

THE VOICE OF ETHICS

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Where flowers bloom,
so does hope.
- Lady Bird Johnson

We are All in This Together

A message from the Ohio Ethics Commission Director Paul M. Nick

Like you, we at the Ethics Commission are finding our way during an unpredictable time this spring. We hope you and your loved ones are doing well and are feeling support through your family and friends and are encouraged by the unity of our state as we come together to fight a pandemic while sustaining our vital work as public sector officials and employees.

The Ethics Commission is steadfast in our effort to protect our employees and the public, including as much teleworking as possible during this national crisis, but also maintaining our commitment to the public.

Throughout this time, the Ethics Commission continues to:

- provide guidance under the Ethics Law to help those who are subject to the law better understand and comply with the Ohio Ethics law;
- accept investigative calls and conduct investigations as appropriate;
- administer the financial disclosure program to assist public servants in identifying potential conflicts of interest and to provide citizens greater awareness of the financial interests of the officials and employees who serve them; and
- deliver an ongoing education program; though live “classroom” speeches were cancelled or rescheduled during this time, the Education staff provides webinars, e-courses and communication regarding the Commission’s efforts.

As always, please feel free to visit our website or contact us at (614) 466-7090 if we can offer any additional information or support to you or your public entities. Thank you for staying connected with us through this newsletter and please know that even during turbulent times, you can count on your Ethics Commission.



Meet the Ethics Commission's General Counsel!

James Edward "Jed" Hood joined the Ohio Ethics Commission in December 2019 as General Counsel/Deputy Director. Let's get to know him better!

What did your life look like before joining the Ethics Commission staff?

I grew up in beautiful West Virginia, where I received my Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from West Liberty State College (now West Liberty University). I came to Central Ohio to pursue my law degree from The Capital University Law School and I've been in the Columbus area ever since. I am admitted to practice law in the State of Ohio and the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio.

Before coming to the Ethics Commission, I served as Reynoldsburg City Attorney for nearly 14 years. I was elected to serve as Director of the Department of Law and provided legal counsel to all city officials, departments, boards, and commissions.

What are your responsibilities at the Ohio Ethics Commission?

This job includes providing executive-level leadership and counsel in support of agency programs that require a high degree of specialized experience and knowledge. I also serve as appointed special assistant prosecutor and assist state and local prosecutors on ethics-related criminal referrals. Finally, I am a liaison for the Executive Director and members of the Commission between external agencies regarding legal, legislative, and investigative issues.

What attracted you to this type of work with the Ethics Law?

I believe in honesty, integrity, and duties to oneself and others. At an early age, I was taught to act with the highest character and integrity. The work the Commission does goes a long way to ensure to the citizens of Ohio, that public officials are held to strict standards to maintain integrity and impartiality in their public service. It is rewarding to play a small part in that. As a public official for the past 14 years, I tried to hold myself to the highest ethical standards, and in doing so, I would occasionally refer back to a lesson learned at an OEC seminar or seek guidance from the advisory section. I found the Commission staff to be pleasant, knowledgeable, and eager to help. When my term was ending, I was seeking a new challenge with an enjoyable workplace, shared values, and a commitment to serving others. I found that here with the Commission.

Outside your job, what do you enjoy doing?

No question, the greatest joys of my life are my wife, Leslie, and our two wonderful boys, Brady and Cooper. We pursue a dynamic life as a family; we are very active in our church and several volunteer organizations. We enjoy camping, hiking, fishing, and I also like coaching youth sports. I value my job and being an attorney very much, but at the end of the day, there is nothing better than spending time with my family.



Question of the Month: Receptions at Conferences

I am going to attend a conference as part of my public service soon. May I attend any receptions hosted by private sector parties while I am there?

In many circumstances, yes! In 2002, the Ethics Commission issued an Advisory Opinion stating that private sector parties may host or sponsor functions such as receptions and open houses at conferences. Such functions may include food and beverages without charge or lunches, seminars or dances that are open to all attendees.

The Advisory Opinion did note that private sector parties could underwrite such events provided that:

- The social function is hosted at an actual education or informational event, such as a conference;
- The meal, reception, or open house at the conference is of an ordinary, routine character; and
- All public officials and employees attending the conference are invited.



What do you mean by “at the conference?” Does the location of the reception matter?

Yes, it absolutely matters. The 2002 Advisory Opinion noted that the reception must be “at the conference” and that was reiterated in subsequent opinions.

In 2003, the Commission explained that even routine receptions to which all conference attendees were invited were prohibited when such events “will be held away from the conference site.” The Commission restated this again in a 2006 opinion: “It is especially important that the item or event is offered ‘at’ the conference. In other words, the meal or reception cannot be at a restaurant or other site.”

What if the reception is held off site and payment is required to attend?

Private sector parties are not prohibited from hosting an off-site event provided that all attendees pay an admission fee that accurately reflects an amount that covers the actual per-person cost of the event. Further, the reception hosts may not promise or give public officials and employees substantial discounts off the cost of the event.

What if I have more questions before I leave for the conference?

Please visit our website for more information! The advisory opinions referenced in this article can be viewed online. Just click below!



[Advisory Opinion 2002-02](#)



[2003 Informal Advisory Opinion](#)



[2006 Informal Advisory Opinion](#)



Ethics Education Update

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the Ohio Ethics Commission has rescheduled the May 5 “Regional Training” for August 13, 2020; the class will still be held in downtown Columbus. We conduct these classes for any public officials and employees who would like to know more about the Ohio Ethics Law and hope you that will be able to join us at one of these sessions.

We are currently keeping the May 20 Regional Training scheduled at Owens Community College on the calendar but will re-evaluate as we get closer to that date.

In the meantime, you may register for our fall classes at your convenience.

Cincinnati	Friday, October 2
Columbus	Tuesday, October 20
Columbus	Thursday, December 3

And if you can't make one of these sessions, don't forget that we also offer live monthly webinars and an annual e-course; both meet the requirement for annual Ethics Law training per the Governor's Executive Order for state officials and employees. They are approved for one-hour general CLE!

Thank you for your understanding and flexibility. We look forward to safely congregating once again to dialogue about this law in which we so strongly believe.



Ohio Ethics Commission
William Green Building
30 West Spring Street, L3
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2256
(614) 466-7090

www.ethics.ohio.gov