

SUBJECT: HIRING OF SPOUSE OF DISTRICT COMMISSIONER

SUMMARY: The spouse of a special purpose district commissioner would not be prohibited from being hired, provided the commissioner/spouse takes no action regarding the hiring and has no supervisory or management authority over the spouse.

QUESTION: The spouse of a special purpose district commissioner has been hired on a part-time basis to do the secretarial and accounting work. Previously, she had been doing this work on a volunteer basis, however, the commissioners felt she should receive some compensation for her services. Her spouse abstained when the vote was taken to offer the position to her. There is no contract, just a verbal agreement between the commission and the requestor.

DISCUSSION:

This opinion is rendered in response to a letter dated April 30, 1992 requesting an opinion from the State Ethics Commission. The Commission's jurisdiction is limited to the applicability of the Ethics, Government Accountability, and Campaign Reform Act of 1991 (Act No. 248 of 1991; Section 8-13-100 et. seq., as amended, 1976 Code of Laws). This opinion does not supersede any other statutory or regulatory restrictions or procedures which may apply to this situation.

Section 8-13-750 provides:

- (A) No public official, public member, or public employee may cause the employment, appointment, promotion, transfer, or advancement of a family member to a state or local office or position in which the public official, public member, or public employee supervises or manages.
- (B) A public official, public member, or public employee may not participate in an action relating to the discipline of the public official's, public member's, or public employee's family member.

Family member is defined in Section 8-13-100(15):

"Family member" means an individual who is:

- (a) the spouse, parent, brother, sister, child, mother-in-law, father-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandparent, or grandchild; or
- (b) a member of the individual's immediate family.

Immediate family is defined in Section 8-13-100(18):

"Immediate family" means:

- (a) a child residing in ... the household;
- (b) a spouse ...; or
- (c) an individual ... claimed as a dependent for income tax purposes.

The Commission addressed a similar issue in Advisory Opinion AO92-096 in which a county councilman was advised that a family member could be hired by the Agriculture Fair Board since there was no direct management or supervision of the employee by the Councilman. In Advisory Opinion A092-190, the Commission advised that the spouse of a director of a technical education center could be hired by the center since he had no direct management or supervision over the spouse. The Commission therefore advises that family members may be employed within an agency, so long as the manager or supervisor exercises no direct management or supervision and takes no other action to affect personnel actions regarding the family member. A spouse may be employed in the agency so long as the position is not under the management or supervision of the other spouse.

If allowed to be employed by Section 8-13-750, the Commission calls attention to the provisions of Section 8-13-700(B) which provides in part as follows:

- (B) No public official, public member, or public employee may make, participate in making, or in any way attempt to use his office, membership, or employment to influence a governmental decision in which he, a member of his immediate family, an individual with whom he is associated, or a business with which he is associated has an economic interest. A public official, public member, or public employee who, in the discharge of his official responsibilities, is required to take an action or make a decision which affects an economic interest of himself, a member of his immediate family, an individual with whom he is associated, or a business with which he is associated shall:
 - (1) prepare a written statement describing the matter requiring action or decisions and the nature of his potential conflict of interest with respect to the action or decision;
 - * * *
 - (3) if he is a public employee, he shall furnish a copy of the statement to his superior, if any, who shall assign the matter to another employee who does not have a potential conflict of interest. If he has no immediate superior, he shall take the action prescribed by the State Ethics Commission.