

Chapter 42.23 RCW
CODE OF ETHICS FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICERS—CONTRACT INTERESTS

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RCW 42.23.010 Declaration of purpose. It is the purpose and intent of this chapter to revise and make uniform the laws of this state concerning the transaction of business by municipal officers, as defined in chapter 268, Laws of 1961, in conflict with the proper performance of their duties in the public interest; and to promote the efficiency of local government by prohibiting certain instances and areas of conflict while at the same time sanctioning, under sufficient controls, certain other instances and areas of conflict wherein the private interest of the municipal officer is deemed to be only remote, to the end that, without sacrificing necessary public responsibility and enforceability in areas of significant and clearly conflicting interests, the selection of municipal officers may be made from a wider group of responsible citizens of the communities which they are called upon to serve. [1961 c 268 s 2.]

RCW 42.23.020 Definitions. For the purpose of chapter 268, Laws of 1961:

(1) "Municipality" shall include all counties, cities, towns, districts, and other municipal corporations and quasi municipal corporations organized under the laws of the state of Washington;

(2) "Municipal officer" and "officer" shall each include all elected and appointed officers of a municipality, together with all deputies and assistants of such an officer, and all persons exercising or undertaking to exercise any of the powers or functions of a municipal officer;

(3) "Contract" shall include any contract, sale, lease or purchase;

(4) "Contracting party" shall include any person, partnership, association, cooperative, corporation, or other business entity which is a party to a contract with a municipality. [1961 c 268 s 3.]

RCW 42.23.030 Interest in contracts prohibited—Exceptions. No municipal officer shall be beneficially interested, directly or indirectly, in any contract which may be made by, through or under the supervision of such officer, in whole or in part, or which may be made for the benefit of his or her office, or accept, directly or indirectly, any compensation, gratuity or reward in connection with such contract from any other person beneficially interested therein. This section shall not apply in the following cases:

(1) The furnishing of electrical, water or other utility services by a municipality engaged in the business of furnishing such services, at the same rates and on the same terms as are available to the public generally;

(2) The designation of public depositaries for municipal funds;

(3) The publication of legal notices required by law to be published by any municipality, upon competitive bidding or at rates not higher than prescribed by law for members of the general public;

(4) The designation of a school director as clerk or as both clerk and purchasing agent of a school district;

(5) The employment of any person by a municipality for unskilled day labor at wages not exceeding \$1,000 in any calendar month. The exception provided in this subsection does not apply to a county with a population of 125,000 or more, a city with a population of more than 1,500, an irrigation district encompassing more than 50,000 acres, or a first-class school district;

(6) (a) The letting of any other contract in which the total amount received under the contract or contracts by the municipal officer or the municipal officer's business does not exceed \$3,000 in any calendar month.

(b) However, in the case of a particular officer of a second-class city or town, or a noncharter optional code city, or a member of any county fair board in a county which has not established a county purchasing department pursuant to RCW 36.32.240, the total amount of such contract or contracts authorized in this subsection (6) may exceed \$3,000 in any calendar month but shall not exceed \$36,000 in any calendar year.

(c) (i) In the case of a particular officer of a rural public hospital district, as defined in RCW 70.44.460, the total amount of such contract or contracts authorized in this subsection (6) may exceed \$1,500 in any calendar month, but shall not exceed \$24,000 in any calendar year.

(ii) At the beginning of each calendar year, beginning with the 2006 calendar year, the legislative authority of the rural public hospital district shall increase the calendar year limitation described in this subsection (6) (c) by an amount equal to the dollar amount for the previous calendar year multiplied by the change in the consumer price index as of the close of the 12-month period ending December 31st of that previous calendar year. If the new dollar amount established under this subsection is not a multiple of \$10, the increase shall be rounded to the next lowest multiple of \$10. As used in this subsection, "consumer price index" means the consumer price index compiled by the bureau of labor statistics, United States

department of labor for the state of Washington. If the bureau of labor statistics develops more than one consumer price index for areas within the state, the index covering the greatest number of people, covering areas exclusively within the boundaries of the state, and including all items shall be used.

(d) The exceptions provided in this subsection (6) do not apply to:

- (i) A sale or lease by the municipality as the seller or lessor;
- (ii) The letting of any contract by a county with a population of 125,000 or more, a city with a population of 5,000 or more, or an irrigation district encompassing more than 50,000 acres; or
- (iii) Contracts for legal services, except for reimbursement of expenditures.

(e) The municipality shall maintain a list of all contracts that are awarded under this subsection (6). The list must be made available for public inspection and copying;

(7) The leasing by a port district as lessor of port district property to a municipal officer or to a contracting party in which a municipal officer may be beneficially interested, if in addition to all other legal requirements, a board of three disinterested appraisers and the superior court in the county where the property is situated finds that all terms and conditions of such lease are fair to the port district and are in the public interest. The appraisers must be appointed from members of the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers by the presiding judge of the superior court;

(8) The letting of any employment contract for the driving of a school bus in a second-class school district if the terms of such contract are commensurate with the pay plan or collective bargaining agreement operating in the district;

(9) The letting of an employment contract as a substitute teacher or substitute educational aide to an officer of a second-class school district that has 300 or fewer full-time equivalent students, if the terms of the contract are commensurate with the pay plan or collective bargaining agreement operating in the district and the board of directors has found, consistent with the written policy under RCW 28A.330.240, that there is a shortage of substitute teachers in the school district;

(10) The letting of any employment contract to the spouse of an officer of a school district, when such contract is solely for employment as a substitute teacher for the school district. This exception applies only if the terms of the contract are commensurate with the pay plan or collective bargaining agreement applicable to all district employees and the board of directors has found, consistent with the written policy under RCW 28A.330.240, that there is a shortage of substitute teachers in the school district;

(11) The letting of any employment contract to the spouse of an officer of a school district if the spouse was under contract as a certificated or classified employee with the school district before the date in which the officer assumes office and the terms of the contract are commensurate with the pay plan or collective bargaining agreement operating in the district. However, in a second-class school district that has less than 200 full-time equivalent students enrolled at the start of the school year as defined in RCW 28A.150.203, the spouse is not required to be under contract as a certificated or classified employee before the date on which the officer assumes office;

(12) The authorization, approval, or ratification of any employment contract with the spouse of a public hospital district commissioner if: (a) The spouse was employed by the public hospital district before the date the commissioner was initially elected; (b) the terms of the contract are commensurate with the pay plan or collective bargaining agreement operating in the district for similar employees; (c) the interest of the commissioner is disclosed to the board of commissioners and noted in the official minutes or similar records of the public hospital district prior to the letting or continuation of the contract; and (d) and the commissioner does not vote on the authorization, approval, or ratification of the contract or any conditions in the contract.

A municipal officer may not vote in the authorization, approval, or ratification of a contract in which he or she is beneficially interested even though one of the exemptions allowing the awarding of such a contract applies. The interest of the municipal officer must be disclosed to the governing body of the municipality and noted in the official minutes or similar records of the municipality before the formation of the contract. [2023 c 153 s 1; 2020 c 69 s 1; 2007 c 298 s 1; 2006 c 121 s 1; 2005 c 114 s 1; 1999 c 261 s 2; 1997 c 98 s 1; 1996 c 246 s 1. Prior: 1994 c 81 s 77; 1994 c 20 s 1; 1993 c 308 s 1; 1991 c 363 s 120; 1990 c 33 s 573; 1989 c 263 s 1; 1983 1st ex.s. c 44 s 1; prior: 1980 c 39 s 1; 1979 ex.s. c 4 s 1; 1971 ex.s. c 242 s 1; 1961 c 268 s 4.]

Findings—Intent—1999 c 261: "The legislature finds that:

(1) The current statutes pertaining to municipal officers' beneficial interest in contracts are quite confusing and have resulted in some inadvertent violations of the law.

(2) The dollar thresholds for many of the exemptions have not been changed in over thirty-five years, and the restrictions apply to the total amount of the contract instead of the portion of the contract that pertains to the business operated by the municipal officer.

(3) The confusion existing over these current statutes discourages some municipalities from accessing some efficiencies available to them.

Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to clarify the statutes pertaining to municipal officers and contracts and to enact reasonable protections against inappropriate conflicts of interest." [1999 c 261 s 1.]

Purpose—Captions not law—1991 c 363: See notes following RCW 2.32.180.

Purpose—Statutory references—Severability—1990 c 33: See RCW 28A.900.100 through 28A.900.102.

Severability—1989 c 263: "If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1989 c 263 s 3.]

Severability—1980 c 39: "If any provision of this amendatory act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the

remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected." [1980 c 39 s 3.]

RCW 42.23.040 Remote interests. A municipal officer is not interested in a contract, within the meaning of RCW 42.23.030, if the officer has only a remote interest in the contract and the extent of the interest is disclosed to the governing body of the municipality of which the officer is an officer and noted in the official minutes or similar records of the municipality prior to the formation of the contract, and thereafter the governing body authorizes, approves, or ratifies the contract in good faith by a vote of its membership sufficient for the purpose without counting the vote or votes of the officer having the remote interest. As used in this section "remote interest" means:

- (1) That of a nonsalaried officer of a nonprofit corporation;
- (2) That of an employee or agent of a contracting party where the compensation of such employee or agent consists entirely of fixed wages or salary;
- (3) That of a landlord or tenant of a contracting party;
- (4) That of a holder of less than one percent of the shares of a corporation or cooperative which is a contracting party.

None of the provisions of this section are applicable to any officer interested in a contract, even if the officer's interest is only remote, if the officer influences or attempts to influence any other officer of the municipality of which he or she is an officer to enter into the contract. [1999 c 261 s 3; 1961 c 268 s 5.]

Findings—Intent—1999 c 261: See note following RCW 42.23.030.

RCW 42.23.050 Prohibited contracts void—Penalties for violation of chapter. Any contract made in violation of the provisions of this chapter is void and the performance thereof, in full or in part, by a contracting party shall not be the basis of any claim against the municipality. Any officer violating the provisions of this chapter is liable to the municipality of which he or she is an officer for a penalty in the amount of five hundred dollars, in addition to such other civil or criminal liability or penalty as may otherwise be imposed upon the officer by law.

In addition to all other penalties, civil or criminal, the violation by any officer of the provisions of this chapter may be grounds for forfeiture of his or her office. [1999 c 261 s 4; 1961 c 268 s 6.]

Findings—Intent—1999 c 261: See note following RCW 42.23.030.

RCW 42.23.060 Local charter controls chapter. If any provision of this chapter conflicts with any provision of a city or county charter, or with any provision of a city-county charter, the charter shall control if it contains stricter requirements than this chapter. The provisions of this chapter shall be considered as minimum standards to be enforced by municipalities. [1999 c 261 s 5; 1961 c 268 s 16.]

Findings—Intent—1999 c 261: See note following RCW 42.23.030.

RCW 42.23.070 Prohibited acts. (1) No municipal officer may use his or her position to secure special privileges or exemptions for himself, herself, or others.

(2) No municipal officer may, directly or indirectly, give or receive or agree to receive any compensation, gift, reward, or gratuity from a source except the employing municipality, for a matter connected with or related to the officer's services as such an officer unless otherwise provided for by law.

(3) No municipal officer may accept employment or engage in business or professional activity that the officer might reasonably expect would require or induce him or her by reason of his or her official position to disclose confidential information acquired by reason of his or her official position.

(4) No municipal officer may disclose confidential information gained by reason of the officer's position, nor may the officer otherwise use such information for his or her personal gain or benefit. [1994 c 154 s 121.]

Effective date—1994 c 154: See RCW 42.52.904.

RCW 42.23.900 Construction—Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships—2009 c 521. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms spouse, marriage, marital, husband, wife, widow, widower, next of kin, and family shall be interpreted as applying equally to state registered domestic partnerships or individuals in state registered domestic partnerships as well as to marital relationships and married persons, and references to dissolution of marriage shall apply equally to state registered domestic partnerships that have been terminated, dissolved, or invalidated, to the extent that such interpretation does not conflict with federal law. Where necessary to implement chapter 521, Laws of 2009, gender-specific terms such as husband and wife used in any statute, rule, or other law shall be construed to be gender neutral, and applicable to individuals in state registered domestic partnerships. [2009 c 521 s 104.]