

RESTRICTIONS ON
PUBLIC SERVANTS —
PENAL CODE

“Public servant” shall mean a person elected, selected, appointed, employed, or otherwise designated as one of the following, even if the person has not yet qualified for office or assumed his or her duties:

1. An officer, employee, or agent of government; or
2. A candidate for nomination or election to public office.

Penal Code 1.07(a)(41)(A), (E)

Prohibited activities are covered by, but are not limited to, the following:

BRIBERY

1. A public servant shall not intentionally or knowingly offer, confer, agree to confer on another, solicit, accept, or agree to accept a benefit:
 - a. As consideration for the public servant’s decision, opinion, recommendation, vote, or other exercise of discretion as a public servant.
 - b. As consideration for a violation of a duty imposed on the public servant by law.
 - c. That is a political contribution as defined by Title 15 of the Election Code or an expenditure made and reported as a lobbying expense in accordance with Government Code, Chapter 305, if the benefit was offered, conferred, solicited, accepted, or agreed to pursuant to an express agreement to take or withhold a specific exercise of official discretion, if such exercise of official discretion would not have been taken or withheld but for the benefit.

“Benefit” means anything reasonably regarded as pecuniary gain or pecuniary advantage, including benefit to any other person in whose welfare the beneficiary has a direct and substantial interest.

Penal Code 36.01(3), 36.02

ILLEGAL GIFTS

2. A public servant who exercises discretion in connection with contracts, purchases, payments, claims, or other pecuniary transactions shall not solicit, accept, or agree to accept any benefit from a person the public servant knows is interested in or likely to become interested in any such transactions of a College District. *Penal Code 1.07(41)(A), (E), 36.08(d)*

A public servant who receives an unsolicited benefit that the public servant is prohibited from accepting under this section may donate the benefit to a governmental entity that has the

authority to accept the gift or may donate the benefit to a recognized tax exempt charitable organization formed for educational, religious, or scientific purposes. *Penal Code 36.08(i)*

EXCEPTIONS

“Illegal gifts to public servants” does not apply to:

- a. A fee prescribed by law to be received by a public servant or any other benefit to which the public servant is lawfully entitled or for which he or she gives legitimate consideration in a capacity other than as a public servant;
- b. A gift or other benefit conferred on account of kinship or a personal, professional, or business relationship independent of the official status of the recipient;
- c. A benefit to a public servant required to file a statement under Chapter 572, Government Code, or a report under Title 15, Election Code, that is derived from a function in honor or appreciation of the recipient if:
 - (1) The benefit and the source of any benefit in excess of \$50 is reported in the statement; and
 - (2) The benefit is used solely to defray the expenses that accrue in the performance of duties or activities in connection with the office which are nonreimbursable by the state or political subdivision;
- d. A political contribution as defined by Title 15, Election Code;
- e. An item with a value of less than \$50, excluding cash or a negotiable instrument as described by Business and Commerce Code 3.104;
- f. An item issued by a governmental entity that allows the use of property or facilities owned, leased, or operated by the governmental entity; or
- g. Food, lodging, transportation, or entertainment accepted as a guest and, if the donee is required by law to report those items, reported by the donee in accordance with that law.

Penal Code 36.10

HONORARIA AND
EXPENSES

3. A public servant commits a class A misdemeanor offense if he or she solicits, accepts, or agrees to accept an honorarium in consideration for services that the public servant would not have been requested to provide but for his or her official posi-

tion or duties. However, a public servant is not prohibited from accepting transportation and lodging expenses or meals in connection with a conference or similar event in which he or she renders services, such as addressing an audience or engaging in a seminar, to the extent those services are more than merely perfunctory. *Penal Code 36.07*

ABUSE OF OFFICE

4. A public servant shall not, with intent to obtain a benefit or with intent to harm or defraud another, intentionally or knowingly violate a law relating to the office or misuse College District property, services, personnel, or any other thing of value, belonging to a College District, that has come into his or her custody by virtue of his or her office or employment. *Penal Code 39.02(a)*

“Law relating to the office” means a law that specifically applies to a person acting in the capacity of a public servant and that directly or indirectly imposes a duty on the public servant or governs the conduct of the public servant. *Penal Code 39.01(1)*

“Misuse” means to deal with property contrary to:

- a. An agreement under which the public servant holds the property;
- b. A contract of employment or oath of office of a public servant;
- c. A law, including provisions of the General Appropriations Act specifically relating to government property, that prescribes the manner of custody or disposition of the property; or
- d. A limited purpose for which the property is delivered or received.

Penal Code 39.01(2)

NEPOTISM

5. Except as provided by law, a public official may not appoint a person to a position that is to be directly or indirectly compensated from public funds or fees of office if:
- a. The person is related to the public official by blood (consanguinity) within the third degree or by marriage (affinity) within the second degree [see below]; or
 - b. The public official holds the appointment or confirmation authority as a member of a local board and the person is related to another member of the Board by blood or marriage within a prohibited degree.

Gov't Code 573.002, 573.041; Atty. Gen. Op. JC-184 (2000) [See DBE]

DEFINITION OF
PUBLIC OFFICIAL

“Public official” shall mean:

- c. An officer of this state or of a College District, county, municipality, precinct, College District, or other political subdivision of this state; or
- d. An officer or member of a Board of this state or of a district, county, municipality, College District, or other political subdivision of this state.

Gov't Code 573.001(3)

The nepotism law governs the hiring of an individual, whether the individual is hired as an employee or an independent contractor. *Atty. Gen. Op. DM-76 (1992)*

A public official may not approve an account or draw or authorize the drawing of a warrant or order to pay the compensation of an ineligible individual if the official knows the individual is ineligible. *Gov't Code 573.083*

A Trustee of a Board that has delegated to a college president final authority for personnel selection remains subject to the nepotism provisions. *Atty. Gen. Op. GA-415 (2006)*

FORMER TRUSTEE
EMPLOYMENT

- 6. A Trustee of a College District may not accept employment with the College District until the first anniversary of the date the Trustee's membership on the Board ends. *Education Code 11.063*

INCOMPATIBILITY OF
OFFICE

- 7. One person may not occupy two legally incompatible offices. Offices are legally incompatible when the faithful and independent exercise of one would necessarily interfere with the faithful and independent exercise of the other. A person may not serve in one branch of government while exercising any powers properly attached to either of the other branches of government. *Texas Constitution, Art. II, Sec. 1; State v. Martin, 51 S.W.2d 815 (Tex. Civ. App. 1932); Thomas v. Abernathy County Line ISD, 290 S.W. 152 (Tex. Comm. App. 1927); Turner v. Trinity ISD, 700 S.W.2d 1 (Tex. Ct. App. 1983); Atty. Gen. Op. JM-634 (1987)*

TEXTBOOK
VIOLATIONS -
COMMISSIONS

- 8. A Trustee commits a class B misdemeanor offense if the Trustee receives any commission or rebate on any textbooks used in the schools with which the Trustee is associated. *Education Code 31.152(a)*

TEXTBOOK
VIOLATIONS —
CONFLICT

9. A Trustee commits a class B misdemeanor offense if the Trustee accepts a gift, favor, or service that:
- a. Is given to the person or the person's school;
 - b. Might reasonably tend to influence a Trustee in the selection of a textbook; and
 - c. Could not be lawfully purchased with funds from the state textbook fund.

"Gift, favor, or service" does not include staff development, in-service, or teacher training; or instructional materials, such as maps or worksheets, that convey information to the student or otherwise contribute to the learning process.

Education Code 31.152(b)–(d)