

# ETHICS REMINDERS

## *Going to that event for free?*

**Things to think about when the price of admission is on someone else's dime!**

### Overview

What if you are offered complimentary admission to a conference or some other kind of event that you would otherwise have to pay to attend? Can you accept it? Or should you say “thanks, but I’ll pay my own way”?

The gift rules generally prohibit a State employee from accepting any gift exceeding \$15 in value from anyone that does business or has a relationship with their agency (an “interested source”). There are, however, several gift exclusions that may apply, the most common of which is for complimentary attendance at a “widely attended event.”

If the event you’ve been invited to attend for free meets the criteria for a “widely-attended event”, then you could accept the offer of complimentary admission, even if it is from an “interested source.” Whether a particular event qualifies for the “widely attended event” exclusion depends on whether at least 25 people outside your agency were invited to attend the event and it relates to your official duties or responsibilities.

### What should you do if you’re offered free admission to an event and you want to go?

- **Contact your agency’s Ethics Officer in advance.** (Members of the State Legislature and legislative employees should contact the Legislative Ethics Commission for specific guidance.)
- **Consider the ethical standards imposed by Public Officers Law § 74.** Your agency’s Ethics Officer and JCOPE attorneys can help you work through any potential conflict of interest issues that may arise.

*Violating Public Officers Law § 73, including the gift ban provisions, can result in a maximum fine of \$40,000 and the value of any gift, compensation, or benefit received in connection with such violation, and is punishable as a class A misdemeanor.*



### *Remember:*

The Joint Commission on Public Ethics periodically releases Ethics Reminders. Each reminder is a brief and easy to understand synopsis of the laws and rules under the Commission’s jurisdiction. Ethics Reminders are issued to assist those subject to the Commission’s jurisdiction in understanding and complying with their obligations under the law.