



THE OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JOINT LEGISLATIVE ETHICS COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF THE LEGISLATIVE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Interested Parties
From: Joint Legislative Ethics Committee
Date: January 11, 2024

RE: *Lobbying expenditures associated with Meetings/Conferences of National Organizations to which the State pays membership dues*

This memorandum reviews the lobbying expenditure reporting requirements for expenditures associated with meetings or conferences of national organizations to which any state agency or political subdivision pays membership dues.¹ For purposes of this memorandum, "national organization" refers to organizations to which one or more of the aforementioned entities pay dues.

1. Lobbying Expenditures

A. Gifts – In General:

Members and employees are prohibited from accepting more than \$75 in gifts from a legislative agent, aggregated per calendar year.² However, this limit does not apply to gifts from an employer of a legislative agent. Expenditures for events or activities, excluding meals and beverages, hosted by a registered lobbyist³ or an employer of a registered lobbyist, must be reported in the itemized gift category of the Activity & Expenditure Report (recipient name, date, amount and nature of gift disclosed) if the value exceeds \$25.⁴

¹ R.C. 101.73(B)(3); state agency includes but is not limited to any legislative agency or state institution of higher education.

² R.C. 102.031(C)(3); Joint Legislative Code of Ethics Section 5(C).

³ "Lobbyist" refers to any individual registered as a legislative agent, executive agency lobbyist or retirement system lobbyist. See R.C. 101.70(F); R.C. 121.60(H); R.C. 101.90(H).

⁴ R.C. 101.73(B)(2); 1995 JLEC Advisory Opinion 95-007; O.A.C. 101-9-01(D)(2).

Example:

XYZ Corporation invites a Member, who is a conference attendee, to a golf outing and pays for the greens fees; the fees are a gift to the Member. XYZ Corporation, as the employer of a legislative agent, will report the name of the Member, the date, the nature, and the amount of the expenditure in the gift section of the Activity & Expenditure Report.

If the cost of a round of golf exceeds \$75.00, the legislative agent for XYZ Corporation is prohibited from providing the golf outing.⁵

Except for actual travel costs related to a conference, neither Ohio Revised Code 102.031 nor the Legislative Code of Ethics provides an exception to the annual \$75 limit for gifts to Members and legislative staff received from legislative agents at national conferences.

B. Gifts to Spouses

Any gift provided to a spouse or other family member is considered to be for the use or benefit of the Member or employee (i.e. spouse or family member is receiving the gift because he or she is the spouse of the Member or employee), and therefore the amount of the gift given to a spouse must be added to the amount, if any, of the gift received by the Member or employee.

C. Travel:

Generally, Members and legislative staff are prohibited from accepting any direct payment or reimbursement for personal travel and lodging expenses from a legislative agent.⁶ Travel is defined as any transportation by airplane, train, or common carrier regardless of the distance and any travel by automobile for those trips which exceed 50 miles one way.⁷ Lodging encompasses the following: a stay of one or more nights in either a

⁵ See Ohio Lobbying Handbook: Lobbyist Expenditures vs. Employer Expenditures, at 46.

⁶ R.C. 102.031C(1), R.C. 102.03(H); Joint Legislative Code of Ethics Section 5(B)(1).

⁷ 1997 JLEC Advisory Opinion 97-006.

commercial establishment or a noncommercial private dwelling.⁸ As to noncommercial private dwellings, this includes residences owned in whole or in part by a legislative agent.⁹

However, there is an exception for travel in connection to a national organization meeting or conference. Attendance at a meeting or conference of a national organization is considered an official duty; Members and legislative staff may accept actual travel or lodging expenses from a legislative agent when the travel is directly related to their attendance at a national organization meeting or conference.¹⁰

For prohibitions and exceptions relative to Ohio executive branch officials, please contact the Ohio Ethics Commission at (614)-466-7090.

D. Meals & Beverages:

Generally, Members and legislative employees are prohibited from accepting more than \$75 in meals and beverages from a legislative agent, aggregated per calendar year.¹¹ **However, meals and beverages provided by a legislative agent to a Member while attending a meeting or conference of a national organization do not count towards the annual \$75 limit.** The meals and beverages exception to the annual \$75 limit does not apply to legislative employees.¹²

Payment of expenses for meals and beverages provided to Members and executive branch officials attending the conference in the host city at the time of the conference are reported as an aggregate dollar amount (recipient not disclosed) in the national conference reporting category of the Activity & Expenditure Report.¹³ Alternatively, if all Members of the House or Senate are invited to a reception, the host may choose to report the reception expenditures in the All-Invited reporting category of the Activity & Expenditure Report.¹⁴

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ R.C. 102.031(C)(1), R.C. 102.03(H); Joint Legislative Code of Ethics Section 5(B)(1).

¹¹ R.C. 102.031(C)(2); Joint Legislative Code of Ethics Section 5(B)(2). This limit does not apply to meals and beverages from the employer of a legislative agent.

¹² 1995 JLEC Advisory Opinion 95-007.

¹³ R.C. 101.73(B)(3); R.C. 121.63(B)(3).

¹⁴ R.C. 101.73(D).

2. Financial Support of Conference Events not Reportable as Ohio Lobbying Expenditures in Certain Circumstances:

During meetings or conferences, a national organization may hold events as part of the official conference agenda. Some of these costs will be offset by financial support provided to the national organization from those who are registered lobbyists or employers of registered lobbyists.

Financial support provided to a national organization for such events is not a reportable lobbying expenditure when the national organization is responsible for: (1) determining who is invited; (2) extending any invitation to those invited; and (3) the activity is part of the conference agenda.

3. Scheduled National Meetings of National Organizations to which Ohio Pays Membership Dues:¹⁵

American Legislative Exchange Council

July 24-26, 2024, Annual Meeting, Denver, CO

December 3-5, 2024, States and Nation Policy Summit, Washington, DC

Council on Governmental Ethics Laws

December 8-11, 2024, Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA

Council of State Governments

July 21–24, 2024, Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC) Annual Meeting, Columbus, OH

December 4–7, 2024, CSG National Conference, New Orleans, LA

Midwest Higher Education Compact

November 18–20, 2024, Annual Commission Meeting, Kansas City/Overland Park, KS

¹⁵ This list of meetings and dates reflects national meetings commonly attended by Members & legislative staff.

National Conference of Insurance Legislators

April 11-14, 2024, Spring Meeting, Nashville, TN

July 17–20, 2024, Summer Meeting, Costa Mesa, CA

November 21–24, 2024, Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX

National Conference of State Legislatures

August 5-7, 2024, Legislative Summit, Louisville, KY

National Council of Legislators from Gaming States

January 3-6, 2024, Winter Meeting, Fort Lauderdale, FL

July 17-20, 2024, Summer Meeting, Pittsburgh, PA

State Legislative Leaders Foundation

April 25-27, 2024, Spring Leadership Summit, Palo Alto, CA

June 20-22, 2024, Conference of State Majority Leaders, Charleston, SC

September 4-7, 2024, National Speakers Conference, Las Vegas, NV

September 26–28, 2024, Fall Leadership Summit, Atlanta, GA