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# LEGISLATIVE ETHICS BOARD

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## ETHICS ALERT

January – 2007

### **Use of Legislative Office and Public Resources on Behalf of Constituents**

The Ethics Act and Board opinions acknowledge the propriety of legislators using their position, or legislative office, and public resources to assist constituents. The Act refers to these efforts as "...within the scope of (legislative) employment" and "part of a state officers...official duties." However, intervention on behalf of constituents is not unlimited. In a recent case a legislator violated the Act when he used his legislative position and public resources in an effort to exact concessions from a home builder on behalf of the legislator's friend. "When a legislator becomes an advocate for a constituent, public resources and the office of the legislator may be used on behalf of that constituent if a government official or government office is involved or if the constituent is seeking assistance on legislative issues." Complaint 2006 – No. 4.

### **Prohibition on Use of Public Resources to Assist a Campaign is Not Limited to a Legislative Campaign**

RCW 42.52.180 prohibits the use the "facilities of an agency" (public resources) to assist a campaign for "...election of a person to an office..." The statute is violated when legislative equipment and staff are used in support of a candidate for city council. Complaint 2006 – No. 2.

### **Posting of Legislative Newsletters and/or Legislative Press Releases on a Campaign Web Site**

Staff, equipment and publications of the legislature are included within the definition of "facilities of an agency" and may not be used to directly or indirectly assist a campaign. It is a violation of this prohibition if legislators post their legislative newsletters and legislative press releases on their campaign web sites. Complaints 2006 – No's 5 and 7.

- **The Board published thirteen complaint opinions in 2006.**
- **The full text of all Board opinions together with a brief description of each may be found on the Board's web site at [www.leg.wa.gov/LEB](http://www.leg.wa.gov/LEB)**