

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2474

As Passed House:

February 10, 1998

Title: An act relating to gifts under ethics in public service laws.

Brief Description: Clarifying "gifts" for purposes of ethics in public service.

Sponsors: Representatives Pennington, Appelwick, O'Brien, Dunshee and Kessler; by request of Legislative Ethics Board.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 1/28/98, 2/3/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/98, 96-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Dunshee; Smith; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: John Carmichael (786-7093).

Background: The Ethics in Public Service Act prohibits state officers and employees from seeking or accepting certain gifts. Generally, state officers and employees are not allowed to accept gifts worth more than \$50. The value of gifts given to an officer's or employee's family member is included when determining if the \$50 limit has been exceeded, unless the family member has an independent relationship with the donor.

The act excludes several items from the definition of "gift." Items from family members or friends that are clearly not designed to gain influence are excluded from the definition. Another exclusion allows state officers and employees to accept payment of enrollment fees and reasonable travel expenses to attend seminars or educational programs. The programs must be sponsored by a nonprofit professional, educational, or trade association or charitable institution.

Summary of Bill: The value of gifts given to the guest of a state officer or employee is counted in the same way as gifts given to family members.

State officers or employees may accept enrollment fees and reasonable travel expenses for seminars and educational programs sponsored by governmental associations or institutions, in addition to programs sponsored by nonprofit associations or institutions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The bill clarifies the definition of "gift."

Testimony Against: The bill may have unintended consequences for officials traveling overseas on trade missions. Lawmakers should not accept any gifts, not even a cup of coffee.

Testified: Representative John Pennington, prime sponsor; Tony Cook, Legislative Ethics Board, and Michelle Burkheimer, Office of the Secretary of State (all pro). Sherry Bockwinkel, (CLEAN), Citizens for Leaders with Ethics and Accountability Now (con).