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COOK COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

69 W. WASHINGTON STREET, SUITE 3040
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602
312/603-4304 OFFICE - 312/603-9988 FAX

OVERVIEW OF THE COOK COUNTY GIFT BAN

The Cook County Gift Ban prohibits County officials, appointees and employees from receiving gifts in circumstances that create a conflict of interest or appearance of impropriety. The Gift Ban generally bars any Cook County official, appointee or employee from soliciting or accepting any gift from any “prohibited source.” Ethics Ordinance § 2-574(a). It also bars any “prohibited source” from offering such a gift.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is a “gift”? The Ban defines “gift” very broadly to include any gratuity, discount, entertainment, hospitality, loan, forbearance, or anything having monetary value, including cash, food/drink, and honoraria for speaking engagements related to or attributable to one’s official position.

What is a “prohibited source”? This includes County vendors, prospective vendors, lobbyists, those regulated by County officials, or those seeking official action by the County.

Who is covered by the Gift Ban? The Gift Ban applies not only to County officials, appointees and employees, but also to their spouses and any immediate family members living in their households.

Are there exceptions? Yes. These exceptions include:

- Gifts from relatives or friends based on a personal relationship, unless you have reason to believe that the gift was provided because of your position with the County.
- Any item or items from any one prohibited source during any calendar year having a cumulative total value less than \$100.
- Food/beverages not exceeding \$75/person/day that are consumed on premises where purchased.
- Educational missions (such as conferences) or travel expenses for a meeting to discuss County business. These must be submitted to the Board of Ethics approval in advance.
- Items for which you pay the market value.
- Political contributions or activities associated with a fundraising event.
- **Check the Ethics Ordinance for a complete list of exemptions.**

What Should I Do If I Receive an Improper Gift?

- Return the prohibited gift to its source; or
- Donate the prohibited gift, or an amount equal to the gift's value, to a charity exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code;

– AND –

- File a gift disclosure form with the Board of Ethics within 10 days of receipt of the gift.

What Are the Consequences of Violating the Gift Ban? Employees found to have knowingly violated the Gift Ban may be subject to disciplinary action and fines up to \$5,000. Also, those doing business with the County who knowingly violate the Ordinance may have their contracts with the County voided.

What should I do if I have questions about the Gift Ban? Call the Cook County Board of Ethics at (312) 603-4304, or email us at cookcounty.ethics@cookcountyil.gov. We are here to help!