



## Holiday Season Ethics Guide

This is the time of year when gift baskets and other holiday gifts begin to arrive in some state offices. Although the holidays may be a time for giving, state employees are reminded that they must not accept gifts from vendors, contractors, or anyone they regulate. This means you must not accept gifts from anyone seeking a license or permit from your agency, anyone who has (or might have) a contested case before your agency, or anyone who may be subject to fines or penalties by your agency.



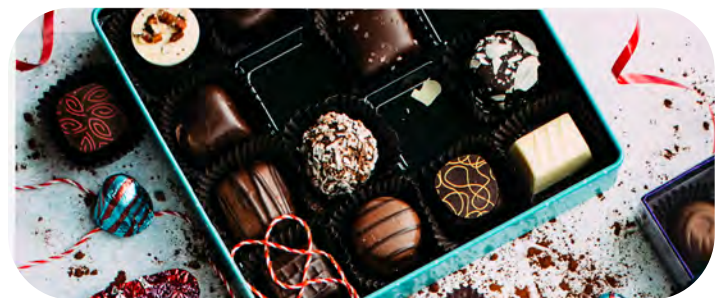
You can contact us for quick, confidential, and free advice at [ethics@hawaiiethics.org](mailto:ethics@hawaiiethics.org) or (808) 587-0460. In the meantime, here are answers to some common holiday questions:

- Q** What should I do if someone shows up with a gift, but I know we can't accept it? It seems rude not to accept a holiday gift.
- A** Tell the person that you really appreciate the thought, but that under state ethics rules, you're not allowed to accept the gift.
- Q** Someone left a gift here, but I shouldn't have accepted it. What should I do?
- A** Call us! We may advise that you return it to the person who gave it to you, or we may advise that you donate it to a charitable organization (like a homeless shelter). Either way, we'll help you figure out what to do.
- Q** I got a gift basket from a contractor. Can I just share it with the office? What if I use it as a prize for our office's holiday party?
- A** No. It's still a prohibited gift, and sharing it with the whole office or using it for your office holiday party doesn't make it okay.

- Q** What should I do if someone shows up with a gift, but I don't know whether we can accept it?
- A** Contact us for advice, or politely decline the gift. Don't worry if the person already left your office: you can still call us for advice.
- Q** I'm a teacher, and students/parents sometimes give me small gifts at the holidays, like cookies.
- A** Yes, teachers, social workers, and other social services providers can accept small, unsolicited tokens of appreciation from students/clients.
- Q** Can I accept prizes/gifts from holiday parties and raffles?
- A** It depends. If it's your state office's holiday party, then probably yes – but whoever's organizing the party should contact us for advice on where the prizes are coming from, because soliciting donations for prizes – or accepting prizes from vendors, contractors, licensees, or permittees – can pose serious ethics issues. If you're invited to a private company's holiday party because of your state position, contact us for advice before attending. Going to your spouse's office's party is probably okay, but call us for advice if that company does business with your agency.

### For more information about gifts, see our Quick Guide on Gifts at

<http://bit.ly/ethics-gifts>. If you'd like to read more about holiday-season ethics issues, see <http://bit.ly/ethics-holidays> and <http://bit.ly/ethics-sharing-gifts> (page 2).



### Any other questions?

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