

Advisory Opinion 2025-4

Response to a Request for an Advisory Opinion from Anastasia M. Childs (September 18, 2025)

The Legislative Ethics Committee, at its meeting on September 18, 2025, considered a request for an advisory opinion from Anastasia Childs, Executive Administration Director in the Office of the Speaker of the House, seeking guidance from the Committee with respect to a GoFundMe fundraising campaign set up to assist her with expenses resulting from a fire which caused extensive damage to her home.

In her letter to the Committee, dated September 3, 2025, Ms. Childs stated that “the fire resulted in the complete loss of everything within my home and our displacement to temporary housing.” Following the loss, she said, a couple of her coworkers set up a GoFundMe fundraising campaign to help pay for her expenses. She said that between the GoFundMe website and separate cash donations a total of \$4070 was raised, of that amount \$70 came from personal friends, but most donations came from legislators and legislative staff, with one donation from a lobbyist.

Relevant Provisions of Statute and the Ethics Guidelines

14-C:1 Purpose. – The purpose of this chapter is to ensure that persons charged with carrying out the duties and activities of the legislative branch of state government do so in an atmosphere that supports the independent judgment of such persons and minimizes the opportunity for inappropriate influence by persons or organizations subject to or likely to become subject to or interested in any matter or action pending in the legislative branch...

14-C:3 Prohibition on Gifts; Duty to Report. –

I. It shall be unlawful to knowingly give any gift as defined in this chapter, directly or indirectly, to any legislator or legislative employee.

III. (a) It shall be unlawful for any legislator or legislative employee to solicit or to knowingly accept, directly or indirectly, any gift, as defined in this chapter, or to fail to meet the reporting requirements of this chapter.

14-C:2 Definitions. – In this chapter:

IV. (a) "Gift" means:

(1) Money in any amount

(b) Notwithstanding subparagraph (a), "gift" shall not include:

(6) Money in any form... where the donor's act of giving is purely private and personal in nature and the money ... would have been given and received even if the person were not a legislator or legislative employee.

Ethics Guidelines Section 8, Legislative Employee Code of Conduct

II. Prohibited Activities

(c) A legislative employee or officer shall not accept any gift from givers who wish to influence the work activities of the employee or officer.

(g) A legislative employee or officer shall not accept or solicit anything of value for the private benefit of the employee or officer, or the employee's or officer's immediate family or household member under circumstances in which it can be reasonably inferred that the legislative employee's or officer's independence of judgment is impaired or is intended as a reward for any official action.

III. Permitted Activities.

(g) Acceptance of anything permitted to be accepted pursuant to RSA 14-C.

Committee Analysis

In completing its consideration, the Committee reviewed the written request submitted by Ms. Childs, viewed the GoFundMe site set up to raise funds for her, and received testimony from Ms. Childs and Aaron Goulette, House Chief of Staff.

RSA 14-C, commonly known as the "gift law," generally prohibits the giving of gifts to legislators, legislative officers and legislative employees and prohibits legislators, legislative officers and legislative employees from accepting gifts, as defined in the statute. However, the statute lists fifteen exceptions to this general definition. One exception from the definition of gift is "money in any form... where the donor's act of giving is purely private and personal in nature and the money ... would have been given and received even if the person were not a legislator or legislative employee." [RSA 14-C:2, IV(b)(6)]

The question is whether the donations made to the GoFundMe website were given with the intention of influencing Ms. Childs in her official capacity as a legislative employee. The Committee found that the GoFundMe fundraising campaign was open to anyone who wanted to donate to it and that all but one of the donations made were by friends, fellow legislative employees and legislators. The website asked for donations for the purpose of "helping Anastasia get back on her feet," and stated that "the money raised will help with the costs of replacing the items lost, buying essentials, and covering the costs associated with overcoming this tragic event."

The Committee recognizes that the General Court is a workplace where personal relationships develop among staff, legislators, and staff and legislators. In such an environment, it is understandable that individuals would want to help their colleagues in times of need when they incur personal tragedies, or to celebrate life events like weddings, birthdays, baby showers, and retirements. When a monetary donation is made by a friend or colleague for such an event, the donor's act in giving can generally be considered "purely private and personal in nature."

However, a donation from an individual who has a financial interest in any official policy decisions that the recipient is authorized to make would generally not qualify for the statutory exception. There was one donation to Ms. Childs' fund from a lobbyist which concerned the Committee. However, Ms. Childs testified that she knows the lobbyist from a past association and believes the contribution was made from friendship, not as an effort to influence her decisions on any legislative activities in her official capacity as a legislative employee.

Conclusion

The money received by Ms. Childs is exempt from the definition of "gift" as defined by RSA 14-C:2, IV, (a). The Committee found no indication that the donations to the GoFundMe website were intended to influence Ms. Childs in her official capacity. She qualifies for the exemption found in RSA 14-C:2, IV, (b), (6). Donations made to the fund, and Ms. Child's acceptance of the funds, do not constitute a violation of applicable statutes or the Ethics Guidelines.

We appreciate the opportunity to be of assistance.

Honorable Edward M. Gordon, Chairman
Honorable Donna Sytek, Vice Chairman
Senator Cindy Rosenwald
Senator Ruth Ward
Representative Bob Lynn (Not present and did not participate.)
Representative Catherine A. Rombeau
Honorable David W. Hess

For the Committee,
Edward M. Gordon
Chairman

[Vote: 6-0]