

ETHICS

To: Gonzales, Daniel (GSA)
Subject: Request for opinion

Mr. Gonzales,

Christina Prkic and I discussed your request for opinion that entails county providers paying for you and one of your staff to attend a national conference. Moreover, you asked whether it would be ethical for a provider to cover the travel expenses of a couple of your staff to visit the provider's home office.

Currently, there is no policy in effect that would prohibit the providers from underwriting the costs of these trips, but both scenarios raise serious questions. In fact, I have asked the County Commission to consider adopting a resolution that would ban vendors/providers from paying for this type of travel. I understand that Commissioner Carey-Shuler is interested in sponsoring the legislation.

In any event, my thinking on this matter is that if the county believes such travel benefits the county, then the county ought to pay for it. It creates the perception of bias and favoritism when vendors cover the costs of these trips, particularly in cases where an item is out for bid.

Please keep in mind, however, the under the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance, which the Ethics Commission interprets and enforces, no conflict exists unless the county employee who accepted these trips acted in an improper manner to benefit those companies that paid for the travel.

Feel free to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Thank you,

Robert Meyers, Executive Director

INQ 03-53

Prkic, Christina (COE)

From: Gonzales, Daniel (GSA)
Sent: Tuesday, June 17, 2003 11:47 AM
To: Prkic, Christina (COE)
Subject: Opinion

Christina

Here is the scenario I wish to obtain an opinion on from your office.

We are the administrators of the deferred compensation program for the County. We have two providers, NRS & ICMA-RC, the program is completely funded by employee money and the assets are over \$500 million. Through out the year there are a number of educational conferences regarding deferred compensation and other tax deferred savings plans for government employees. However, the largest conference is hosted every Fall by the National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators (NAGDCA). In the past few years due to budgetary constraints, the County has only attended one conference. This year, each of our providers have offered to pay for one of my staff members and myself to attend the conference. The cost including travel, meals, hotel, conference dues, etc. is approximately \$2000 - \$3000 per person.

The second item I need a ruling on is similar to the previous one. Only in this circumstance the provider offered to fly a couple of staff members up to their home office to see there new service center and show us how their operation worked and served us and the employees of Miami-Dade County.

Would it be a conflict of interest and/or unethical to accept these offers? Would the opinion be different if the County was currently out to bid for the Deferred Compensation Program?

Thanks for your help,

Daniel J. Gonzales
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