

Merom Brachman, *Chairman*
Mark A. Vander Laan, *Vice Chairman*
Megan C. Kelley
Mary M. Ross-Dolen
Christian H. Stickan
Elizabeth E. Tracy

Paul M. Nick
Executive Director



OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION
William Green Building
30 West Spring Street, L3
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2256
Telephone: (614) 466-7090
Fax: (614) 466-8368

www.ethics.ohio.gov

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For more information, contact:

Susan Willeke, (614) 466-7090
susan.willeke@ethics.ohio.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION ISSUES LEGAL DEFENSE FUNDS OPINION

At its meeting on January 22, 2026, the Ohio Ethics Commission approved [Formal Advisory Opinion 2026-01](#), which addresses the solicitation and acceptance of contributions to legal defense funds established by public officials or employees in civil cases.

The opinion clarifies that while Ohio Ethics Law does not categorically prohibit contributions to a legal defense fund, it does impose significant limitations. Specifically, a public official or employee may not solicit or accept contributions for a legal defense fund from any individual or entity that is doing business with, seeking to do business with, regulated by, or has matters pending before the public agency the official or employee serves.

“These restrictions are designed to prevent conflicts of interest and preserve public confidence in government decision-making,” said Paul Nick, Executive Director of the Ohio Ethics Commission. “Even in the context of a legal defense fund, public officials must avoid situations where contributors could appear to be seeking influence or favorable treatment.”

In addition, the restrictions extend to third parties. No person may solicit contributions on behalf of a public official’s legal defense fund from prohibited sources.

The opinion further states that a public official is not prohibited from using his or her official title in connection with a solicitation for legal defense funds. However, the solicitation must not suggest that the public agency endorses or sanctions the legal defense fund. This includes prohibitions on using a public agency’s seal, letterhead, or other official insignia in connection with such solicitations.

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