012 - No. 3](#)

C [2014 - No. 4](#)

C [2014 - No. 7](#)

C [2016 - Nos. 1, 5, 7, 8, and 13](#)

C [2016 - No. 15](#)

C [2016 - No. 16](#)

C [2017 - No. 41](#)

C [2018 - No. 1](#)

C [2019 - Nos. 2, 3, 10, 11, 12 and 13](#)

C [2020 - Nos. 9, 10, 13](#)

C [2021 - Nos. 6, 7, 9](#)

C [2022 - Nos. 6, 7, 14, 15](#)

C [2023 - Nos. 3, 6](#)

A [1995 - Nos. 17 and 18](#)

A [1996 - No. 11 \(opinion retired\)](#)

A [1997 - Nos. 2, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 12](#)

A [2004 - No. 1](#)

A [2004 - No. 2 and 3](#)

A [2009 - No. 1 \(opinion retired\)](#)

A [2019 - No. 3](#)

A [2020 - No. 1](#)

A [2021 - No. 1](#)

Ethics Alert [September 2019](#)

Ethics Alert [December 2022](#)

42.52.185: Restrictions on mailings by legislators.

C [1996 - Nos. 2, 3, 7, 9 and 10](#)

C [2000 - No. 1](#)

C [2017 - No. 43](#)

A [1995 - No. 19](#)

A [1996 - Nos. 4, 6, 7 \(opinion retired\) and 12 \(opinion retired\)](#)

A [1997 - Nos. 2, 3 \(opinion retired\), and 12](#)

A [2004 - No. 3](#)

A [2005 - No. 1 \(opinion retired\)](#)

42.52.320: Authority of ethics board.

C [1995 - No. 3](#)

C [1996 - Nos. 4 and 5](#)

C [2000 - Nos. 6, 7 and 8](#)

C [2003 - No. 3](#)

C [2003 - No. 4](#)

C [2003 - No. 11](#)

C [2004 - No. 1](#)

C [2006 - Nos. 10, 11 and 13](#)

C [2021 - No. 8](#)

C [2023 - Nos. 7, 13, and 14](#)

42.52.330: Interpretation of part-time employment.

C [1995 - No. 2](#)

C [2016 - Nos. 10, 11 and 12](#)

A [1995 - No. 4](#)

A [1998 - No. 6](#)

42.52.425: Dismissal of Complaint.

C [2008 - No. 3](#)

C [2009 - No. 1](#)

C [2020 - No. 13](#)

C [2023 - No. 16](#)

42.52.900: Declaration of policy.

C [1995 - Nos. 1, 2 and 4](#)

A [1995 - No. 7](#)

Rule 3: Private Use of Public resources

C [2003 - Nos. 5 and 7](#)

C [2003 - Nos. 6, 8 and 9](#)

ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE ACT - 42.52

SECTIONS

42.52.010	Definitions.
42.52.020	Activities incompatible with public duties.
42.52.030	Financial interests in transactions.
42.52.040	Assisting in transactions.
42.52.050	Confidential information—Improperly concealed records.
42.52.060	Testimony of state officers and state employees.
42.52.070	Special privileges and exemptions—Application of section to legislature.
42.52.080	Employment after public service.
42.52.090	Limited assistance by former state officers and employees.
42.52.100	Conditions on appearance before state agencies or doing business with the state—Hearing—Judicial review.
42.52.110	Compensation for official duties or nonperformance.
42.52.120	Compensation for outside activities.
42.52.130	Honoraria.
42.52.140	Gifts.
42.52.150	Limitations on gifts.
42.52.160	Use of persons, money, or property for private gain.
42.52.170	Giving, paying, loaning, etc., any thing of economic value to state employee.
42.52.180	Use of public resources for political campaigns.
42.52.185	Restrictions on mailings by legislators.
42.52.187	Letters of recommendation or congratulations by legislators.
42.52.190	Investments.
42.52.200	Agency rules.
42.52.220	Universities and state board for community and technical colleges—Administrative processes.
42.52.310	Legislative ethics board.
42.52.320	Authority of legislative ethics board.
42.52.330	Interpretation.
42.52.340	Transfer of jurisdiction.
42.52.350	Executive ethics board.
42.52.360	Authority of executive ethics board.
42.52.365	Executive branch agencies—Ethics advisors—Ethics training.
42.52.370	Authority of commission on judicial conduct.
42.52.380	Political activities of board members.
42.52.390	Hearing and subpoena authority.
42.52.400	Enforcement of subpoena authority.
42.52.410	Filing complaint—Whistleblower protection—Penalty for reprisal or retaliation.
42.52.420	Investigation.
42.52.425	Dismissal of complaint.
42.52.430	Public hearing—Findings.
42.52.440	Review of order.

42.52.450	Complaint against legislator or statewide elected official.
42.52.460	Citizen actions.
42.52.470	Referral for enforcement.
42.52.480	Action by boards.
42.52.490	Action by attorney general.
42.52.500	Optional hearings by administrative law judge.
42.52.510	Rescission of state action.
42.52.520	Disciplinary action.
42.52.530	Additional investigative authority.
42.52.540	Limitations period.
42.52.550	Compensation of ethics boards.
42.52.560	Communications from an employee organization or charitable organization—Distribution by state employee.
42.52.570	Private business activity policy—Department of fish and wildlife—Parks and recreation commission.
42.52.575	Information about scholarship opportunities.
42.52.800	Exemptions—Solicitation for state capitol historic furnishings and preservation and restoration of state legislative building.
42.52.801	Exemption—Solicitation to promote tourism.
42.52.802	Exemption—Solicitation for Washington state legacy project, state library, and archives account.
42.52.8021	Exemption—Solicitation for Washington state flag account.
42.52.8022	Exemption—Informational or educational meetings regarding legislative issues.
42.52.8023	Exemption—Gina Grant Bull memorial legislative page scholarship account.
42.52.8024	Exemption—Rosa Franklin legislative internship program scholarship.
42.52.803	Exemption—Solicitation for legislative oral history account.
42.52.804	Exemption—Health profession board or commission—Professional opinions.
42.52.805	Solicitation for charitable activities of executive branch state employees—Limitations—Definitions.
42.52.806	Exemption—Solicitation for Billy Frank Jr. national statutory hall collection fund.
42.52.810	Solicitation for the legislative international trade account—Report.
42.52.820	Solicitation for hosting national legislative association conference.
42.52.821	Exemption—Solicitation to host conference of a national association.
42.52.822	Exemption—Solicitation for regional or national legislative association conferences.
42.52.900	Legislative declaration.
42.52.901	Liberal construction.
42.52.903	Serving on board, committee, or commission not prevented.
42.52.904	Effective date—1994 c 154.
42.52.906	Construction—Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships—2009 c 521.

ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE LAW

RCW 42.52.010

Definitions.

1. “Agency” means any state board, commission, bureau, committee, department, institution, division, or tribunal in the legislative, executive, or judicial branch of state government. “Agency” includes all elective offices, the state legislature, those institutions of higher education created and supported by the state government, and those courts that are parts of state government.
2. “Assist” means to act, or offer or agree to act, in such a way as to help, aid, advise, furnish information to, or otherwise provide assistance to another person, believing that the action is of help, aid, advice, or assistance to the person and with intent so to assist such person.
3. “Beneficial interest” has the meaning ascribed to it under the Washington case law. However, an ownership interest in a mutual fund or similar investment pooling fund in which the owner has no management powers does not constitute a beneficial interest in the entities in which the fund or pool invests.
4. “Compensation” means anything of economic value, however designated, that is paid, loaned, granted, or transferred, or to be paid, loaned, granted, or transferred for, or in consideration of, personal services to any person.
5. “Confidential information” means (a) specific information, rather than generalized knowledge, that is not available to the general public on request or (b) information made confidential by law.
6. “Contract” or “grant” means an agreement between two or more persons that creates an obligation to do or not to do a particular thing. “Contract” or “grant” includes, but is not limited to, an employment contract, a lease, a license, a purchase agreement, or a sales agreement.
7. “Ethics boards” means the commission on judicial conduct, the legislative ethics board, and the executive ethics board.
8. “Family” has the same meaning as “immediate family” in [RCW 42.17A.005](#).
9. “Gift” means anything of economic value for which no consideration is given. “Gift” does not include:
 - (a) Items from family members or friends where it is clear beyond a reasonable doubt that the gift was not made as part of any design to gain or maintain influence in the agency of which the recipient is an officer or employee;
 - (b) Items related to the outside business of the recipient that are customary and not related to the recipient’s performance of official duties;
 - (c) Items exchanged among officials and employees or a social event hosted or sponsored by a state officer or state employee for coworkers;
 - (d) Payments by a governmental or nongovernmental entity of reasonable expenses incurred in connection with a speech, presentation, appearance, or trade mission made in an official capacity. As used in this subsection, “reasonable expenses” are limited to travel, lodging, and subsistence expenses incurred the day before through the day after the event;
 - (e) Items a state officer or state employee is authorized by law to accept;
 - (f) Payment of enrollment and course fees and reasonable travel expenses attributable to attending seminars and educational programs sponsored by a bona fide governmental or nonprofit professional, educational, trade, or charitable association or institution. As used in this

subsection, “reasonable expenses” are limited to travel, lodging, and subsistence expenses incurred the day before through the day after the event;

- (g) Items returned by the recipient to the donor within thirty days of receipt or donated to a charitable organization within thirty days of receipt;
 - (h) Campaign contributions reported under chapter [42.17A RCW](#);
 - (i) Discounts available to an individual as a member of an employee group, occupation, or similar broad-based group; and
 - (j) Awards, prizes, scholarships, or other items provided in recognition of academic or scientific achievement.
10. “Head of agency” means the chief executive officer of an agency. In the case of an agency headed by a commission, board, committee, or other body consisting of more than one natural person, agency head means the person or board authorized to appoint agency employees and regulate their conduct.
11. “Honorarium” means money or thing of value offered to a state officer or state employee for a speech, appearance, article, or similar item or activity in connection with the state officer’s or state employee’s official role.
12. “Official duty” means those duties within the specific scope of employment of the state officer or state employee as defined by the officer’s or employee’s agency or by statute or the state Constitution.
13. “Participate” means to participate in state action or a proceeding personally and substantially as a state officer or state employee, through approval, disapproval, decision, recommendation, the rendering of advice, investigation, or otherwise but does not include preparation, consideration, or enactment of legislation or the performance of legislative duties.
14. “Person” means any individual, partnership, association, corporation, firm, institution, or other entity, whether or not operated for profit.
15. “Regulatory agency” means any state board, commission, department, or officer, except those in the legislative or judicial branches, authorized by law to conduct adjudicative proceedings, issue permits or licenses, or to control or affect interests of identified persons.
16. “Responsibility” in connection with a transaction involving the state, means the direct administrative or operating authority, whether intermediate or final, and either exercisable alone or through subordinates, effectively to approve, disapprove, or otherwise direct state action in respect of such transaction.
17. “State action” means any action on the part of an agency, including, but not limited to:
- (a) A decision, determination, finding, ruling, or order; and
 - (b) A grant, payment, award, license, contract, transaction, sanction, or approval, or the denial thereof, or failure to act with respect to a decision, determination, finding, ruling, or order.
18. “State employee” means an individual who is employed by an agency in any branch of state government. For purposes of this chapter, employees of the superior courts are not state officers or state employees.
19. “State officer” means every person holding a position of public trust in or under an executive, legislative, or judicial office of the state. “State officer” includes judges of the superior court, judges of the court of appeals, justices of the supreme court, members of the legislature together with the secretary of the senate and the chief clerk of the house of representatives,

holders of elective offices in the executive branch of state government, chief executive officers of state agencies, members of boards, commissions, or committees with authority over one or more state agencies or institutions, and employees of the state who are engaged in supervisory, policy-making, or policy-enforcing work. For the purposes of this chapter, “state officer” also includes any person exercising or undertaking to exercise the powers or functions of a state officer.

20. “Thing of economic value,” in addition to its ordinary meaning, includes:
- (a) A loan, property interest, interest in a contract or other chose in action, and employment or another arrangement involving a right to compensation;
 - (b) An option, irrespective of the conditions to the exercise of the option; and
 - (c) A promise or undertaking for the present or future delivery or procurement.
21. a. “Transaction involving the state” means a proceeding, application, submission, request for a ruling or other determination, contract, claim, case, or other similar matter that the state officer, state employee, or former state officer or state employee in question believes, or has reason to believe:
- i. Is, or will be, the subject of state action; or
 - ii. Is one to which the state is or will be a party; or
 - iii. Is one in which the state has a direct and substantial proprietary interest.
- b. “Transaction involving the state” does not include the following: Preparation, consideration, or enactment of legislation, including appropriation of moneys in a budget, or the performance of legislative duties by an officer or employee; or a claim, case, lawsuit, or similar matter if the officer or employee did not participate in the underlying transaction involving the state that is the basis for the claim, case, or lawsuit.
22. “University” includes “state universities” and “regional universities” as defined in [RCW 28B.10.016](#) and also includes any research or technology institute affiliated with a university, including without limitation, the *Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute and the *Washington technology center.
23. “University research employee” means a state officer or state employee employed by a university, but only to the extent the state officer or state employee is engaged in research, technology transfer, approved consulting activities related to research and technology transfer, or other incidental activities.

[2011 c 60 § 28; 2005 c 106 § 1; 1998 c 7 § 1; 1996 c 213 § 1; 1994 c 154 § 101.]

Notes: Reviser’s note: *(1) The Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute and the Washington technology center were abolished by 2011 1st sp.s. c 14 § 17.

(2) The definitions in this section have been alphabetized pursuant to [RCW 1.08.015\(2\)\(k\)](#).

Effective date — 2011 c 60: See [RCW 42.17A.919](#).

RCW 42.52.020

Activities incompatible with public duties.

No state officer or state employee may have an interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect, or engage in a business or transaction or professional activity, or incur an obligation of any nature, that is in conflict with the proper discharge of the state officer’s or state employee’s official duties.

[1996 c 213 § 2; 1994 c 154 § 102.]

RCW 42.52.030

Financial interests in transactions.

1. No state officer or state employee, except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, may be beneficially interested, directly or indirectly, in a contract, sale, lease, purchase, or grant that may be made by, through, or is under the supervision of the officer or employee, in whole or in part, or accept, directly or indirectly, any compensation, gratuity, or reward from any other person beneficially interested in the contract, sale, lease, purchase, or grant.
2. No state officer or state employee may participate in a transaction involving the state in his or her official capacity with a person of which the officer or employee is an officer, agent, employee, or member, or in which the officer or employee owns a beneficial interest, except that an officer or employee of an institution of higher education or the *Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute may serve as an officer, agent, employee, or member, or on the board of directors, board of trustees, advisory board, or committee or review panel for any nonprofit institute, foundation, or fund-raising entity; and may serve as a member of an advisory board, committee, or review panel for a governmental or other nonprofit entity.

[2005 c 106 § 2; 1996 c 213 § 3; 1994 c 154 § 103.]

Notes: *Reviser's note: The Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute was abolished by 2011 1st sp.s. c 14 § 17.

RCW 42.52.040

Assisting in transactions.

1. Except in the course of official duties or incident to official duties, no state officer or state employee may assist another person, directly or indirectly, whether or not for compensation, in a transaction involving the state:
 - (a) In which the state officer or state employee has at any time participated; or
 - (b) If the transaction involving the state is or has been under the official responsibility of the state officer or state employee within a period of two years preceding such assistance.
2. No state officer or state employee may share in compensation received by another for assistance that the officer or employee is prohibited from providing under subsection (1) or (3) of this section.
3. A business entity of which a state officer or state employee is a partner, managing officer, or employee shall not assist another person in a transaction involving the state if the state officer or state employee is prohibited from doing so by subsection (1) of this section.
4. This chapter does not prevent a state officer or state employee from assisting, in a transaction involving the state:
 - (a) The state officer's or state employee's parent, spouse or domestic partner, or child, or a child thereof for whom the officer or employee is serving as guardian, executor, administrator, trustee, or other personal fiduciary, if the state officer or state employee did not participate in the transaction; or
 - (b) Another state employee involved in disciplinary or other personnel administration proceedings.

[2008 c 6 § 203; 1994 c 154 § 104.]

Notes: Part headings not law — Severability — 2008 c 6: See [RCW 26.60.900](#) and [26.60.901](#).

RCW 42.52.050

Confidential information — Improperly concealed records.

1. No state officer or state employee may accept employment or engage in any business or professional activity that the officer

or employee might reasonably expect would require or induce him or her to make an unauthorized disclosure of confidential information acquired by the official or employee by reason of the official's or employee's official position.

2. No state officer or state employee may make a disclosure of confidential information gained by reason of the officer's or employee's official position or otherwise use the information for his or her personal gain or benefit or the gain or benefit of another, unless the disclosure has been authorized by statute or by the terms of a contract involving (a) the state officer's or state employee's agency and (b) the person or persons who have authority to waive the confidentiality of the information.
3. No state officer or state employee may disclose confidential information to any person not entitled or authorized to receive the information.
4. No state officer or state employee may intentionally conceal a record if the officer or employee knew the record was required to be released under chapter 42.56 RCW, was under a personal obligation to release the record, and failed to do so. This subsection does not apply where the decision to withhold the record was made in good faith.

[2005 c 274 § 292; 1996 c 213 § 4; 1994 c 154 § 105.]

Notes: Part headings not law — Effective date — 2005 c 274: See [RCW 42.56.901](#) and [42.56.902](#).

RCW 42.52.060

Testimony of state officers and state employees.

This chapter does not prevent a state officer or state employee from giving testimony under oath or from making statements required to be made under penalty of perjury or contempt.

[1994 c 154 § 106.]

RCW 42.52.070

Special privileges.

1. Except as required to perform duties within the scope of employment, no state officer or state employee may use his or her position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself or herself, or his or her spouse, child, parents, or other persons.
2. For purposes of this section, and only as applied to legislators, activities within the scope of employment include but are not limited to duties enumerated in law and activities that have a tangible legislative nexus. Activities with a legislative nexus include but are not limited to:
 - (a) Communications directly pertaining to any legislative proposal which has been introduced in either chamber of the legislature; and
 - (b) Posting information to a legislator's official legislative social media account, about:
 - i. Emergencies;
 - ii. Federal holidays, state and legislatively recognized holidays established under [RCW 1.16.050](#), and religious holidays;
 - iii. Information originally provided or published by other government entities which provide information about government resources; and
 - iv. Achievements, honors, or awards of extraordinary distinction.
3. It is not a violation of this section for a legislator or an appropriate legislative staff designee to engage in activities listed in subsection (2) of this section.
4. For purposes of this section, and only as applied to legislators and employees of the legislative branch, "special privileges"

includes, but is not limited to, engaging in behavior that constitutes harassment. As used in this section:

- (a) “Harassment” means engaging in physical, verbal, visual, or psychological conduct that:
- i. Has the purpose or effect of interfering with the person’s work performance;
 - ii. Creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment; or
 - iii. Constitutes sexual harassment.
- (b) “Sexual harassment” means unwelcome or unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual or romantic favors, sexually motivated bullying, or other verbal, visual, physical, or psychological conduct or communication of a sexual or romantic nature, when:
- i. Submission to the conduct or communication is either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of current or future employment;
 - ii. Submission to or rejection of the conduct or communication is used as the basis of an employment decision affecting the person; or
 - iii. The conduct or communication unreasonably interferes with the person’s job performance or creates a work environment that is hostile, intimidating, or offensive.

[2019 c 383 § 1; 1994 c 154 § 107.]

RCW 42.52.080

Employment after public service.

1. No former state officer or state employee may, within a period of one year from the date of termination of state employment, accept employment or receive compensation from an employer if:
 - (a) The officer or employee, during the two years immediately preceding termination of state employment, was engaged in the negotiation or administration on behalf of the state or agency of one or more contracts with that employer and was in a position to make discretionary decisions affecting the outcome of such negotiation or the nature of such administration;
 - (b) Such a contract or contracts have a total value of more than ten thousand dollars; and
 - (c) The duties of the employment with the employer or the activities for which the compensation would be received include fulfilling or implementing, in whole or in part, the provisions of such a contract or contracts or include the supervision or control of actions taken to fulfill or implement, in whole or in part, the provisions of such a contract or contracts. This subsection shall not be construed to prohibit a state officer or state employee from accepting employment with a state employee organization.
2. No person who has served as a state officer or state employee may, within a period of two years following the termination of state employment, have a direct or indirect beneficial interest in a contract or grant that was expressly authorized or funded by specific legislative or executive action in which the former state officer or state employee participated.
3. No former state officer or state employee may accept an offer of employment or receive compensation from an employer if the officer or employee knows or has reason to believe that the offer of employment or compensation was intended, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, to influence the officer or employee or as compensation or reward for the performance or nonperformance of a duty by the officer or employee during the course of state employment.

4. No former state officer or state employee may accept an offer of employment or receive compensation from an employer if the circumstances would lead a reasonable person to believe the offer has been made, or compensation given, for the purpose of influencing the performance or nonperformance of duties by the officer or employee during the course of state employment.
5. No former state officer or state employee may at any time subsequent to his or her state employment assist another person, whether or not for compensation, in any transaction involving the state in which the former state officer or state employee at any time participated during state employment. This subsection shall not be construed to prohibit any employee or officer of a state employee organization from rendering assistance to state officers or state employees in the course of employee organization business.
6. As used in this section, “employer” means a person as defined in RCW [42.52.010](#) or any other entity or business that the person owns or in which the person has a controlling interest. For purposes of subsection (1) of this section, the term “employer” does not include a successor organization to the rural development council under chapter [43.31 RCW](#).

[1999 c 299 § 3; 1994 c 154 § 108.]

RCW 42.52.090

Limited assistance by former state officers and employees.

This chapter shall not be construed to prevent a former state officer or state employee from rendering assistance to others if the assistance is provided without compensation in any form and is limited to one or more of the following:

1. Providing the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of state agencies or state employees;
2. Providing free transportation to another for the purpose of conducting business with a state agency;
3. Assisting a natural person or nonprofit corporation in obtaining or completing application forms or other forms required by a state agency for the conduct of a state business; or
4. Providing assistance to the poor and infirm. [1994 c 154 § 109.]

RCW 42.52.100

Conditions on appearance before state agencies or doing business with the state — Hearing — Judicial review.

1. The head of an agency, upon finding that any former state officer or state employee of such agency or any other person has violated any provision of this chapter or rules adopted under it, may, in addition to any other powers the head of such agency may have, bar or impose reasonable conditions upon:
 - (a) The appearance before such agency of such former state officer or state employee or other person; and
 - (b) The conduct of, or negotiation or competition for, business with such agency by such former state officer or state employee or other person, such period of time as may reasonably be necessary or appropriate to effectuate the purposes of this chapter.
2. Findings of violations referred to in subsection (1)(b) of this section shall be made on record after notice and hearing, conducted in accordance with the Washington Administrative Procedure Act, chapter [34.05 RCW](#). Such findings and orders are subject to judicial review.
3. This section does not apply to the legislative or judicial branches of government.

[1994 c 154 § 110; 1969 ex.s. c 234 § 27. Formerly RCW 42.18.270.]

RCW 42.52.110

Compensation for official duties or nonperformance.

No state officer or state employee may, directly or indirectly, ask for or give or receive or agree to receive any compensation, gift, reward, or gratuity from a source for performing or omitting or deferring the performance of any official duty, unless otherwise authorized by law except: (1) The state of Washington; or (2) in the case of officers or employees of institutions of higher education or of the *Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute, a governmental entity, an agency or instrumentality of a governmental entity, or a nonprofit corporation organized for the benefit and support of the state employee's agency or other state agencies pursuant to an agreement with the state employee's agency.

[1996 c 213 § 5; 1994 c 154 § 111.]

Notes: *Reviser's note: The Spokane intercollegiate research and technology institute was abolished by 2011 1st sp.s. c 14 § 17.

RCW 42.52.120

Compensation for outside activities.

1. No state officer or state employee may receive any thing of economic value under any contract or grant outside of his or her official duties. The prohibition in this subsection does not apply where the state officer or state employee has complied with [*RCW 42.52.030\(2\)](#) or each of the following conditions are met:

- (a) The contract or grant is bona fide and actually performed;
- (b) The performance or administration of the contract or grant is not within the course of the officer's or employee's official duties, or is not under the officer's or employee's official supervision;
- (c) The performance of the contract or grant is not prohibited by [RCW 42.52.040](#) or by applicable laws or rules governing outside employment for the officer or employee;
- (d) The contract or grant is neither performed for nor compensated by any person from whom such officer or employee would be prohibited by [RCW 42.52.150\(4\)](#) from receiving a gift;
- (e) The contract or grant is not one expressly created or authorized by the officer or employee in his or her official capacity;
- (f) The contract or grant would not require unauthorized disclosure of confidential information.

2. In addition to satisfying the requirements of subsection (1) of this section, a state officer or state employee may have a beneficial interest in a grant or contract or a series of substantially identical contracts or grants with a state agency only if:

- (a) The contract or grant is awarded or issued as a result of an open and competitive bidding process in which more than one bid or grant application was received; or
- (b) The contract or grant is awarded or issued as a result of an open and competitive bidding or selection process in which the officer's or employee's bid or proposal was the only bid or proposal received and the officer or employee has been advised by the appropriate ethics board, before execution of the contract or grant, that the contract or grant would not be in conflict with the proper discharge of the officer's or employee's official duties; or
- (c) The process for awarding the contract or issuing the grant is not open and competitive, but the officer or employee has been advised by the appropriate ethics board that the contract or grant would not be in conflict with the proper discharge of the officer's or employee's official duties.

3. A state officer or state employee awarded a contract or issued a grant in compliance with subsection (2) of this section shall

file the contract or grant with the appropriate ethics board within thirty days after the date of execution; however, if proprietary formulae, designs, drawings, or research are included in the contract or grant, the proprietary formulae, designs, drawings, or research may be deleted from the contract or grant filed with the appropriate ethics board.

4. This section does not prevent a state officer or state employee from receiving compensation contributed from the treasury of the United States, another state, county, or municipality if the compensation is received pursuant to arrangements entered into between such state, county, municipality, or the United States and the officer's or employee's agency. This section does not prohibit a state officer or state employee from serving or performing any duties under an employment contract with a governmental entity.
5. As used in this section, "officer" and "employee" do not include officers and employees who, in accordance with the terms of their employment or appointment, are serving without compensation from the state of Washington or are receiving from the state only reimbursement of expenses incurred or a predetermined allowance for such expenses.

[1997 c 318 § 1; 1996 c 213 § 6; 1994 c 154 § 112.]

Notes: *Reviser's note: RCW 42.52.030 was amended by 2005 c 106 § 2, deleting subsection (2).

RCW 42.52.130

Honoraria.

1. No state officer or state employee may receive honoraria unless specifically authorized by the agency where they serve as state officer or state employee.
2. An agency may not permit honoraria under the following circumstances:
 - (a) The person offering the honorarium is seeking or is reasonably expected to seek contractual relations with or a grant from the employer of the state officer or state employee, and the officer or employee is in a position to participate in the terms or the award of the contract or grant;
 - (b) The person offering the honorarium is regulated by the employer of the state officer or state employee and the officer or employee is in a position to participate in the regulation; or
 - (c) The person offering the honorarium (i) is seeking or opposing or is reasonably likely to seek or oppose enactment of legislation or adoption of administrative rules or actions, or policy changes by the state officer's or state employee's agency; and (ii) the officer or employee may participate in the enactment or adoption.

[1994 c 154 § 113.]

RCW 42.52.140

Gifts.

No state officer or state employee may receive, accept, take, seek, or solicit, directly or indirectly, any thing of economic value as a gift, gratuity, or favor from a person if it could be reasonably expected that the gift, gratuity, or favor would influence the vote, action, or judgment of the officer or employee, or be considered as part of a reward for action or inaction.

[1994 c 154 § 114.]

RCW 42.52.150

Limitations on gifts.

1. No state officer or state employee may accept gifts, other than those specified in subsections (2) and (5) of this section, with an aggregate value in excess of fifty dollars from a single source in a calendar year or a single gift from multiple sources

with a value in excess of fifty dollars. For purposes of this section, “single source” means any person, as defined in [RCW 42.52.010](#), whether acting directly or through any agent or other intermediary, and “single gift” includes any event, item, or group of items used in conjunction with each other or any trip including transportation, lodging, and attendant costs, not excluded from the definition of gift under [RCW 42.52.010](#). The value of gifts given to an officer’s or employee’s family member or guest shall be attributed to the official or employee for the purpose of determining whether the limit has been exceeded, unless an independent business, family, or social relationship exists between the donor and the family member or guest.

2. Except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, the following items are presumed not to influence under [RCW 42.52.140](#), and may be accepted without regard to the limit established by subsection (1) of this section:
 - (a) Unsolicited flowers, plants, and floral arrangements;
 - (b) Unsolicited advertising or promotional items of nominal value, such as pens and note pads;
 - (c) Unsolicited tokens or awards of appreciation in the form of a plaque, trophy, desk item, wall memento, or similar item;
 - (d) Unsolicited items received by a state officer or state employee for the purpose of evaluation or review, if the officer or employee has no personal beneficial interest in the eventual use or acquisition of the item by the officer’s or employee’s agency;
 - (e) Informational material, publications, or subscriptions related to the recipient’s performance of official duties;
 - (f) Food and beverages consumed at hosted receptions where attendance is related to the state officer’s or state employee’s official duties;
 - (g) Gifts, grants, conveyances, bequests, and devises of real or personal property, or both, in trust or otherwise accepted and solicited for deposit in the legislative international trade account created in [RCW 43.15.050](#);
 - (h) Gifts, grants, conveyances, bequests, and devises of real or personal property, or both, in trust or otherwise accepted and solicited for the purpose of promoting the expansion of tourism as provided for in [*RCW 43.330.090](#);
 - (i) Gifts, grants, conveyances, bequests, and devises of real or personal property, or both, solicited on behalf of a national legislative association, 2006 official conference of the national lieutenant governors’ association, the annual conference of the national association of state treasurers[,] or host committee for the purpose of hosting an official conference under the circumstances specified in [RCW 42.52.820](#), section 2, chapter 5, Laws of 2006, or [RCW 42.52.821](#). Anything solicited or accepted may only be received by the national association or host committee and may not be commingled with any funds or accounts that are the property of any person;
 - (j) Admission to, and the cost of food and beverages consumed at, events sponsored by or in conjunction with a civic, charitable, governmental, or community organization;
 - (k) Unsolicited gifts from dignitaries from another state or a foreign country that are intended to be personal in nature; and
 - (l) Gifts, grants, donations, sponsorships, or contributions from any agency or federal or local government agency or program or private source for the purposes of chapter [28B.156 RCW](#).

3. The presumption in subsection (2) of this section is rebuttable and may be overcome based on the circumstances surrounding the giving and acceptance of the item.
4. Notwithstanding subsections (2) and (5) of this section, a state officer or state employee of a regulatory agency or of an agency that seeks to acquire goods or services who participates in those regulatory or contractual matters may receive, accept, take, or seek, directly or indirectly, only the following items from a person regulated by the agency or from a person who seeks to provide goods or services to the agency:
 - (a) Unsolicited advertising or promotional items of nominal value, such as pens and note pads;
 - (b) Unsolicited tokens or awards of appreciation in the form of a plaque, trophy, desk item, wall memento, or similar item;
 - (c) Unsolicited items received by a state officer or state employee for the purpose of evaluation or review, if the officer or employee has no personal beneficial interest in the eventual use or acquisition of the item by the officer’s or employee’s agency;
 - (d) Informational material, publications, or subscriptions related to the recipient’s performance of official duties;
 - (e) Food and beverages consumed at hosted receptions where attendance is related to the state officer’s or state employee’s official duties;
 - (f) Admission to, and the cost of food and beverages consumed at, events sponsored by or in conjunction with a civic, charitable, governmental, or community organization; and
 - (g) Those items excluded from the definition of gift in [RCW 42.52.010](#) except:
 - (h) Payments by a governmental or nongovernmental entity of reasonable expenses incurred in connection with a speech, presentation, appearance, or trade mission made in an official capacity;
 - i. Payments for seminars and educational programs sponsored by a bona fide governmental or nonprofit professional, educational, trade, or charitable association or institution; and
 - ii. Flowers, plants, and floral arrangements.
5. A state officer or state employee may accept gifts in the form of food and beverage on infrequent occasions in the ordinary course of meals where attendance by the officer or employee is related to the performance of official duties. Gifts in the form of food and beverage that exceed fifty dollars on a single occasion shall be reported as provided in chapter [42.17A RCW](#).

[2015 3rd sp.s. c 20 § 7; 2015 c 45 § 2; 2011 c 60 § 29; 2006 c 5 § 3; 2003 1st sp.s. c 23 § 2. Prior: 2003 c 265 § 3; 2003 c 153 § 6; 1998 c 7 § 2; 1994 c 154 § 115.]

Reviser’s note: *(1) [RCW 43.330.090](#) was amended by 2007 c 228 § 201, deleting subsection (2) which directly related to “expansion of tourism.”

(2) This section was amended by 2015 c 45 § 2 and by 2015 3rd sp.s. c 20 § 7, each without reference to the other. Both amendments are incorporated in the publication of this section under [RCW 1.12.025\(2\)](#). For rule of construction, see [RCW 1.12.025\(1\)](#).

Notes: Finding—Intent—Short title—2015 3rd sp.s. c 20: See RCW 28B.156.005 and 28B.156.900.

Effective date—2011 c 60: See RCW 42.17A.919.

Findings—2006 c 5: “The legislature finds that due to the massive devastation inflicted on the city of New Orleans by hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, the city of New Orleans will not be able to meet its obligation to host the national lieutenant governors’ association’s annual conference scheduled for July 17 through July 19, 2006. As

a result of this unfortunate situation, the members of the national lieutenant governors' association officially pressed to have Washington state host the next annual conference in Seattle, Washington, and lieutenant governor Brad Owen has agreed to do so. The legislature further finds, in recognition of the unprecedented situation created by this natural disaster, the high national visibility of this important event, and due to the limited amount of time remaining for planning and fund-raising, it is necessary to initiate fund-raising activities for this national conference as soon as possible." [2006 c 5 § 1.]

Effective date—2006 c 5: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [February 7, 2006]." [2006 c 5 § 4.]

Findings—2003 c 153: See note following [RCW 43.330.090](#).

RCW 42.52.160

Use of persons, money, or property for private gain.

1. No state officer or state employee may employ or use any person, money, or property under the officer's or employee's official control or direction, or in his or her official custody, for the private benefit or gain of the officer, employee, or another.
2. This section does not prohibit the use of public resources to benefit others as part of a state officer's or state employee's official duties. It is not a violation of this section for a legislator or an appropriate legislative staff designee to engage in activities listed under [RCW 42.52.070\(2\)](#).
3. This section does not prohibit de minimis use of state facilities to provide employees with information about (a) medical, surgical, and hospital care; (b) life insurance or accident and health disability insurance; or (c) individual retirement accounts, by any person, firm, or corporation administering such program as part of authorized payroll deductions pursuant to [RCW 41.04.020](#).
4. The appropriate ethics boards may adopt rules providing exceptions to this section for occasional use of the state officer or state employee, of de minimis cost and value, if the activity does not result in interference with the proper performance of public duties.

[2014 c 28 § 1; 1996 c 213 § 7; 1994 c 154 § 116; 1987 c 426 § 3. Formerly RCW 42.18.217.]

RCW 42.52.170

Giving, paying, loaning, etc., any thing of economic value to state employee.

No person shall give, pay, loan, transfer, or deliver, directly or indirectly, to any other person any thing of economic value believing or having reason to believe that there exist circumstances making the receipt thereof a violation of [RCW 42.52.040](#), [42.52.110](#), [42.52.120](#), [42.52.140](#), or [42.52.150](#).

[1994 c 154 § 117; 1987 c 426 § 5; 1969 ex.s. c 234 § 23. Formerly RCW 42.18.230.]

RCW 42.52.180

Use of public resources for political campaigns.

1. No state officer or state employee may use or authorize the use of facilities of an agency, directly or indirectly, for the purpose of assisting a campaign for election of a person to an office or for the promotion of or opposition to a ballot proposition. Knowing acquiescence by a person with authority to direct, control, or influence the actions of the state officer or state employee using public resources in violation of this section constitutes a violation of this section. Facilities of an agency include, but are not limited to, use of stationery, postage, machines, and equipment, use of state employees of the agency during working hours, vehicles, office space, publications of the agency, and clientele lists of persons served by the agency.

2. This section shall not apply to the following activities:

- (a) Action taken at an open public meeting by members of an elected legislative body to express a collective decision, or to actually vote upon a motion, proposal, resolution, order, or ordinance, or to support or oppose a ballot proposition as long as (i) required notice of the meeting includes the title and number of the ballot proposition, and (ii) members of the legislative body or members of the public are afforded an approximately equal opportunity for the expression of an opposing view;
- (b) A statement by an elected official in support of or in opposition to any ballot proposition at an open press conference or in response to a specific inquiry. For the purposes of this subsection, it is not a violation of this section for an elected official to respond to an inquiry regarding a ballot proposition, to make incidental remarks concerning a ballot proposition in an official communication, or otherwise comment on a ballot proposition without an actual, measurable expenditure of public funds. The ethics boards shall adopt by rule a definition of measurable expenditure;
- (c)
 - i. The maintenance of official legislative web sites throughout the year, regardless of pending elections. The web sites may contain any discretionary material which was also specifically prepared for the legislator in the course of his or her duties as a legislator, including newsletters and press releases.
 - ii. The official legislative web sites of legislators seeking reelection or election to any office shall not be altered, other than during a special legislative session, beginning on the first day of the declaration of candidacy filing period specified in [RCW 29A.24.050](#) through the date of certification of the general election of the election year. As used in this subsection, "legislator" means a legislator who is a "candidate," as defined in [RCW 42.17A.005](#), for any public office. "Legislator" does not include a member of the legislature who has announced their retirement from elected public office and who does not file a declaration of candidacy by the end of the candidacy filing period specified in [RCW 29A.24.050](#).
 - iii. The web site shall not be used for campaign purposes;
- (d) Activities that are part of the normal and regular conduct of the office or agency, which include but are not limited to:
 - i. Communications by a legislator or appropriate legislative staff designee directly pertaining to any legislative proposal which has been introduced in either chamber of the legislature; and
 - ii. Posting, by a legislator or appropriate legislative staff designee, information to a legislator's official legislative website including an official legislative social media account, about:
 - A. Emergencies;
 - B. Federal holidays, state and legislatively recognized holidays established under RCW 1.16.050, and religious holidays;
 - C. Information originally provided or published by other government entities which provide information about government resources; and
 - D. Achievements, honors or awards of extraordinary distinction; and
 - E. De minimis use of public facilities by statewide elected officials and legislators incidental to the preparation or delivery of permissible communications, including

written and verbal communications initiated by them of their views on ballot propositions that foreseeably may affect a matter that falls within their constitutional or statutory responsibilities.

3. As to state officers and employees, this section operates to the exclusion of [RCW 42.17A.555](#).
4. As used in this section, “official legislative website” includes but is not limited to, a legislator’s official legislative social media accounts.

[2017 c 7 § 2; 2011 c 60 § 30; 2010 c 185 § 1; 1995 c 397 § 30; 1994 c 154 § 118.]

Notes: Finding—Intent—2017 c 7: “The legislature finds that the prohibition on the use of public resources for campaign purposes serves an important purpose, but that the period prohibiting state legislators from communicating with constituents at public expense is unnecessary once the election, and the campaign itself, has ended. Furthermore, the delay in constituent outreach after the election only hinders a legislator’s ability to quickly and effectively respond to requests and keep the public informed about current state issues, and the various deadlines relating to mailed, emailed, and web site communications are confusing and need to be harmonized. For these reasons, the legislature intends to change mailed, emailed, and web site communication deadlines to the same time periods, in order to allow legislators to actively engage with the public on official legislative business in a timely and effective manner.”

[2017 c 7 § 1.]

Effective date — 2017 c 7: “This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [March 31, 2017].” [2017 c 7 § 4.]
Effective date — 2011 c 60: See [RCW 42.17A.919](#).

Effective date — Captions—1995 c 397: See [RCW 42.17A.910](#) and [42.17A.911](#).

RCW 42.52.185

Restrictions on mailings by legislators.

1. During the period beginning on the first day of the declaration of candidacy filing period specified in [RCW 29A.24.050](#) in the year of a general election for a state legislator’s election to office and continuing through the date of certification of the general election, the legislator may not mail, either by regular mail or email, to a constituent at public expense a letter, newsletter, brochure, or other piece of literature, except for routine legislative correspondence, such as scheduling, and the legislator may, by mail or email send an individual letter to (a) an individual constituent who has contacted the legislator regarding the subject matter of the letter during the legislator’s current term of office; (b) an individual constituent who holds a governmental office with jurisdiction over the subject matter of the letter; or (c) an individual constituent who has received an award or honor of extraordinary distinction of a type that is sufficiently infrequent to be noteworthy to a reasonable person, including, but not limited to: (i) An international or national award such as the Nobel prize or the Pulitzer prize; (ii) a state award such as Washington scholar; (iii) an Eagle Scout award; and (iv) a Medal of Honor.
2. A violation of this section constitutes use of the facilities of a public office for the purpose of assisting a campaign under [RCW 42.52.180](#).
3. The house of representatives and senate shall specifically limit expenditures per member for the total cost of mailings. Those costs include, but are not limited to, production costs, printing costs, and postage costs. The limits imposed under this subsection apply only to the total expenditures on mailings per member and not to any categorical cost within the total.

4. For purposes of this section:

- (a) “Legislator” means a legislator who is a “candidate,” as defined in [RCW 42.17A.005](#), for any public office. “Legislator” does not include a member of the legislature who has announced their retirement from elected public
- (b) Persons residing outside the legislative district represented by the legislator are not considered to be constituents, but students, military personnel, or others temporarily employed outside of the district who normally reside in the district are considered to be constituents.

[2017 c 7 § 3; 2011 c 60 § 31; 2008 c 39 § 2; 1997 c 320 § 1; 1995 c 397 § 5; 1993 c 2 § 25 (Initiative Measure No. 134, approved November 3, 1992). Formerly RCW 42.17.132.]

Notes: Finding—Intent—Effective date—2017 c 7: See notes following [RCW 42.52.180](#).

Effective date—2011 c 60: See [RCW 42.17A.919](#). Findings—Intent—2008 c 39: “The legislature finds that the legislature’s ability to communicate with its constituency is of the utmost importance in having a healthy representative democracy. It is the intent of the legislature to provide important information to constituents on an ongoing basis in order to truly be a government of the people and for the people. The legislature finds that this communication will only increase citizen access to legislative issues.” [2008 c 39 § 1.]

RCA 42.52.187

Letters of recommendation or congratulations by legislators.

It is not a violation of this chapter for a legislator to send by mail or email:

1. A letter of recommendation on behalf of an individual constituent if the constituent has requested the letter;
2. A congratulatory letter to an individual constituent who has received an award or honor of extraordinary distinction of a type that is sufficiently infrequent to be noteworthy to a reasonable person including, but not limited to: (a) An international or national award such as the Nobel prize or the Pulitzer prize; (b) a state award such as Washington scholar; (c) an Eagle Scout award; or (d) a Medal of Honor; or
3. Except when under a mailing restriction as provided in [RCW 42.52.185](#), a congratulatory letter to an individual constituent who has received an honor or award if the individual or a third party on the individual’s behalf has requested the letter.

[2023 c 226 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.190

Investments.

1. Except for permissible investments as defined in this section, no state officer or state employee of any agency responsible for the investment of funds, who acts in a decision-making, advisory, or policy-influencing capacity with respect to investments, may have a direct or indirect interest in any property, security, equity, or debt instrument of a person, without prior written approval of the agency.
2. Agencies responsible for the investment of funds shall adopt policies governing approval of investments and establishing criteria to be considered in the approval process. Criteria shall include the relationship between the proposed investment and investments held or under consideration by the state, the size and timing of the proposed investment, access by the state officer or state employee to nonpublic information relative to the proposed investment, and the availability of the investment in the public market. Agencies responsible for the investment of funds also shall adopt policies consistent with this chapter governing use by their officers and employees of financial information acquired by virtue of their state

positions. A violation of such policies adopted to implement this subsection shall constitute a violation of this chapter.

3. As used in this section, “permissible investments” means any mutual fund, deposit account, certificate of deposit, or money market fund maintained with a bank, broker, or other financial institution, a security publicly traded in an organized market if the interest in the security at acquisition is ten thousand dollars or less, or an interest in real estate, except if the real estate interest is in or with a party in whom the agency holds an investment.

[1994 c 154 § 119.]

RCW 42.52.200

Agency rules.

1. Each agency may adopt rules consistent with law, for use within the agency to protect against violations of this chapter.
2. Each agency proposing to adopt rules under this section shall forward the rules to the appropriate ethics board before they may take effect. The board may submit comments to the agency regarding the proposed rules.
3. This section applies to universities only to the extent their activities are not subject to [RCW 42.52.220](#).

[2005 c 106 § 3; 1994 c 154 § 120.]

42.52.220

Universities — Administrative processes.

1. Consistent with the state policy to encourage basic and applied scientific research by the state’s research universities as stated in [RCW 28B.140.005](#), each university may develop, adopt, and implement one or more written administrative processes that shall, upon approval by the governor, apply in place of the obligations imposed on universities and university research employees under [RCW 42.52.030](#), [42.52.040](#), [42.52.080](#), [42.52.110](#), [42.52.120](#), [42.52.130](#), [42.52.140](#), [42.52.150](#), and [42.52.160](#). The universities shall coordinate on the development of administrative processes to ensure the processes are comparable. A university research employee in compliance with the processes authorized in this section shall be deemed to be in compliance with [RCW 42.52.030](#), [42.52.040](#), [42.52.080](#), [42.52.110](#), [42.52.120](#), [42.52.130](#), [42.52.140](#), [42.52.150](#), and [42.52.160](#).
2. The executive ethics board shall enforce activity subject to the written approval processes under this section, as provided in [RCW 42.52.360](#).

[2005 c 106 § 4.]

RCW 42.52.310

Legislative ethics board.

1. The legislative ethics board is created, composed of nine members, selected as follows:
 - (a) Two senators, one from each of the two largest caucuses, appointed by the president of the senate;
 - (b) Two members of the house of representatives, one from each of the two largest caucuses, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;
 - (c) Five citizen members:
 - (d) One citizen member chosen by the governor from a list of three individuals submitted by each of the four legislative caucuses; and
 - (e) One citizen member selected by three of the four other citizen members of the legislative ethics board.
2. Except for initial members and members completing partial terms, non-legislative members shall serve a single five-year term.
3. No more than three of the public members may be identified with the same political party.

4. Terms of initial non-legislative board members shall be staggered as follows: One member shall be appointed to a one-year term; one member shall be appointed to a two-year term; one member shall be appointed to a three-year term; one member shall be appointed to a four-year term; and one member shall be appointed for a five-year term.
5. A vacancy on the board shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.
6. Legislative members shall serve two-year terms, from January 31st of an odd-numbered year until January 31st of the next odd-numbered year.
7. Each member shall serve for the term of his or her appointment and until his or her successor is appointed.
8. The citizen members shall annually select a chair from among themselves.

[1994 c 154 § 201.]

RCW 42.52.320

Authority of legislative ethics board.

1. The legislative ethics board shall enforce this chapter and rules adopted under it with respect to members and employees of the legislature.
2. The legislative ethics board shall:
 - (a) Develop educational materials and training with regard to legislative ethics for legislators and legislative employees;
 - (b) Issue advisory opinions;
 - (c) Adopt rules or policies governing the conduct of business by the board, and adopt rules defining working hours for purposes of [RCW 42.52.180](#) and where otherwise authorized under chapter 154, Laws of 1994;
 - (d) Investigate, hear, and determine complaints by any person or on its own motion;
 - (e) Impose sanctions including reprimands and monetary penalties;
 - (f) Recommend suspension or removal to the appropriate legislative entity, or recommend prosecution to the appropriate authority; and
 - (g) Establish criteria regarding the levels of civil penalties appropriate for different types of violations of this chapter and rules adopted under it.
3. The board may:
 - (a) Issue subpoenas for the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of documentary evidence relating to any matter under examination by the board or involved in any hearing;
 - (b) Administer oaths and affirmations;
 - (c) Examine witnesses; and
 - (d) Receive evidence.
4. Subject to [RCW 42.52.540](#), the board has jurisdiction over any alleged violation that occurred before January 1, 1995, and that was within the jurisdiction of any of the boards established under *chapter [44.60 RCW](#). The board’s jurisdiction with respect to any such alleged violation shall be based on the statutes and rules in effect at [the] time of the violation.

[1994 c 154 § 202.]

Notes: *Reviser’s note: Chapter [44.60 RCW](#) was repealed by 1994 c 154 § 304, effective January 1, 1995.

RCW 42.52.330

Interpretation.

By constitutional design, the legislature consists of citizen-legislators who bring to bear on the legislative process their individual experience and expertise. The provisions of this chapter shall be interpreted in light of this constitutional principle.

[1994 c 154 § 203.]

RCW 42.52.340

Transfer of jurisdiction.

On January 1, 1995, any complaints or other matters under investigation or consideration by the boards of legislative ethics in the house of representatives and the senate operating pursuant to *chapter 44.60 RCW shall be transferred to the legislative ethics board created by [RCW 42.52.310](#). All files, including but not limited to minutes of meetings, investigative files, records of proceedings, exhibits, and expense records, shall be transferred to the legislative ethics board created in [RCW 42.52.310](#) pursuant to their direction and the legislative ethics board created in [RCW 42.52.310](#) shall assume full jurisdiction over all pending complaints, investigations, and proceedings.

[1994 c 154 § 204.]

Notes: *Reviser's note: Chapter 44.60 RCW was repealed by 1994 c 154 § 304, effective January 1, 1995.

RCW 42.52.350

Executive ethics board.

1. The executive ethics board is created, composed of five members, appointed by the governor as follows:
 - (a) One member shall be a classified service employee as defined in chapter [41.06 RCW](#);
 - (b) One member shall be a state officer or state employee in an exempt position;
 - (c) One member shall be a citizen selected from a list of three names submitted by the attorney general;
 - (d) One member shall be a citizen selected from a list of three names submitted by the state auditor; and
 - (e) One member shall be a citizen selected at large by the governor.
2. Except for initial members and members completing partial terms, members shall serve a single five-year term.
3. No more than three members may be identified with the same political party.
4. Terms of initial board members shall be staggered as follows: One member shall be appointed to a one-year term; one member shall be appointed to a two-year term; one member shall be appointed to a three-year term; one member shall be appointed to a four-year term; and one member shall be appointed to a five-year term.
5. A vacancy on the board shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.
6. Each member shall serve for the term of his or her appointment and until his or her successor is appointed.
7. The members shall annually select a chair from among themselves.
8. Staff shall be provided by the office of the attorney general.
[1994 c 154 § 205.]

RCW 42.52.360

Authority of executive ethics board.

1. The executive ethics board shall enforce this chapter and rules adopted under it with respect to statewide elected officers

and all other officers and employees in the executive branch, boards and commissions, and institutions of higher education.

2. The executive ethics board shall enforce this chapter with regard to the activities of university research employees as provided in this subsection.
 - (a) With respect to compliance with [RCW 42.52.030](#), [42.52.110](#), [42.52.130](#), [42.52.140](#), and [42.52.150](#), the administrative process shall be consistent with and adhere to no less than the current standards in regulations of the United States public health service and the office of the secretary of the department of health and human services in Title 42 C.F.R. Part 50, Subpart F relating to promotion of objectivity in research.
 - (b) With respect to compliance with [RCW 42.52.040](#), [42.52.080](#), and [42.52.120](#), the administrative process shall include a comprehensive system for the disclosure, review, and approval of outside work activities by university research employees while assuring that such employees are fulfilling their employment obligations to the university.
 - (c) With respect to compliance with [RCW 42.52.160](#), the administrative process shall include a reasonable determination by the university of acceptable private uses having de minimis costs to the university and a method for establishing fair and reasonable reimbursement charges for private uses the costs of which are in excess of de minimis.
3. The executive ethics board shall:
 - (a) Develop educational materials and training;
 - (b) Adopt rules and policies governing the conduct of business by the board, and adopt rules defining working hours for purposes of [RCW 42.52.180](#) and where otherwise authorized under chapter 154, Laws of 1994;
 - (c) Issue advisory opinions;
 - (d) Investigate, hear, and determine complaints by any person or on its own motion;
 - (e) Impose sanctions including reprimands and monetary penalties;
 - (f) Recommend to the appropriate authorities suspension, removal from position, prosecution, or other appropriate remedy; and
 - (g) Establish criteria regarding the levels of civil penalties appropriate for violations of this chapter and rules adopted under it.
4. The board may:
 - (a) Issue subpoenas for the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of documentary evidence relating to any matter under examination by the board or involved in any hearing;
 - (b) Administer oaths and affirmations;
 - (c) Examine witnesses; and
 - (d) Receive evidence.
5. The board shall not delegate to the board's executive director its authority to issue advisories, advisory letters, or opinions.
6. Except as provided in [RCW 42.52.220](#), the executive ethics board may review and approve agency policies as provided for in this chapter.
7. This section does not apply to state officers and state employees of the judicial branch.

[2013 c 190 § 3; 2005 c 106 § 5; 1994 c 154 § 206.]

Notes: Finding — 2013 c 190: See note following [RCW 42.52.410](#).

RCW 42.52.365

Executive branch agencies —

Ethics advisors — Ethics training.

1. Each executive branch agency shall designate an ethics advisor or advisors to assist the agency's employees in understanding their obligations under the ethics in public service act. Agencies shall inform the executive ethics board of their designated advisors. As funding permits and as determined by the executive ethics board and the agency head, the advisors shall receive regular ethics training.
2. Executive branch officers and employees are encouraged to attend ethics training offered by the executive ethics board at least once every thirty-six months.

[2013 c 190 § 6.]

Notes: Finding — 2013 c 190: See note following [RCW 42.52.410](#)

RCW 42.52.370

Authority of commission on judicial conduct.

The commission on judicial conduct shall enforce this chapter and rules adopted under it with respect to state officers and employees of the judicial branch and may do so according to procedures prescribed in Article IV, section 31 of the state Constitution. In addition to the sanctions authorized in Article IV, section 31 of the state Constitution, the commission may impose sanctions authorized by this chapter.

[1994 c 154 § 207.]

RCW 42.52.380

Political activities of board members.

1. No member of the executive ethics board may (a) hold or campaign for partisan elective office other than the position of precinct committeeperson, or any full-time nonpartisan office; (b) be an officer of any political party or political committee as defined in chapter [42.17A RCW](#) other than the position of precinct committeeperson; (c) permit his or her name to be used, or make contributions, in support of or in opposition to any state candidate or state ballot measure; or (d) lobby or control, direct, or assist a lobbyist except that such member may appear before any committee of the legislature on matters pertaining to this chapter.
2. No citizen member of the legislative ethics board may (a) hold or campaign for partisan elective office other than the position of precinct committeeperson, or any full-time nonpartisan office; (b) be an officer of any political party or political committee as defined in chapter [42.17A RCW](#), other than the position of precinct committeeperson; (c) permit his or her name to be used, or make contributions, in support of or in opposition to any legislative candidate, any legislative caucus campaign committee that supports or opposes legislative candidates, or any political action committee that supports or opposes legislative candidates; or (d) engage in lobbying in the legislative branch under circumstances not exempt, under [RCW 42.17A.610](#), from lobbyist registration and reporting.
3. No citizen member of the legislative ethics board may hold or campaign for a seat in the state house of representatives or the state senate within two years of serving on the board if the citizen member opposes an incumbent who has been the respondent in a complaint before the board.

[2011 c 60 § 32; 1997 c 11 § 1; 1994 c 154 § 208.]

Notes: Effective date — 2011 c 60: See [RCW 42.17A.919](#).

RCW 42.52.390

Hearing and subpoena authority.

Except as otherwise provided by law, the ethics boards may hold hearings, subpoena witnesses, compel their attendance, administer oaths, take the testimony of a person under oath, and

in connection therewith, to require the production for examination of any books or papers relating to any matter under investigation or in question before the ethics board. The ethics board may make rules as to the issuance of subpoenas by individual members, as to service of complaints, decisions, orders, recommendations, and other process or papers of the ethics board.

[1994 c 154 § 209.]

RCW 42.52.400

Enforcement of subpoena authority.

In case of refusal to obey a subpoena issued to a person, the superior court of a county within the jurisdiction of which the investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this chapter is carried on or within the jurisdiction of which the person refusing to obey is found or resides or transacts business, upon application by the appropriate ethics board shall have jurisdiction to issue to the person an order requiring the person to appear before the ethics board or its member to produce evidence if so ordered, or to give testimony touching the matter under investigation or in question. Failure to obey such order of the court may be punished by the court as contempt.

[1994 c 154 § 210.]

RCW 42.52.410

Filing complaint — Whistleblower protection —

Penalty for reprisal or retaliation.

1. A person may, personally or by his or her attorney, make, sign, and file with the appropriate ethics board a complaint on a form provided by the appropriate ethics board. The complaint shall state the name of the person alleged to have violated this chapter or rules adopted under it and the particulars thereof, and contain such other information as may be required by the appropriate ethics board.
2. If it has reason to believe that any person has been engaged or is engaging in a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it, an ethics board may issue a complaint.
3. (a) A state employee who files a complaint with the appropriate ethics board shall be afforded the protection afforded to a whistleblower under [RCW 42.40.050](#) and [49.60.210\(2\)](#), subject to the limitations of [RCW 42.40.035](#) and [42.40.910](#). An agency, manager, or supervisor may not retaliate against a state employee who, after making a reasonable attempt to ascertain the correctness of the information furnished, files a complaint with the appropriate ethics board.
(b) A state employee may not be denied the protections in chapter [42.40 RCW](#) even if the ethics board denies an investigation of the complaint.
4. If a determination is made that a reprisal or retaliatory action has been taken against the state employee, the retaliator may be subject to a civil penalty of up to five thousand dollars.

[2013 c 190 § 2; 1994 c 154 § 211.]

Notes: Finding — 2013 c 190: "The legislature finds that ensuring public trust in government is a priority. The public expects its elected officials and state employees to adhere to the highest ethical standards during their service, and this includes a commitment to full and independent investigations, with proper penalties, in cases where the ethics in public service act is violated." [2013 c 190 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.420

Investigation.

1. After the filing of any complaint, except as provided in [RCW 42.52.450](#), the staff of the appropriate ethics board shall investigate the complaint. The ethics board may request the assistance of the office of the attorney general or a contract investigator in conducting its investigation.

2. The results of the investigation shall be reduced to writing and the staff shall either make a determination that the complaint should be dismissed pursuant to [RCW 42.52.425](#), or recommend to the board that there is or that there is not reasonable cause to believe that a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it has been or is being committed.
3. The board's determination on reasonable cause shall be provided to the complainant and to the person named in such complaint.
4. The identity of a person filing a complaint under [RCW 42.52.410\(1\)](#) is exempt from public disclosure, as provided in [RCW 42.56.240](#).

[2013 c 190 § 4; 2000 c 211 § 1; 1994 c 154 § 212.]

Notes: Finding — 2013 c 190: See note following [RCW 42.52.410](#).

RCW 42.52.425

Dismissal of complaint.

1. Based on the investigation conducted under [RCW 42.52.420](#) or [42.52.450](#), and subject to rules issued by each board, the board or the staff of the appropriate ethics board may issue an order of dismissal based on any of the following findings:
 - (a) Any violation that may have occurred is not within the jurisdiction of the board;
 - (b) The complaint is obviously unfounded or frivolous; or
 - (c) Any violation that may have occurred does not constitute a material violation because it was inadvertent and minor, or has been cured, and, after consideration of all of the circumstances, further proceedings would not serve the purposes of this chapter.
2. Written notice of the determination under subsection (1) of this section shall be provided to the complainant, respondent, and the board. The written notice to the complainant shall include a statement of the complainant's right to appeal to the board under subsection (3) of this section if the dismissal order was issued by staff.
3. In the event that a complaint is dismissed by staff under this section, the complainant may request that the board review the action. Following review, the board shall:
 - (a) Affirm the staff dismissal;
 - (b) Direct the staff to conduct further investigation; or
 - (c) Issue a determination that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation has been or is being committed.
4. The board's decision under subsection (3) of this section shall be reduced to writing and provided to the complainant and the respondent.

[2005 c 116 § 1; 2000 c 211 § 2.]

RCW 42.52.430

Public hearing — Findings.

1. If the ethics board determines there is reasonable cause under [RCW 42.52.420](#) that a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it occurred, a public hearing on the merits of the complaint shall be held.
2. The ethics board shall designate the location of the hearing. The case in support of the complaint shall be presented at the hearing by staff of the ethics board.
3. The respondent shall file a written answer to the complaint and appear at the hearing in person or otherwise, with or without counsel, and submit testimony and be fully heard. The respondent has the right to cross-examine witnesses.
4. Testimony taken at the hearing shall be under oath and recorded.
5. If, based upon a preponderance of the evidence, the ethics board finds that the respondent has violated this chapter or rules

adopted under it, the board shall file an order stating findings of fact and enforcement action as authorized under this chapter.

6. If, upon all the evidence, the ethics board finds that the respondent has not engaged in an alleged violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it, the ethics board shall state findings of fact and shall similarly issue and file an order dismissing the complaint.
7. If the board makes a determination that there is not reasonable cause to believe that a violation has been or is being committed or has made a finding under subsection (6) of this section, the attorney general shall represent the officer or employee in any action subsequently commenced based on the alleged facts in the complaint.

[1994 c 154 § 213.]

RCW 42.52.440

Review of order.

Except as otherwise provided by law, reconsideration or judicial review of an ethics board's order that a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it has occurred shall be governed by the provisions of chapter [34.05 RCW](#) applicable to review of adjudicative proceedings.

[1994 c 154 § 214.]

RCW 42.52.450

Complaint against legislator or statewide elected official.

1. If a complaint alleges a violation of [RCW 42.52.180](#) by a legislator or statewide elected official other than the attorney general, the attorney general shall, if requested by the appropriate ethics board, conduct the investigation under [RCW 42.52.420](#) and recommend action.
2. If a complaint alleges a violation of [RCW 42.52.180](#) by the attorney general, the state auditor shall conduct the investigation under [RCW 42.52.420](#) and recommend action to the appropriate ethics board.

[2005 c 116 § 2; 1994 c 154 § 215.]

RCW 42.52.460

Citizen actions.

Any person who has notified the appropriate ethics board and the attorney general in writing that there is reason to believe that [RCW 42.52.180](#) is being or has been violated may, in the name of the state, bring a citizen action for any of the actions authorized under this chapter. A citizen action may be brought only if the appropriate ethics board or the attorney general have failed to commence an action under this chapter within forty-five days after notice from the person, the person has thereafter notified the appropriate ethics board and the attorney general that the person will commence a citizen's action within ten days upon their failure to commence an action, and the appropriate ethics board and the attorney general have in fact failed to bring an action within ten days of receipt of the second notice. An action is deemed to have been commenced when the appropriate ethics board or the board's executive director accepts a complaint for filing and initiates a preliminary investigation.

If the person who brings the citizen's action prevails, the judgment awarded shall escheat to the state, but the person shall be entitled to be reimbursed by the state of Washington for costs and attorneys' fees incurred. If a citizen's action that the court finds was brought without reasonable cause is dismissed, the court may order the person commencing the action to pay all costs of trial and reasonable attorneys' fees incurred by the defendant.

Upon commencement of a citizen action under this section, at the request of a state officer or state employee who is a defendant, the office of the attorney general shall represent the defendant if the

attorney general finds that the defendant's conduct complied with this chapter and was within the scope of employment.

[2013 c 190 § 5; 1994 c 154 § 216.]

Notes: Finding — 2013 c 190: See note following [RCW 42.52.410](#).

RCW 42.52.470

Referral for enforcement.

As appropriate, an ethics board may refer a complaint:

1. To an agency for initial investigation and proposed resolution which shall be referred back to the appropriate ethics board for action; or
2. To the attorney general's office or prosecutor for appropriate action.

[1994 c 154 § 217.]

RCW 42.52.480

Action by boards.

1. Except as otherwise provided by law, an ethics board may order payment of the following amounts if it finds a violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it after a hearing under [RCW 42.52.370](#) or other applicable law:
 - (a) Any damages sustained by the state that are caused by the conduct constituting the violation;
 - (b) From each such person, a civil penalty of up to five thousand dollars per violation or three times the economic value of any thing received or sought in violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it, whichever is greater; and
 - (c) Costs, including reasonable investigative costs, which shall be included as part of the limit under (b) of this subsection. The costs may not exceed the penalty imposed. The payment owed on the penalty shall be reduced by the amount of the costs paid.
2. Damages under this section may be enforced in the same manner as a judgment in a civil case.

[1994 c 154 § 218.]

RCW 42.52.490

Action by attorney general.

1. Upon a written determination by the attorney general that the action of an ethics board was clearly erroneous or if requested by an ethics board, the attorney general may bring a civil action in the superior court of the county in which the violation is alleged to have occurred against a state officer, state employee, former state officer, former state employee, or other person who has violated or knowingly assisted another person in violating any of the provisions of this chapter or the rules adopted under it. In such action the attorney general may recover the following amounts on behalf of the state of Washington:
 - (a) Any damages sustained by the state that are caused by the conduct constituting the violation;
 - (b) From each such person, a civil penalty of up to five thousand dollars per violation or three times the economic value of any thing received or sought in violation of this chapter or the rules adopted under it, whichever is greater; and
 - (c) Costs, including reasonable investigative costs, which shall be included as part of the limit under (b) of this subsection. The costs may not exceed the penalty imposed. The payment owed on the penalty shall be reduced by the amount of the costs paid.
2. In any civil action brought by the attorney general upon the basis that the attorney general has determined that the board's action was clearly erroneous, the court shall not proceed with the action unless the attorney general has first shown, and

the court has found, that the action of the board was clearly erroneous.

[1994 c 154 § 219.]

RCW 42.52.500

Optional hearings by administrative law judge.

If an ethics board finds that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation has occurred, the board shall consider the possibility of the alleged violator having to pay a total amount of penalty and costs of more than five hundred dollars. Based on such consideration, the board may give the person who is the subject of the complaint the option to have an administrative law judge conduct the hearing and rule on procedural and evidentiary matters. The board may also, on its own initiative, provide for retaining an administrative law judge. An ethics board may not require total payment of more than five hundred dollars in penalty and costs in any case where an administrative law judge is not used and the board did not give such option to the person who is the subject of the complaint.

[1994 c 154 § 220.]

RCW 42.52.510

Rescission of state action.

1. The attorney general may, on request of the governor or the appropriate agency, and in addition to other available rights of rescission, bring an action in the superior court of Thurston county to cancel or rescind state action taken by a state officer or state employee, without liability to the state of Washington, contractual or otherwise, if the governor or ethics board has reason to believe that: (a) A violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it has substantially influenced the state action, and (b) the interest of the state requires the cancellation or rescission. The governor may suspend state action pending the determination of the merits of the controversy under this section. The court may permit persons affected by the governor's actions to post an adequate bond pending such resolution to ensure compliance by the defendant with the final judgment, decree, or other order of the court.
2. This section does not limit other available remedies.

[1994 c 154 § 221.]

RCW 42.52.520

Disciplinary action.

1. A violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it is grounds for disciplinary action.
2. The procedures for any such action shall correspond to those applicable for disciplinary action for employee misconduct generally; for those state officers and state employees not specifically exempted in chapter [41.06 RCW](#), the rules set forth in chapter [41.06 RCW](#) shall apply. Any action against the state officer or state employee shall be subject to judicial review to the extent provided by law for disciplinary action for misconduct of state officers and state employees of the same category and grade.

[1994 c 154 § 222; 1969 ex.s. c 234 § 26. Formerly RCW 42.18.260.]

RCW 42.52.530

Additional investigative authority.

In addition to other authority under this chapter, the attorney general may investigate persons not under the jurisdiction of an ethics board whom the attorney general has reason to believe were involved in transactions in violation of this chapter or rules adopted under it.

[1994 c 154 § 223.]

RCW 42.52.540

Limitations period.

Any action taken under this chapter must be commenced within five years from the date of the violation. However, if it is shown that the violation was not discovered because of concealment by the person charged, then the action must be commenced within two years from the date the violation was discovered or reasonably should have been discovered: (1) By any person with direct or indirect supervisory responsibilities over the person who allegedly committed the violation; or (2) if no person has direct or indirect supervisory authority over the person who committed the violation, by the appropriate ethics board.

[1994 c 154 § 224.]

RCW 42.52.550

Compensation of ethics boards.

The citizen members of the legislative ethics board and the members of the executive ethics board shall be compensated as provided in [RCW 43.03.250](#) and reimbursed for travel expenses as provided in [RCW 43.03.050](#) and [43.03.060](#). Legislators members of the legislative ethics board shall be reimbursed as provided in [RCW 44.04.120](#).

[1994 c 154 § 227.]

RCW 42.52.560

Communications from an employee organization or charitable organization — Distribution by state employee.

1. Nothing in this chapter prohibits a state employee from distributing communications from an employee organization or charitable organization to other state employees if the communications do not support or oppose a ballot proposition or candidate for federal, state, or local public office. Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize any lobbying activity with public funds beyond the activity permitted by [RCW 42.17A.635](#).
2. "Employee organization," for purposes of this section, means any organization, union, or association in which employees participate and that exists for the purpose of collective bargaining with employers or for the purpose of opposing collective bargaining or certification of a union.

[2011 c 60 § 33; 2006 c 217 § 1.]

Notes: Effective date — 2011 c 60: See [RCW 42.17A.919](#).

RCW 42.52.570

Private business activity policy — Department of fish and wildlife — Parks and recreation commission.

1. The department of fish and wildlife and the parks and recreation commission may approve private business activity in state-owned housing provided under Title [77 RCW](#) or chapter [79A.05 RCW](#).
2. Prior to granting approval of private business activity in state-owned housing, the department of fish and wildlife and the parks and recreation commission must adopt a private business activity policy that is approved by the executive ethics board.
 - (a) The private business activity policy may only authorize private business activity by the resident state employee while the employee is off duty or the employee's spouse who is approved for residency in the agency housing or the employee's children.
 - (b) The private business activity policy may not allow private business activity that negatively impacts the agency's operations. For the purposes of this section, "negatively impacts" includes but is not limited to: (i) Negative impacts to visitors' services or access; (ii) in-person visits to state-

owned housing for the purpose of transacting business that negatively impacts agency operations; (iii) the incurrence of additional expenses by the state; (iv) the use of signage in the state-owned residence; (v) advertising on state-owned property; or (vi) an appearance of state endorsement of the private business activity.

3. The private business activity must comply with all other local, state, and federal laws.
4. All approvals of a private business activity in state-owned housing must be by the agency director or designee in writing.
5. A state employee is presumed not to be in violation of [RCW 42.52.070](#) or [42.52.160](#) if the employee or the employee's spouse or child complies with this section.

[2008 c 247 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.575

Information about scholarship opportunities.

This chapter does not prohibit the department of labor and industries from providing information about scholarship opportunities offered by nonprofit organizations and available to children and spouses of workers who suffered an injury in the course of employment resulting in death or permanent total disability. The department of labor and industries may, in its sole discretion, provide information about one or more scholarship opportunities. The cost of printing and inserting materials, any additional mailing costs, and any other related costs must be borne by the scholarship organization.

[2013 c 134 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.800

Exemptions — Solicitation for state capitol historic furnishings and preservation and restoration of state legislative building.

1. When soliciting charitable gifts, grants, or donations solely for the limited purposes of [RCW 27.48.040](#), members of the capitol furnishings preservation committee are exempt from the laws of this chapter.
2. When soliciting charitable gifts, grants, or donations solely for the limited purposes of [RCW 27.48.050](#) or when assisting a nonprofit foundation established for the purposes of [RCW 27.48.050](#), state officers and state employees are exempt from the laws of this chapter.

[2002 c 167 § 3; 1999 c 343 § 4.]

Notes: Findings — Effective date — 2002 c 167: See notes following [RCW 27.48.050](#).

Findings — Purpose — 1999 c 343: See note following [RCW 27.48.040](#).

RCW 42.52.801

Exemption — Solicitation to promote tourism.

When soliciting charitable gifts, grants, or donations solely for the purposes of promoting the *expansion of tourism as provided for in [RCW 43.330.090](#), state officers and state employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in [RCW 42.52.140](#).

[2003 c 153 § 5.]

Notes: ***Reviser's note:** [RCW 43.330.090](#) was amended by 2007 c 228 § 201, deleting subsection (2) which directly related to "expansion of tourism."

Findings — 2003 c 153: See note following [RCW 43.330.090](#).

RCW 42.52.802

Exemption — Solicitation for Washington state legacy project, state library, and archives account.

This chapter does not prohibit the secretary of state or a designee from soliciting and accepting contributions to the Washington

state legacy project, state library, and archives account created in [RCW 43.07.380](#).

[2008 c 222 § 14; 2003 c 164 § 4.]

Notes: Purpose — 2008 c 222: See note following [RCW 44.04.320](#).

RCW 42.52.8021

Exemption — Solicitation for Washington state flag account.

This chapter does not prohibit the secretary of state or the secretary of state's designee from soliciting and accepting contributions to the Washington state flag account created in [RCW 43.07.388](#).

[2009 c 71 § 3.]

RCW 42.52.8022

Exemption — Informational or educational meetings regarding legislative issues.

This chapter does not prohibit state employees from attending informational or educational meetings regarding legislative issues with a legislator or other elected official. It is not a violation of this chapter to hold such meetings in public facilities, including state-owned or leased buildings. This section is not intended to allow the use of state facilities for a political campaign or for the promotion of or opposition to a ballot proposition.

[2011 c 63 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.8023

Exemption — Gina Grant Bull memorial legislative page scholarship account.

This chapter does not prohibit the secretary of the senate, the chief clerk of the house of representatives, or their designee from soliciting and accepting contributions to the Gina Grant Bull memorial legislative page scholarship account created in [RCW 44.04.380](#). Furthermore, this chapter does not prohibit any legislative member or legislative employee from soliciting gifts for the Gina Grant Bull memorial legislative page scholarship account.

[2017 c 322 § 4.]

RCW 42.52.8024

Exemption—Rosa Franklin legislative internship program scholarship.

This chapter does not prohibit the secretary of the senate, the chief clerk of the house of representatives, or their designee from soliciting and accepting contributions to the Rosa Franklin legislative internship program scholarship account created in [RCW 44.04.410](#). Furthermore, this chapter does not prohibit any legislative member or legislative employee from soliciting gifts for the Rosa Franklin legislative internship program scholarship account.

[2021 c 108 § 4.]

RCW 42.52.803

Exemption — Solicitation for legislative oral history account.

This chapter does not prohibit the secretary of the senate, the chief clerk of the house of representatives, or their designee from soliciting and accepting contributions to the legislative oral history account created in [RCW 44.04.345](#).

[2008 c 222 § 2.]

Notes: Purpose — 2008 c 222: See note following [RCW 44.04.320](#).

RCW 42.52.804

Exemption — Health profession board or commission — Professional opinions.

Members of a health profession board or commission as identified in [RCW 18.130.040\(2\)\(b\)](#) may express their professional opinions to an elected official about the work of the board or commission on which the member serves, even if those opinions differ from the department of health's official position. Such communication

shall be to inform the elected official and not to lobby in support or opposition to any initiative to the legislature.

[2008 c 134 § 15.]

Notes: Finding — Intent — Severability — 2008 c 134: See notes following [RCW 18.130.020](#).

RCW 42.52.805

Solicitation for charitable activities of executive branch state employees — Limitations — Definitions.

1. When soliciting gifts, grants, or donations solely to support the charitable activities of executive branch state employees conducted pursuant to [RCW 9.46.0209](#), the executive branch state officers and executive branch state employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in [RCW 42.52.140](#). However, the gifts, grants, or donations must only be solicited from state employees or businesses and organizations that have no business dealings with the soliciting employee's agency. For the purposes of this subsection, "business dealings" includes being subject to regulation by the agency, having a contractual relationship with the agency, and purchasing goods or services from the agency.
2. For purposes of this section, activities are deemed to be charitable if the activities are devoted to the purposes authorized under [RCW 9.46.0209](#) for charitable and nonprofit organizations listed in that section, or are in support of the activities of those charitable or nonprofit organizations.

[2007 c 452 § 2.]

RCW 42.52.806

Exemption—Solicitation for Billy Frank Jr. national statuary hall collection fund.

This chapter does not prohibit the members of the Billy Frank Jr. national statuary hall selection committee, members of the legislature, when outside the period in which solicitation of contributions is prohibited by [RCW 42.17A.560](#), or employees of the Washington state historical society from soliciting contributions for the purposes established in chapter 20, Laws of 2021, and for deposit into the Billy Frank Jr. national statuary hall collection fund created in [RCW 43.08.800](#).

[2023 c 387 § 4.]

RCW 42.52.810

Solicitation for the legislative international trade account — Report.

1. When soliciting charitable gifts, grants, or donations solely for the legislative international trade account created in *RCW 44.04.270, the president of the senate is presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in [RCW 42.52.140](#).
2. When soliciting charitable gifts, grants, or donations solely for the legislative international trade account created in *RCW 44.04.270, state officers and state employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in [RCW 42.52.140](#).
3. An annual report of the legislative international trade account activities, including a list of receipts and expenditures, shall be published by the president of the senate and submitted to the house of representatives and the senate and be a public record for the purposes of [RCW 42.56.070](#).

[2005 c 274 § 293; 2003 c 265 § 2.]

Notes: *Reviser's note: RCW 44.04.270 was recodified as [RCW 43.15.050](#) pursuant to 2006 c 317 § 5.

Part headings not law — Effective date — 2005 c 274: See RCW 42.56.901 and 42.56.902.

RCW 42.52.820**Solicitation for hosting national legislative association conference.**

When soliciting gifts, grants, or donations to host an official conference within the state of Washington of a national legislative association as approved by both the chief clerk and the secretary of the senate, designated legislative officials and designated legislative employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in this chapter. For the purposes of this section, any legislative association must include among its membership the Washington state legislature or individual legislators or legislative staff.

[2003 1st sp.s. c 23 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.821**Exemption—Solicitation to host conference of a national association.**

When soliciting gifts, grants, or donations to host an official conference within the state of Washington of a national association as approved by the state treasurer, the treasurer and designated employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions in this chapter.

[2015 c 45 § 1."2015 c 45 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.822**Exemption—Solicitation for regional or national legislative association conferences.**

1. When soliciting gifts, grants, or donations to a regional or national legislative association for an official conference held outside the state of Washington, legislators who serve as elected leaders of the association and designated legislative employees are presumed not to be in violation of the solicitation and receipt of gift provisions of this chapter.
2. For purposes of this section, any regional or national legislative association is any organization which:
 - (a) Exists for the purpose of supporting legislators in the execution of their official duties;
 - (b) Includes among its membership the Washington state legislature; and
 - (c) Is supported in part by the payment of annual dues by the Washington state legislature.

[2023 c 91 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.900**Legislative declaration.**

Government derives its powers from the people. Ethics in government are the foundation on which the structure of government rests. State officials and employees of government hold a public trust that obligates them, in a special way, to honesty and integrity in fulfilling the responsibilities to which they are elected and appointed. Paramount in that trust is the principle that public office, whether elected or appointed, may not be used for personal gain or private advantage.

The citizens of the state expect all state officials and employees to perform their public responsibilities in accordance with the highest ethical and moral standards and to conduct the business of the state only in a manner that advances the public's interest. State officials and employees are subject to the sanctions of law and scrutiny of the media; ultimately, however, they are accountable to the people and must consider this public accountability as a particular obligation of the public service. Only when affairs of government are conducted, at all levels, with openness as provided by law and an unswerving commitment to the public good does government work as it should.

The obligations of government rest equally on the state's citizenry. The effectiveness of government depends, fundamentally, on the

confidence citizens can have in the judgments and decisions of their elected representatives. Citizens, therefore, should honor and respect the principles and the spirit of representative democracy, recognizing that both elected and appointed officials, together with state employees, seek to carry out their public duties with professional skill and dedication to the public interest. Such service merits public recognition and support.

All who have the privilege of working for the people of Washington state can have but one aim: To give the highest public service to its citizens.

[1994 c 154 § 1.]

RCW 42.52.901**Liberal construction.**

This chapter shall be construed liberally to effectuate its purposes and policy and to supplement existing laws as may relate to the same subject.

[1994 c 154 § 301.]

RCW 42.52.903**Serving on board, committee, or commission not prevented.**

Nothing in this chapter shall be interpreted to prevent a member of a board, committee, advisory commission, or other body required or permitted by statute to be appointed from any identifiable group or interest, from serving on such body in accordance with the intent of the legislature in establishing such body.

[1969 ex.s. c 234 § 33. Formerly RCW 42.18.330.]

RCW 42.52.904**Effective date — 1994 c 154.**

Sections 101 through 121, 203, 204, 207 through 224, and 301 through 317 of this act shall take effect January 1, 1995.

[1994 c 154 § 319.]

RCW 42.52.906**Construction — Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships — 2009 c 521.**

For the purposes of this chapter, the terms spouse, marriage, marital, husband, wife, widow, widower, next of kin, and family shall be interpreted as applying equally to state registered domestic partnerships or individuals in state registered domestic partnerships as well as to marital relationships and married persons, and references to dissolution of marriage shall apply equally to state registered domestic partnerships that have been terminated, dissolved, or invalidated, to the extent that such interpretation does not conflict with federal law. Where necessary to implement chapter 521, Laws of 2009, gender-specific terms such as husband and wife used in any statute, rule, or other law shall be construed to be gender neutral, and applicable to individuals in state registered domestic partnerships.

[2009 c 521 § 105.]

BOARD RULES**Rule Number 1: Procedures****A. Meetings**

A quorum for transaction of board business shall consist of at least a majority of the members, which shall include not less than a majority of the citizen members.

B. Filing of Complaints

- (1) The board shall resolve complaints alleging violations of chapter [42.52 RCW](#) in accordance with these rules.
- (2) Complaints may be filed by any person, personally, or by his or her attorney, or the board.

- (3) The parties to the complaint are the respondent and the board. The Board reserves the right to permit an appeal to proceed in a situation in which the complainant has been directly affected by the actions of the respondent.
- (4) Although complaints need not be submitted on a prescribed form, the information submitted must include all information appearing on the form .
- (5) The complaint form or information alleging a violation may be sent via the USPS to board staff at the address located on the form or may be scanned and the scanned copy submitted via email to board staff at the email address located on the form. The online process for submitting complaints is the preferred method by which complaints are filed.
- (6) If the complainant is claiming whistleblower protection under [RCW 42.52.410](#), he or she must check the appropriate box on the complaint form. Upon receipt of a complaint in which the complainant is claiming whistleblower protection, board staff must determine whether the complainant qualifies for whistleblower protection. If whistleblower protection is appropriate, board staff must redact the complainant's name and any other identifying information before forwarding the complaint to the board members and the respondent.
- (7) If the complainant is not claiming whistleblower protection, or if board staff determines the complainant is not eligible for whistleblower protection, the unredacted complaint shall be forwarded to both the board members and the respondent.
- (8) Upon receipt, complaints shall be assigned a reference number. The board shall maintain and keep current for public inspection a status sheet which shall contain with respect to each complaint: Its reference number, the date received by the board, and its present status, including the date of any hearings scheduled. Unless the complainant qualifies for whistleblower protection, the name of the complainant and the person charged shall be entered on the status sheet following the determination of reasonable cause provided for in section F. of this rule.

C. Investigation of Complaints

- (1) On each complaint, the staff shall first conduct a jurisdiction investigation for the purpose of determining whether the board has personal and subject-matter jurisdiction. If the staff concludes that the complaint is within the jurisdiction of the board, the staff shall commence an investigation of the allegations. If the staff concludes that the complaint is not within such jurisdiction, the staff shall end the investigation and dismiss the complaint subject to section D. of this rule.
- (2) If the complaint alleges a violation of [RCW 42.52.180](#) by a legislator, the board may provide the complaint to the attorney general or to an external investigation firm for investigation of such allegation by the attorney general. For purpose of such investigation, the attorney general shall serve as the board's staff.
- (3) If the board counsel has a conflict in conducting an investigation of an alleged violation of the Act, the board may refer the complaint to an external investigation firm to complete the investigation.
- (4) The results of each investigation shall be reduced to writing and included in an investigative report which shall be provided to the board for the purpose of making a determination under section F. of this rule. If the board desires more information, it may require the staff to investigate further. The results of such additional investigation shall also be reduced to writing and included in an investigative report. The written investigation results, whether conducted by staff or an external firm, are confidential.

D. Staff Dismissal of Complaints

- (1) Subject to subsection (D)(2) of this rule, the staff may dismiss the complaint for the following reasons:
 - (a) The alleged violation is not within the personal or subject matter jurisdiction of the board;
 - (b) The complaint is unfounded or frivolous. For purposes of this section, "unfounded" means the facts as alleged are insufficient to find a violation; or
 - (c) The complaint presents a violation of chapter [42.52.RCW](#), but any violation that may have occurred does not constitute a material violation because it was inadvertent and minor, or has been cured, and after consideration of all the circumstances, further proceedings would not serve the purposes of chapter [42.52 RCW](#).
- (2) The staff shall provide notice by electronic mail to each board member of the staff's intent to dismiss the complaint. If any board member objects to the staff's dismissal within ten (10) calendar days after staff has sent the notice, the complaint will be deliberated at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the board.
- (3) If a timely objection to the staff's dismissal is not received from any board member within the 10 day period, a copy of the staff's order of dismissal will be provided to the complainant and the respondent along with a statement of the complainant's right to request review by the board of the staff's dismissal.

E. Review of Staff Dismissal Order

- (1) Staff must provide complainants with written notice of their right to request the board to review the staff's dismissal of the complaint.
- (2) If the complainant requests such a review, the request must be in writing and received by the board staff within 30 calendar days after the date upon which the order of dismissal is mailed to the complainant.
- (3) When a request for review is received, staff will prepare a record for board review and notify the respondent that a review has been requested. The record will consist of the following items:
 - (a) The complaint;
 - (b) The investigation report;
 - (c) The order of dismissal;
 - (d) The complainant's request for review;
 - (e) Staff's response to the request for review; and
 - (f) Any additional material requested by the board chair or the chair's designee.
- (4) At the next available opportunity, the board will review the record and deliberate in closed session, without oral argument, and act upon the review request by:
 - (a) Affirming the dismissal;
 - (b) Directing the staff to conduct further investigation; or
 - (c) Issuing a determination that there is reasonable cause to believe that a violation has been or is being committed.
- (4) In reviewing the staff's order of dismissal, the board will decide the matter de novo.
- (5) The board's decision will be in writing, provided to the complainant and respondent and published on the legislative ethics board website.

F. Determination of Reasonable Cause

- (1) The board shall review the investigative report and shall determine whether the complaint is within its jurisdiction and, if so, whether there is reasonable cause to believe that a

violation has occurred. The Board's review of the investigative report as well as the determination of reasonable cause shall be made during executive session.

- (2) If the board determines that the complaint is not within its jurisdiction or that there is not such reasonable cause, it shall issue an order dismissing the complaint, and shall notify the complainant, the respondent, the news media and others who have requested notice of the board's actions with a copy of the published opinion.
- (3) If the board determines that the complaint is within its jurisdiction and that there is such reasonable cause, the board shall conduct or provide for conducting a public hearing on the complaint.

G. Stipulation and Settlement

- (1) Any matter before the board may be settled by stipulation after completion of the investigative report. Settlement of a matter shall be concluded by a stipulation of facts, conclusions and penalty.
- (2) After the board determines there is reasonable cause to believe a violation of the Ethics Act has occurred, the board staff shall prepare an opinion for the board and include as part of the opinion a stipulation.
- (3) The opinion which shall include the stipulation shall be provided to the respondent for signature.
- (4) Board staff shall provide respondent with an electronic copy of the stipulation by email as well as with a hard copy of the stipulation by USPS mail.
- (5) After the respondent receives the stipulation, he or she has 30 calendar days from the date the stipulation is sent within which to sign and return the stipulation to the board. A scanned signature on the stipulation is acceptable. The 30-day period shall start from the date the electronic or hard copy is sent, whichever occurs first. If the signed stipulation has not been received by the board within the 30-day period, the stipulation shall be withdrawn.
- (6) Once signed, the stipulation shall become part of the public record.

H. Notice of Hearing and Respondent's Answer

- (1) The board shall provide notice of the public hearing to the board's determination of reasonable cause, the respondent, and news media and others who have requested notice of the board's actions.
- (2) The notice shall include the board's determination of reasonable cause, as well as the date, time and place for the hearing. The notice shall provide that the respondent shall be entitled to appear in person or otherwise, with or without counsel, submit testimony, be fully heard, and cross-examine witnesses.
- (3) The board shall determine whether the hearing is to be conducted by an administrative law judge.
- (4) The respondent shall be notified of the date of the hearing no later than forty-five days before the hearing date. At the request of the respondent, the board or the administrative law judge may move the hearing to an earlier date.
- (5) The respondent shall file a written answer to the complaint not later than thirty days after service of the notice of hearing. The board or the administrative law judge may extend the time for an answer, on a showing of good cause. Absent a showing of good cause, failure to file a written answer shall be deemed an admission to the facts alleged in the complaint and the board may enter a default judgment which shall be final.

I. Conduct of Hearings

- (1) From the time the board issues notice of a public hearing on a complaint, the proceeding shall be conducted pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act (chapter [34.05 RCW](#)), except as modified by chapter [42.52 RCW](#) or these rules. Prior to the issuance of such notice, the board's consideration and disposition of a complaint shall not be considered an adjudicative proceeding. In the case of a conflict between Chapter [34.05 RCW](#) and these procedures rules, the procedures rules adopted by the board shall take precedence.
- (2) All hearings conducted under this section are open to the public. The board's deliberations on a complaint that do not occur during a public hearing are confidential.
- (3) A hearing shall be conducted either by the board or by an administrative law judge. If an administrative law judge participates, the board may choose to sit with the administrative law judge to hear the matter and to enter a final order at the conclusion of the proceedings. The board may also opt to have the administrative law judge hear the matter alone and prepare an initial order for review by the board. If an administrative law judge sits with the board, he or she shall rule on procedural and evidentiary matters.
- (4) Parties to a complaint proceeding shall be the respondent and the staff assigned to present the case in support of the complaint pursuant to [RCW 42.52.430\(2\)](#). Parties are subject to the ex parte restrictions stated in [RCW 34.05.455](#).
- (5) When a complaint has been filed with the board, neither the complainant, if other than the staff, nor any other person shall have special standing to participate or intervene in the investigation or consideration of the complaint by the board.
- (6) The staff assigned to investigate a complaint pursuant to [RCW 42.52.420](#) may be subsequently assigned as adviser(s) to the board following a determination of reasonable cause, without regard to the restrictions of [RCW 34.05.455](#) and [.458](#).
- (7) The board may subpoena witnesses, compel their attendance, administer oaths, take testimony of a persons under oath, and require production for examination of any books, papers, documents or tangible things relating to any matter under investigation or in hearing before the board. The subpoena shall:
 - (a) Specifically describe the testimony which is sought; and materials to be produced, in the form of designated books, papers, documents or tangible things under control of the witness;
 - (b) Set forth a reasonable time and place for the taking of testimony and production of the materials; and
 - (c) Notify the person who has been subpoenaed that if the testimony is not given or designated materials are not produced, the board will apply to the superior court for an appropriate order or other remedy. The subpoena may be personally delivered or sent by certified mail, return receipt requested.
- (8) Without prior approval by the assigned administrative law judge or by the board if an administrative law judge has not been assigned, no party shall have the right to issue subpoenas; or to demand interrogatories, depositions, or other forms of discovery, without prior approval by the board.
- (9) The board may conduct all or part of the hearing by telephone or other virtual means, if each participant in the hearing has an opportunity to participate in, to hear, and, if technically feasible, to see the entire proceeding while it is taking place.
- (10) The time limits stated in [RCW 34.05.419](#) shall not apply to board complaint proceedings.

(11) Service of notices, filings, pleadings and other papers maybe made personally or by first-class, registered, or certified mail; by electronic telefacsimile transmission and same-day mailing of copies; or by commercial parcel delivery company. Service by mail shall be regarded as completed upon deposit in the United States mail properly stamped and addressed. Service by electronic telefacsimile transmission shall be regarded as completed upon production by the telefacsimile device of confirmation of transmission. Service by commercial parcel delivery shall be regarded as completed upon delivery to the parcel delivery company with charges prepaid. Service by electronic transmission is authorized for all hearings in accordance with [RCW 34.05.010\(19\)](#). A respondent to a proceeding must provide a valid email address in their answer to the board's determination of reasonable cause, and if not in their answer, by the time of the prehearing conference. The respondent must monitor this email address throughout the hearing process for the purposes of accepting and providing service of process. Service of pleadings and other documents is deemed complete upon transmission to the email address provided by the parties.

J. Prehearing Conferences

- (1) In any proceeding, the board on its own motion or upon request by a party or the party's authorized representative, may direct the parties to appear at a specified time and place for a conference to consider:
 - (a) Simplification of issues;
 - (b) The necessity of amendments to the hearing notice;
 - (c) The possibility of obtaining stipulations, admissions of facts and of documents;
 - (d) Limitation on the number of witnesses; and
 - (e) Procedural and such other matters as may aid in the disposition of the proceeding.
- (2) Prehearing conferences may be presided over by the board or an administrative law judge.
- (3) Prehearing conferences may be held at a time and place, or by telephone, television, or other electronic means, as specified by the presiding officer.
- (4) Following the prehearing conference, the presiding officer shall issue an order reciting the action taken and decisions made at the conference. If no objection to the order is filed with the presiding officer within seven days after the date the order is mailed, the order shall control the subsequent course of the proceeding unless modified for good cause by subsequent order.

K. Final Order in Complaints

- (1) If the board in its final decision determines that the person has committed a violation, it shall issue an order stating its findings of fact, conclusions of law, and specifying such penalty or remedial action as the board finds appropriate. If the board in its final decision determines that the person has not committed a violation, it shall issue an order stating its findings of fact, conclusions of law, and dismissing the complaint.
- (2) Notification of the results of final orders in complaint cases shall be accomplished by simultaneous mailing or emailing to the complainant and respondent. If the notification is being sent by email, other distribution to the media and others who have requested notice of the board's action may occur the same working day. If the notification is being sent by USPS mail, the other distribution shall occur the following working day.
- (3) Following a hearing in which the board participates, the board shall:

- (a) Set forth in writing its findings of fact, conclusions of law and a decision on the merits of the case; and
 - (b) Deliver, either in person or by email or mail, to the respondent, complainant, and news media and others who have requested notice of the board's actions, a copy of the board's opinion.
- (4) Following a hearing in which the board does not participate, the administrative law judge shall:
 - (a) Set forth written findings of fact, conclusions of law and decision on the merits of the case in an initial order;
 - (b) Deliver, either in person or by email or mail, to each party, board member, and the staff, a copy of the findings of fact, conclusions of law and decision, including a statement of the right to request review of the initial order by the board.
 - (c) If neither party files exceptions to the initial order within 20 days, the board may adopt the initial order as the final order of the board.
 - (d) Within 20 days of entry of the initial order, either the staff or the respondent may file written exceptions to the initial order. Such exceptions shall be served on all other parties, the Administrative Law Judge, the staff, and all members of the board. The board shall set a date for submission of written argument on the exceptions and shall notify the staff and the respondent in writing.
 - (e) The board shall review the initial order, any exceptions and argument filed and shall issue a final order which shall be delivered, either in person or by email or mail, to the staff, the respondent, complainant, and media and others who have requested notice of the board's actions.

L. Procedures Applicable to Advisory Opinions

- (1) The legislative ethics board shall issue advisory opinions with regard to the application of chapter [42.52 RCW](#) and the rules adopted under the chapter. The following procedures apply to requests for advisory opinions:
 - (a) Requests for advisory opinions may be made by any legislator, legislative employee, or board member. The board may issue an advisory opinion on its own motion.
 - (b) Requests may also be made by other persons with respect to the application of the Ethics Act to them.
 - (c) A request must be stated hypothetically unless the individual requests a specific opinion concerning his or her own conduct. Requests must be written, signed, and directed to the chair of the board in care of Board Counsel at the address published on the board's website.
 - (d) Requests shall supply such information as the board requires to enable it to issue the opinion. Advisory Opinions will not be issued based upon facts that have already occurred.
 - (e) An Advisory Opinion will not be issued unless the Board is unanimous in its decision to issue the opinion.
 - (f) The identity of the person making the request shall be known only to the chair and staff of the board, unless such confidentiality is waived in the request.
- (2) The board shall either:
 - (a) Issue a written advisory opinion; or
 - (b) notify, in writing, the person requesting such opinion that the request is denied and the reason(s) for the denial.
- (3) Upon receipt, requests shall be assigned a reference number. The board shall maintain and keep current for public inspection a status sheet which shall contain with respect to each request: its reference number, the date the request was received by the board and its present status.

- (4) The staff shall notify the person requesting the opinion as to the status of the request within thirty days and at thirty-day intervals thereafter until final action is taken.
- (5) Upon request, the board shall make available to the public copies of the status sheets and advisory opinions issued by the board.

M. Procedures Applicable to Informal Advice

- (1) It is a function of board staff to provide ethics advice to persons eligible to request advisory opinions. In providing such advice, board staff should also provide a disclaimer that the advice represents solely the opinion of the staff and is not the opinion of the Board or in any respect binding on the Board.
- (2) In considering a complaint, the board will give weight to the fact that the person charged in the complaint relied in good faith on board staff's advice.
- (3) The board may review the board staff advice provided under subsection (1) of this section and may approve or disapprove of any advice so provided. However, any such approval or disapproval is limited to whether board staff had reasonable grounds for the advice and should not be interpreted as indicating that the board approves or disapproves the actual advice provided. Only advisory opinions issued by the board and complaints decided by the board may be relied on for purposes of determining how the board will interpret a provision of the Ethics Act.

N. Designated Ethics Advisers

- (1) The Chief Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate may each designate and assign legal counsel as "Designated Ethics Advisers" to assist legislators, legislative staff and, if requested, the Legislative Ethics Board. The responsibilities of such advisers should be in accordance with this rule.
- (2) No more than two such Designated Ethics Advisers may be from each legislative body and their designation and assignment should be within the sole discretion of the Chief Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate, respectively.
- (3) The advisers may assist legislators and employees, in their respective legislative bodies, with advice and analysis based upon legislative ethics statutes and rules and upon published opinions of the Legislative Ethics Board. In those instances where an adviser has conferred with board staff, and the staff has concurred with the proposed advice, the advice shall be deemed to be entitled to the protections afforded in Rule 1 M(2). Advice or analysis, which is not concurred in by staff, will be viewed as in-house legal advice and outside the scope of the protections provided in Rule 1 M(2). Requests for advisory opinions are appropriate in cases where designated ethics advisers and board staff disagree.
- (4) The advisers are expected to serve as liaisons between their respective legislative bodies, including their chief administrative officers, and the staff, and may communicate matters of mutual concern to the Board.
- (5) The advisers, in coordination and consultation with the staff, may develop and assist the staff to implement a program of ethics training and education for legislators and legislative staff.
- (6) The advisers should, to the extent reasonably possible, attend Board meetings and be available and prepared to comment on matters before the Board with the exception of formal complaints. The designated advisers will not participate in the Board's review and decision making on formal complaints before the Board.
- (7) The designated advisers may assist legislators and staff in the preparation of advisory opinion requests, responses to

complaints, and other communication with the Board but shall not, however, represent members or staff before the Board as advocates on their behalf

Rule Number 2: "Measurable Expenditure" Defined

A. Authority for Rule.

[RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(b\)](#) directs the ethics boards to define "measurable expenditure of public funds" in the context of a prohibition on the use of public facilities for campaign purposes.

B. Explanatory Note.

The rulemaking directive is limited to subsection (b). In order to fully understand the prohibitions and exceptions contained in this section, refer to the board advisory opinions, especially *Advisory Opinion 1995- No. 18*.

C. Text of Rule.

For purposes of [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)\(b\)](#), "measurable expenditure" has very limited application. The purpose of the measurable expenditure provision is to make it clear that the exception for statements made at open press conferences or in response to specific inquiries will, at a minimum, be construed to include statements that do not result in measurable expenditures. Consistent with this legislative intent, the definition provided in this rule does not restrict the scope of the exception for statements made at an open press conference or in response to a specific inquiry. The term is construed to include any specific cost, or specific portion of a cost, that can be reasonably determined and attributed to a statement made at an open press conference or in response to a specific inquiry and for the purpose of promotion or opposition of a ballot proposition.

- (1) All statements initiated by a legislator will result in a measurable expenditure if the writing was prepared using state time, state employees or resources such as paper and equipment; or if state resources such as postage were used in delivering the statement.
- (2) An oral statement initiated by a legislator will result in a measurable expenditure if its specific cost, or portion of its cost, can be reasonably determined and attributed to the statement. An oral statement constitutes a measurable expenditure if staff time or state resources were used to prepare the oral statement.
- (3) Pursuant to **In re Dhingra, Randall, Shewmake, Robinson, Lovelett, Thai, Bateman, Ramel, Lekanoff, Slatter, & Rule, 2022 – Nos. 14 & 15**, the use of public resources provided by another state agency can result in a "measurable expenditure."

Rule Number 3: Private Use of Public Resources

A. Introduction

Public resources are entrusted to legislators and legislative employees to further the public interest. Appropriation of public facilities, equipment, services, and personnel for personal benefit can undermine this trust and impedes the proper performance of government's work. At the same time, legitimate need exists for limited exceptions to this rule. Where use is incidental, infrequent, involves de minimis or no cost to the state, does not interfere with performance of official duties, and is reasonable in light of legitimate needs and expectations of the public work force, neither the public trust nor government efficiency suffers to any significant degree. This rule defines the circumstances when such limited exceptions are appropriate.

Adoption of this rule is based on the premise that all legislators and legislative employees will use good judgment to protect public resources and to fulfill the obligations stated in the policy of the Ethics Act: "State officials and employees of government hold a public trust that obligates them, in a special way, to honesty and integrity in fulfilling the responsibilities to which they are elected and appointed. Paramount in that trust is the principle that public office, whether elected or appointed, may not be used for personal gain or private advantage." This trust is grounded in the personal responsibility of each legislator and employee.

B. Purpose and Scope

This rule provides guidance on the proper use of state resources. It is not intended to cover every situation that could arise regarding such resources. Further clarifications may be sought from the board.

The Senate and House of Representatives are encouraged to adopt policies applying these principles to their unique circumstances. Nothing in this rule is intended to limit the ability of the Senate and the House of Representatives to adopt policies that are more restrictive. However, violation of a more restrictive Senate or House of Representatives policy will not necessarily constitute a violation of [RCW 42.52.160](#), but will constitute a violation of Senate or House of Representatives policy.

C. General Rules

- (1) Legislators and legislative employees may not use public resources including any person, money, or property under the legislator's or employee's official control or direction or in his or her custody for the private benefit or gain of the legislator or employee or any other person except on an incidental and infrequent basis as provided in these rules. This prohibition does not apply to the use of public resources to benefit another person as part of the legislator's or employee's official duties.
- (2) If there is no actual cost to the state or the cost is de minimis, if there is a public benefit, and if the use does not interfere with the performance of official duties, then infrequent and incidental use of state resources for private benefit may be permissible.
 - (a) The cost to the state is de minimis if the actual expenditure of state funds is so small as to be insignificant or negligible.
 - (b) A public benefit under this rule may be direct or indirect, such as improving employee morale or activities that improve the work-related job skills of a legislator or employee.

D. Special Qualifications and Limits

- (1) A legislator or legislative employee may not make private use of any state property which has been removed from state facilities or other official duty stations, even if there is no cost to the state. Use of computers which have been authorized to be taken out of the office for official purposes is permitted as an exception to this rule, to the same extent as personal use of such computers is permitted when located in a state facility or other official duty station.
- (2) A legislator or legislative employee may not make private use of any state property which is consumable such as paper, envelopes or spare parts, even if the actual cost to the state is de minimis.
- (3) A legislator or legislative employee may not make private use of state computers or other equipment to access a computer network or other database for personal use unless there is no cost to the state and the use does not interfere with the performance of the legislator's or the employee's official duties. Legislative electronic mail and internet uses which do not incur charges are examples of uses which meet the no-cost test.

- (4) In general, a legislator or legislative employee may not make private use of state resources and then reimburse the legislature so there is no actual cost to the state. However, the Board recognizes that in some limited situations, such as legislators or employees working at remote locations, a system of reimbursement may be appropriate. Any system of reimbursement must be established by the Senate or House of Representatives in advance and must result in no cost to the state. To be valid under this rule a reimbursement system must be approved by the Board.

E. Guidelines and hypothetical examples.

- (1) Questions to ask yourself:

- (a) Will my personal use of public resources result in added costs or any other disadvantage to the legislature? Am I using this resource in order to avoid personal expense?
- (b) Are my supervisors aware of my personal use of public resources? Do I feel a reluctance to discuss this subject with my supervisor or my fellow employees?
- (c) Am I confident that my use of legislative equipment will not compromise the security or integrity of legislative information, software, or the legislative information network?
- (d) Are public resources being used for purposes that could be embarrassing to the legislature by creating an appearance of impropriety?

Example 1: An employee makes a local telephone call home every afternoon while on break to make sure the employee's children have arrived home safely from school. This is not an ethical violation. There is no cost to the state and since the call takes place on the employee's break it will not interfere with the performance of the employee's duties.

Example 2: An employee operates an outside business. Every day the employee makes or receives five to ten business calls using a state telephone. All of the calls are local calls. This is an ethical violation because the employee is running a business to make money using public resources.

Example 3: An employee posts a notice to sell a used car on the office bulletin board. The notice gives the employee's home telephone number for those interested in inquiring about the car. This is not an ethical violation. There is no cost to the state and posting the notice will not interfere with the performance of official duties since those who want to inquire about the car can call the employee at home.

Example 4: Once a year, during a two-week period, an employee sells candy bars to support a youth soccer team. The employee leaves the candy bars in an employee common area and employees may buy the bars at their leisure. This is not an ethical violation. There is no cost to the state and the transactions do not interfere with the performance of official duties.

Example 5: Every spring a group of employees meet at lunch time to organize an agency softball team. The meeting is held in a conference room that is not needed for agency business during the lunch hour. This is not an ethical violation. There is no cost to the state and since the meeting takes place during the lunch hour it does not interfere with the performance of the employees' official duties.

Example 6: An employee is taking a night school class and after working hours uses a legislative computer to do homework. The employee prints the homework using the office printer and personal paper. The appropriate official of the Senate or House of Representatives has determined by advance written approval that the class will enhance the employee's job skills. This is not an ethical violation. The use of the office computer and printer will

result in some cost to the state; however, the cost is negligible. Since the class will enhance the employee's job skills there is a public benefit and, since the activity takes place after working hours it will not interfere with the performance of the employee's official duties.

Example 7: After working hours an employee uses the office computer and printer to compose and print reports for a private business using personal paper. This is an ethical violation. The use of the office computer and printer will result in some cost to the state. Although the cost is negligible, the employee cannot use public resources with which to operate any portion of a private business.

Example 8: An employee is in the legislative intern program and is a student at a state four-year university. When time is available, the intern uses a legislative computer to work on a paper as part of an assigned school project. The intern also communicates occasionally with the supervising professor regarding the project using email. This is not an ethical violation. The internship program is a combination education and work experience which is specifically designed by the legislature to combine academic and professional experiences. The use of work time and resources is not sufficient to interfere with legislative duties, and there is a stated public benefit.

Example 9: Legislative equipment includes a video tape player. One night an employee takes the machine home to watch videos of a family vacation. This is an ethical violation. Although there is no cost to the state an employee may not make private use of state equipment removed from state facilities or other official duty station.

Example 10: Two employees use the legislative computer network to play a game of chess via electronic mail during their lunch hour. This is not an ethical violation because there is no cost to the state and the game does not interfere with official duties.

Example 11: A legislator conducts stock trades on a state-issued laptop computer. This is an ethical violation. While conducting a stock trade may not interfere with the performance of legislative duties, the legislator may not use public resources to make money. However, occasional viewing of general stock market activity would fall within the de minimis use exception.

Example 12: For convenience, while unable to access a home computer during the legislative session, a legislator establishes an e-mail account with a private Internet provider for the receipt of personal e-mails on his or her computer. This is not an ethical violation, so long as, (1) there are no actual costs to the State for establishing or accessing the e-mail account, and (2) the personal e-mails received or sent from the account are not campaign related and (3) account activity does not interfere with the performance of legislative duties; and (4) the account is not used for private gain.

E. Private Use of Public Resources for Campaign Activity

A legislator or legislative employee may not make private use of state resources for any campaign related activity. Such a use of state resources is not authorized by this rule and may also be prohibited by [RCW 42.52.180](#), subject to the exceptions in [RCW 42.52.180\(2\)](#) regarding normal and regular conduct of an elected official's office and certain permissible communications about ballot propositions.

Rule Number 4: Working Hours

A. Authority for rule

[RCW 42.52.320\(2\)\(c\)](#) directs the ethics boards to adopt rules defining "working hours for purposes of [RCW 42.52.180](#)." [RCW 42.52.180](#) prohibits the direct or indirect use of public facilities to assist a campaign for election of a person to an office or to promote or oppose a ballot measure. Public facilities specifically include "use of state employees of the agency during working hours."

B. Text of rule

- (1) A legislative employee's working hours are those designated or required by Senate, House of Representatives, or legislative agency work schedule policy. If an employee has a designated work schedule different from the work schedule policy, that employee's working hours are the hours approved by that employee's supervisor and the Secretary of the Senate, Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives, or administrative director of a legislative agency, as appropriate.
- (2) "Working hours" do not include the time approved and designated for the employee's lunch break. Employee lunch periods are assumed to be 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., unless an employee has a designated work schedule different from the work schedule policy which has been approved by the employee's supervisor and the Secretary of the Senate, Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives, or administrative director of a legislative agency.
- (3) "Working hours" do not include time in official leave status, if the leave has been approved in advance.

Rule Number 5: Infrequent Meals

A. Introduction

A legislator may accept gifts of food and beverages on infrequent occasions in the ordinary course of meals where attendance is related to the performance of official duties – [RCW 42.52.150\(5\)](#).

B. Scope of Rule

This rule is limited to food and beverage paid for by a registered lobbyist or lobbyist employer on behalf of a legislator. The rule does not pertain to sections of the Ethics Act which permit the acceptance of complimentary food and beverage in other circumstances. The effective date of this rule is January 1, 2015.

C. Definitions

"Infrequent occasions" means up to twelve qualifying meals total per calendar year.

"In the ordinary course of meals" means breakfast, lunch, or dinner, regardless of cost. A qualifying meal would normally occur when the guest would be expected to sit down and eat, such as in a restaurant or a private residence as opposed to, for example, a hosted reception or other broad-based occasion when attendance is related to the legislator's official duties or the legislator is making an appearance in an official capacity.

"Attendance related to the performance of official duties" means at least some of the discussion during the meal involves legislative business.

It is presumed that qualifying meals as described in [RCW 42.52.150\(5\)](#), whether breakfast, lunch or dinner, include both food and a beverage and therefore they are to be counted against the maximum number of meals allowed.

Examples: NOTE - The Ethics Act contains a number of gift exemptions for food and beverage. If one of those exemptions applies, the meal does not count toward the 12 meal limit.

Example 1: An association which employs a registered lobbyist visits Olympia during a legislative session and invites legislators, over the lunch hour, for complimentary food and conversations about legislative issues. The food is available on a serving table and is basically self-served. While there are some tables and chairs available for the convenience of the guests the event is designed to allow the guests to mingle with one another. Complimentary food and beverage provided at the event are not subject to the statute which limits the number of meals. The Ethics Act presumes that food and beverages consumed at hosted receptions where

attendance is related to a legislator's official duties may be accepted without regard to frequency ([RCW 42.52.150](#)). A setting in the nature of this buffet style reception, where guests are not expected to sit down and eat, is a hosted reception within the meaning of the Ethics Act (*Advisory Opinions 1996 Nos. 3 and No. 15*).

Example 2: A legislative committee is pursuing an interim schedule which includes an approved work session with interested stakeholders on a subject of interest to the committee. The work session will last over the lunch hour and the stakeholders, who are lobbyists for a trade organization, offer to provide the working lunch on behalf of their employer. The meal is not subject to the statute which limits the number of meals. The Ethics Act exempts from the definition of "gift" reasonable subsistence expenses paid for by a nongovernmental entity when a legislator or committee staff appears at this work session in an official capacity ([RCW 42.52.010\(9d\)](#)).

Example 3: Agencies of the Federal and State Government offer complimentary transportation and meals to legislators during a proposed tour of the sites of forest fires in eastern Washington. The tour is designed to acquaint the legislators with the need for increased state funding for restoration and forest fire prevention. Meals provided on the tour are not subject to the statute which limits the number of meals. Payment by a governmental or nongovernmental entity of reasonable subsistence expenses incurred in connection with a legislators appearance in an official capacity are excluded from the definition of gift ([RCW 42.52.010\(9\)\(d\)](#)).

Example 4: A legislator is invited to a complimentary dinner at the home of a lobbyist and is encouraged to bring a non-legislator guest. Although the meal is provided in a buffet-style the guests are expected to sit down and eat. Such a dinner is clearly a meal rather than a reception (*Advisory Opinion 1996 No. 15*). The meal is subject to the statute which limits the number of meals. The complimentary meal provided to the guest is a gift which is attributed to the legislator for the purpose of determining whether the annual gift limit has been exceeded, unless an independent business, family, or social relationship exists between the donor and the guest ([RCW 42.52.150\(1\)](#)).

Example 5: Members of a caucus leadership are invited to use a lobbyist's home for a meeting on legislative issues. The lobbyist is not involved in the substance of the meeting and will not be present but has provided for a complimentary dinner to be catered. The legislators have not met the calendar limit for complimentary meals from lobbyists and seek to categorize the meal as allowable under the statute which limits such meals to infrequent occasions. The meal is a gift and must be treated as a gift from the lobbyist for the purpose of determining whether the annual gift limit has been exceeded. The statute which permits gifts of meals on infrequent occasions requires that there be some discussion of legislative business, presumably the case here, and that the lobbyist-host be present (*Advisory Opinion 1998 No. 5*).

Example 6: A lobbyist invites a legislator to a morning meeting over a cup of complimentary coffee to discuss a legislative issue. This complimentary beverage is not subject to the statute which limits the number of meals to infrequent occasions. The statute refers to gifts of food and beverage. This rule (5) presumes that beverages of some sort accompany breakfast, lunch or dinner, but there is no presumption that complimentary beverages are accompanied by complimentary food.

Example 7: A school PTA holds an annual fundraising auction and solicits donations to help pay for the event. Some of the donations come from registered lobbyists or their employers. The event includes a sit-down dinner, the PTA invites legislators to attend on a complimentary basis, and it uses a portion of the donations to help offset the free meals. The meals are not subject to the statute which limits meals to infrequent occasions. The Ethics Act presumes that legislators may accept gifts in the form of the cost of admission and

the cost of food and beverage consumed at an event sponsored by or in conjunction with a civic, charitable, governmental, or community organization ([RCW 42.52.150\(2j\)](#)) PROVIDED, the entity, the PTA in this example, is the source of the invitation and determines which legislators are to be invited (*Advisory Opinion 1996 No. 15*).

Example 8: A corporate entity which employs registered lobbyists hosts a charitable fundraiser for an arts museum, the event includes a sit-down dinner, and legislators are invited on a complimentary basis. The corporation has arranged the evening so that its representatives will be present at the dinner tables with the legislators with the expectation they will discuss the corporation's industry and its legislative concerns. The meal is subject to the statute which limits the number of meals. The lobbyist employer invited the legislators (unlike Example 7), paid for their dinners, and the event involved some discussion of industry and legislative issues so that the attendance of legislators was related to official duties ([RCW 42.52.150\(5\)](#) and *Advisory Opinion 1997 No. 10*).

Example 9: Following a committee meeting, a lobbyist invites some of the committee members to dinner at a local restaurant. The dinner conversation includes a discussion of a bill before the committee. In this example, if a recipient has not exceeded the calendar year limit of free meals under the statute, the lobbyist is present, and legislative business is discussed, the gift of the meal may be accepted as one of the 12 permitted under the infrequent occasions statute ([RCW 42.52.150\(5\)](#) and *Advisory Opinion 1998 No. 5*).

Example 10: Various groups often request legislators to attend a legislative breakfast, lunch or dinner to discuss legislative business. These groups may include, but are limited to, labor, business, school boards, and county and local governments. A complimentary meal provided at one of these meetings may be accepted and the meal does not count as one of the 12 permitted by the Ethics Act and this Rule. However, at a minimum, all the legislators from the legislative district in which the meeting is held must be invited. The legislators' attendance is an appearance in an official capacity and the meal is exempt from the gift rules ([RCW 42.52.010\(9\)\(d\)](#)).

Example 11: Many associations hold meetings of their members on a periodic basis and may invite legislators to address those members on pending legislative issues. A complimentary sit-down meal is provided. The meal does not count as one of the 12 permitted by the Ethics Act and this Rule because the legislators are delivering a speech or making a presentation in an official capacity pursuant to [RCW 42.52.010\(9\)\(d\)](#).

Example 12: A legislator and a lobbyist have a social relationship which involves sharing potluck dinners at the residence of one or the other. It is common for family members to attend and it is not the purpose of the occasion to discuss legislative business. Absent facts to the contrary, the Board will assume that each attendee actually provides a fair contribution to the meal so that the occasion is viewed as similar to a legislator paying for her or his own meal in a restaurant with a lobbyist present. The meal is not a gift and does not count as one of the 12.

Example 13: Some organizations, such as the 4-H and the Farm Bureau, host an annual sit-down dinner in Olympia during a legislative session and all legislators are invited to attend on a complimentary basis. The Board views these occasions, with their broad-based invitee list of all legislators, as fundamentally different from the more private restaurant and residence complimentary meals which were the impetus behind the Board's adoption of Rule 5. Attendance at these dinners is an appearance in an official capacity and the meal is not a gift pursuant to [RCW 42.52.010\(9\)\(d\)](#) and therefore does not count as one of the 12.

Rule Number 6: Penalties

A. Purpose

The purpose of this rule is to set out the criteria that the board may consider when imposing sanctions for a violation of chapter [42.52 RCW](#) and the rules adopted under it, in accordance with [RCW 42.52.320\(2\)\(g\)](#).

B. Board May Impose Sanctions

If the board finds a violation of chapter [42.52 RCW](#) or rules adopted under it, the board may impose one or more of the following sanctions, pursuant to [RCW 42.52.480](#):

- (1) Reprimand, either by letter of instruction or formal reprimand;
- (2) A civil penalty of up to five thousand dollars per violation or three times the economic value of any thing sought or received in violation of chapter [42.52 RCW](#) or rules adopted under it, whichever is greater. Payment of the civil penalty shall be reduced by the amount of costs paid pursuant to subsection (4);
- (3) Payment of damages sustained by the state that were caused by the violation and were not recovered by the state; and
- (4) Costs, including reasonable investigative costs, that do not exceed the amount of any civil penalty.

C. Criteria for Determining Sanctions

In determining the appropriate sanction, including the amount of any civil penalty, the board may consider the following factors, as well as other factors which the board may find appropriate in a particular case:

- (1) The monetary cost of the violation, including:
 - (a) The cost of the violation to the state;
 - (b) The value of anything received or sought in the violation;
 - (c) The amount of any damages incurred by the state as a result of the violation;
 - (d) The costs incurred in enforcement, including reasonable investigative costs;
- (2) The nature of the violation, including whether the violation:
 - (a) Was continuing in nature;
 - (b) Was motivated by financial gain;
 - (c) Involved criminal conduct;
 - (d) Impaired a function of the agency;
 - (e) Tended to significantly reduce public respect for or confidence in state government or state government officers or employees;
 - (f) Involved personal gain or special privilege to the violator;
- (3) Aggravating circumstances, including whether the violator:
 - (a) Intentionally committed the violation with knowledge that the conduct constituted a violation;
 - (b) Attempted to conceal the violation prior to the filing of the complaint;
 - (c) Was untruthful or uncooperative in dealing with the board or the board's staff;
 - (d) Had significant official, management, or supervisory responsibility;
 - (e) Had committed prior violations found by the board;
 - (f) Incurred no other sanctions as a result of the violation;
- (4) Mitigating factors, including:
 - (a) Prior corrective action taken against the violator;
 - (b) Prior recovery of damages to the state;

- (c) The unethical conduct was approved or required by the violator's supervisor or agency;
- (d) The violation was unintentional;
- (e) The violator relied on advice from board staff or designated ethics advisers;
- (f) Other mitigating factors deemed relevant by the board.

D. Payment of Civil Penalty

Payment of any monetary penalty assessed by the board must be made within 45 days of the date of the board's order, unless an extension is granted by the board. Payments are the personal responsibility of the officer or employee against whom the penalty is assessed.

E. Recommendations or Requests to Others

In addition to any sanctions imposed by the board, the board may take one or both of the following actions:

- (1) Recommend to the appropriate authorities the suspension, removal from the position, or prosecution or other appropriate remedy, as provided by [RCW 42.52.470](#), [520](#);
- (2) Request that the attorney general bring an action pursuant to [RCW 42.52.510](#) to cancel or rescind state action taken by the violator, upon a board finding that:
 - (a) The violation has substantially influenced the state action; and
 - (b) Interests of the state require cancellation or rescission.

Rule Number 7: Harassment

A. Introduction.

ESHB 2018 (2019) amended [RCW 42.52.070](#) (special privileges) to state that it is a violation of special privileges for a legislator or legislative staff to engage in behavior that constitutes harassment, including sexual harassment.

B. Purpose and Scope.

In considering complaints that a legislator or legislative staff has engaged in behavior that constitutes harassment, the Board will apply the following substantive standards: 1. Reasonable person standard. If a reasonable person similarly situated would not view the conduct that is the subject of the complaint as constituting harassment, the Board will not view the conduct as harassment. 2. Substantial interference standard. In interpreting the provision that defines harassment as conduct that has the purpose or effect of interfering with the person's work performance, the Board will find only substantial interference to be the basis for a reasonable cause finding.

Rule Number 8: Board Procedures

A. Circulation of minutes

Meeting minutes shall be prepared in draft form, circulated to members prior to the next meeting, and included in the meeting packet. Once adopted, minutes are available on request. The minutes shall be published on the Board's website contemporaneously.

B. Recording votes

Written board opinions and board minutes will not reflect the board's vote, although any member may request his or her vote be shown in the record or move that votes be included in the minutes.

C. Advisory Opinion circulation procedures

The board may adopt final advisory opinions during board meetings or by circulation to board members. If the board decides to adopt an opinion by circulation, at least seven calendar days shall

be provided for a review period. No response within the seven-day period is assumed to mean concurrence with the opinion as circulated. Non-substantive technical changes may be made without re-circulation. Any other changes shall only be accomplished by re-circulation or consideration at the following board meeting.

D. Complaint Opinion circulation procedures

The board may adopt final complaint opinions during board meetings or by electronic circulation to members. If the board decides to adopt an opinion by circulation, at least seven calendar days shall be provided for a review period. No response by a board member within the seven-day period is assumed to mean concurrence with the opinion as circulated. Non-substantive technical changes approved by the chair may be made without re-circulation. Any change deemed substantive by the chair shall only be accomplished by re-circulation or consideration at the next board meeting.

E. Circulation of Dissents/Concurrences (Separate Opinion) in Complaint Opinions

A board member who wishes to file a Separate Opinion to the majority complaint opinion must indicate that intent during the board's discussion of the majority opinion in executive session or within the seven-day circulation period provided above. If so indicated, the written proposed Separate Opinion must be circulated to the other board members within ten days of receiving the majority opinion for review. If any board member objects to language contained in the proposed Separate Opinion, the proposed Separate Opinion shall be discussed by the full board at its next meeting. If the time for writing a proposed Separate Opinion has elapsed and a proposed Separate Opinion has not been put into circulation, the majority opinion shall be published. If the proposed Separate Opinion has been timely written and circulated and there are no objections to the language of the proposed Separate Opinion or the board members who circulated the proposed Separate Opinion do not concur with the objections of the other board members, the Separate Opinion shall be published at the same time as the majority opinion.

F. Review of contracts, grants, and employment situations with state agencies

All contracts, grants, or employment situations submitted for approval shall be made available to the board in full. Matters which are submitted for filing only shall be summarized in a report to the board at the next meeting. All contracts, grants, or terms-of-employment information shall be submitted in conjunction with an advice request form provided by the board and completed by the legislator or the legislative employee and the counsel to the board.

G. Meetings conducted by electronic means

The board may conduct meetings by telephone or other electronic means. In such cases, a link to the public portion of the meeting shall be made available on the Board's website so that the public can view the meeting.

H. Complaint Process

Prior to the board's notice of a public hearing on a complaint, board members should avoid communication with anyone other than board staff or other board members concerning a complaint that has been filed with the board or appears reasonably likely to be filed with the board. Prior to a public hearing on a complaint, and Board Rule 1.F, the board's consideration of a complaint shall be conducted in closed session. Pursuant to the ethics act and board rules, board members may not conduct an independent investigation of the facts of a complaint. It is not an independent investigation when members read documents

attached to complaints or documents or materials referred to within a complaint as exhibits or supporting documentation.

I. Recusal

A member of the board shall recuse himself or herself if his or her impartiality might reasonably be questioned because of a conflict of interest or personal bias or prejudice. A legislative member of the Board should consider recusing himself or herself if a complaint is filed against a seatmate. If a legislative member becomes a respondent in an ethics complaint, that member shall not participate in any discussions or deliberations related to the complaint and must be excused from any portion of the board's meetings concerning the complaint until proceedings on the complaint are completed. If the board finds reasonable cause to believe the member has violated the act, the issue of the member's continuing participation on the board shall be referred to the member's caucus for a decision in whether the member should continue to serve on the board.

Statement of Administrative Practices

The board's chair and vice-chair are elected on an annual basis from among the citizen members of the board. Their responsibilities during their term of office include oversight of administrative matters and personnel issues with regard to board staff. Because board members, including the officers, serve part-time, it is not practical to expect or demand the officers' approval of day-to-day decisions in the same manner as is usually done for other legislative agencies. Accordingly, the board adopts this statement of administrative practices to facilitate the effective functioning of the board.

1. In addition to performing investigative, educational and legal duties the board's counsel has historically been charged with overseeing the day-to-day operations of the board such as purchase of routine supplies and materials, scheduling board meetings and authorizing payment for expenses associated with those meetings. Subject to the oversight of the board officers, these matters are delegated to the board counsel. Historically, some administrative matters have required, and will continue to require, prior written authorization of the board chair or vice-chair. Examples include approval of personal service contracts which have been authorized by the board and approval of annual salary step increases for which staff may be eligible pursuant to the legislature's salary schedule.
2. Counsel will keep board officers informed about proposed vacation in excess of two days. Records of all forms of leave shall be kept in a manner consistent with the legislature's leave record system. Board staff, with notice to and approval by a board officer, may select an interim work schedule option from among those generally available to legislative employees.
3. Authorization for in-state travel for board staff in the ordinary course of board business may be signed by the counsel on behalf of the officers pursuant to a general authorization for such travel by the officers. Examples of travel in the ordinary course of business include attendance at continuing legal education seminars, attendance at programs or conferences related to the work of the board, attendance at board meetings or meetings with board members, and travel associated with a board investigation. Out of state travel requires written prior authorization by a board officer. Expense vouchers for staff travel will be signed by a board officer.

