



# JOINT LEGISLATIVE ETHICS COMMITTEE 129<sup>th</sup> OHIO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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## Staff:

Tony Bledsoe  
Executive Director

To: All Interested Parties

From: The Office of the Legislative Inspector General

Date: July 28, 2011

RE: **Meetings/Conferences of National Organizations to which the State Pays Membership Dues**

The purpose of this memo is to review lobbyist reporting and financial disclosure requirements for members and staff attending meetings/conferences of national organizations meeting the following criteria:

The national meeting exception for financial disclosure and lobbyist reporting requirements are only applicable to national meetings/conventions of those organizations to which the general assembly, a legislative agency, a state institution of higher education, any other state agency, or any political subdivision or any office or agency of a political subdivision pays membership dues.

*Questions as to membership status should be directed to the host organization.*

## **PROHIBITIONS**

A member or employee is prohibited from accepting a gift or gifts from a legislative agent where the value of the gift or gifts, aggregated per calendar year, exceeds \$75.

Members and employees are prohibited from accepting more than \$75, aggregated per calendar year, in meals and beverages from a legislative agent. ***Meals and beverages provided to a member while attending a meeting/conference of a national organization do not count towards the \$75 limit.*** This exception ***does not*** apply to employees of the General Assembly.

A member is prohibited from accepting any direct payment or reimbursement for travel and lodging expenses from a legislative agent **except actual travel and lodging expenses related to official duties.** Attendance at a meeting/conference of a national organization **(meeting the criteria above)** is considered an official duty. As such, a member may accept actual travel/lodging expenses from a legislative agent for travel directly related to attendance at a meeting/conference of a national organization.

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.

Lodging encompasses the following: (1) A stay of one or more nights in a commercial establishment and (2) A stay of one or more nights in a noncommercial private dwelling. As to noncommercial private dwellings, this includes residences owned in whole or in part by a Legislative Agent.

It is important to note that the often-referenced “national meeting exception” applies only to travel expenses (members and employees) and meals and beverages **(members only)**.

## **FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

### **Travel**

Members and employees are not required to disclose either the source or amount of travel expenses incurred to attend national meetings/conferences sponsored by organizations to which the General Assembly, a legislative agency, a state institution of higher education, any other state agency, or any political subdivision or any office or agency of a political subdivision pays membership dues.

The source of and actual amount of travel/lodging expenses directly related to attendance at a meeting/conference of a national organization need not be disclosed on a Financial Disclosure Statement by a member or employee of the General Assembly.

### **Meals & Beverages**

The payment of expenses for meals and beverages, even if they exceed \$100, incurred at a meeting/conference of a national organization, are not required to be disclosed on the

**member's** Financial Disclosure Statement. This exception encompasses all meals & beverages provided during the course of such a meeting/conference regardless of the source of the meals. Additionally, neither a legislative agent nor the employer of a legislative agent is required to report these meals on their respective Activity & Expenditure Reports.

**This exception above does not apply to employees of the General Assembly.** The employee will disclose meals and beverages accepted by the employee from sources other than the national organization, if he or she accepts more than \$100 in meals and beverages from this source in a calendar year. Employees are reminded that meals and beverages provided by legislative agents, even while attending a meeting/conference, count towards the \$75 annual limit.

### **Gifts – Including Ticketed Events & Fundraisers**

Events or activities, excluding official travel and meals, which are hosted by persons or entities, **other than the national organization holding the meeting/conference**, must be reported as gifts if the value exceeds \$75 or \$25 if from a legislative agent.

For example, if while attending a meeting/conference, of an organization to which the state pays membership dues, the XYZ Corporation sponsors a golf outing with free greens fees for the conference attendees, the greens fees are a gift. If the national organization hosting the meeting/conference sponsors the outing and pays for the fees, the fees are considered part of the benefits of the dues paid by the State of Ohio and not considered to be a gift.

Members and employees must identify the source of a gift where the value of the gift or gifts, aggregated per calendar, exceeds \$75 or if received from a legislative agent, \$25. A member or employee is prohibited from accepting a gift or gifts from a legislative agent where the value of the gift or gifts, aggregated per calendar year, exceeds \$75.

Complimentary attendance at a non-political fundraising event for a charitable cause is not considered a gift if the source of the complimentary admission is the entity/person hosting the event. If a third person or entity purchases a ticket or otherwise pays for admission, attendance is considered a gift. The value of which is the actual face value of admission.

### **Miscellaneous Gift Reminder:**

Any gift provided to a spouse or other family member is for the use or benefit of the member or employee (i.e., the spouse/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 must be added to the amount, if any, of the gift received by the member or employee.