

§ 2635.402 Disqualifying financial interests.

(a) *Statutory prohibition.* An employee is prohibited by criminal statute, 18 U.S.C. 208(a), from participating personally and substantially in an official capacity in any particular matter in which, to his knowledge, he or any person whose interests are imputed to him under this statute has a financial interest, if the particular matter will have a direct and predictable effect on that interest.

NOTE: Standards applicable when seeking non-Federal employment are contained in subpart F of this part and, if followed, will ensure that an employee does not violate 18 U.S.C. 208(a) or this section when he is negotiating for or has an arrangement concerning future employment. In all other cases where the employee's participation would violate 18 U.S.C. 208(a), an employee shall disqualify himself from participation in the matter in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section or obtain a waiver or determine that an exemption applies, as described in paragraph (d) of this section.

(b) *Definitions.* For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) *Direct and predictable effect.* (i) A particular matter will have a direct effect on a financial interest if there is a close causal link between any decision or action to be taken in the matter and any expected effect of the matter on the financial interest. An effect may be direct even though it does not occur immediately. A particular matter will not have a direct effect on a financial interest, however, if the chain of causation is attenuated or is contingent upon the occurrence of events that are speculative or that are independent of, and unrelated to, the matter. A particular matter that has an effect on a financial interest only as a consequence of its effects on the general economy does not have a direct effect within the meaning of this subpart.

(ii) A particular matter will have a predictable effect if there is a real, as opposed to a speculative possibility that the matter will affect the financial interest. It is not necessary, however, that the magnitude of the gain or loss be known, and the dollar amount of the gain or loss is immaterial.

NOTE: If a particular matter involves a specific party or parties, generally the matter will at most only have a direct and predictable effect, for purposes of this subpart, on a financial interest of the employee in or with a party, such as the employee's interest by virtue of owning stock. There may, however, be some situations in which, under the above standards, a particular matter will have a direct and predictable effect on an employee's financial interests in or with a nonparty. For example, if a party is a corporation, a particular matter may also have a direct and predictable effect on an employee's financial interests through ownership of stock in an affiliate, parent, or subsidiary of that party. Similarly, the disposition of a protest against the award of a contract to a particular company may also have a direct and predictable effect on an employee's financial interest in another company listed as a subcontractor in the proposal of one of the competing offerors.

Example 1: An employee of the National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health has just been asked to serve on the technical evaluation panel to review proposals for a new library computer search system. DEF Computer Corporation, a closely held company in which he and his wife own a majority of the stock, has submitted a proposal. Because award of the systems contract to DEF or to any other offeror will have a direct and predictable effect on both his and his wife's financial interests, the employee cannot participate on the technical evaluation team unless his disqualification has been waived.

Example 2: Upon assignment to the technical evaluation panel, the employee in the preceding example finds that DEF Computer Corporation has not submitted a proposal. Rather, LMN Corp., with which DEF competes for private sector business, is one of the six offerors. The employee is not disqualified from serving on the technical evaluation panel. Any effect on the employee's financial interests as a result of the agency's decision to award or not award the systems contract to LMN would be at most indirect and speculative.

(2) *Imputed interests.* For purposes of 18 U.S.C. 208(a) and this subpart, the financial interests of the following persons will serve to disqualify an employee to the same extent as if they were the employee's own interests:

- (i) The employee's spouse;
- (ii) The employee's minor child;
- (iii) The employee's general partner;
- (iv) An organization or entity which the employee serves as officer, director, trustee, general partner or employee; and

(v) A person with whom the employee is negotiating for or has an arrangement concerning prospective employment. (Employees who are seeking other employment should refer to and comply with the standards in subpart F of this part).

Example 1: An employee of the Department of Education serves without compensation on the board of directors of Kinder World, Inc., a nonprofit corporation that engages in good works. Even though her personal financial interests will not be affected, the employee must disqualify herself from participating in the review of a grant application submitted by Kinder World. Award or denial of the grant will affect the financial interests of Kinder World and its financial interests are imputed to her as a member of its board of directors.

Example 2: The spouse of an employee of the Food and Drug Administration has obtained a position with a well established biomedical research company. The company has developed an artificial limb for which it is seeking FDA approval and the employee would ordinarily be asked to participate in the FDA's review and approval process. The spouse is a salaried employee of the company and has no direct ownership interest in the company. Nor does she have an indirect ownership interest, as would be the case, for example, if she were participating in a pension plan that held stock in the company. Her position with the company is such that the granting or withholding of FDA approval will not have a direct and predictable effect on her salary or on her continued employment with the company. Since the FDA approval process will not affect his spouse's financial interests, the employee is not disqualified under § 2635.402 from participating in that process. Nevertheless, the financial interests of the spouse's employer may be disqualifying under the impartiality principle, as implemented at § 2635.502.

(3) *Particular matter.* The term particular matter encompasses only matters that involve deliberation, decision, or action that is focused upon the interests of specific persons, or a discrete and identifiable class of persons. Such a matter is covered by this subpart even if it does not involve formal parties and may include governmental action such as legislation or policy-making that is narrowly focused on the interests of such a discrete and identifiable class of persons. The term particular matter, however, does not extend to the consideration or adoption of broad policy options that are directed to the interests of a large and

diverse group of persons. The particular matters covered by this subpart include a judicial or other proceeding, application, request for a ruling or other determination, contract, claim, controversy, charge, accusation or arrest.

Example 1: The Internal Revenue Service's amendment of its regulations to change the manner in which depreciation is calculated is not a particular matter, nor is the Social Security Administration's consideration of changes to its appeal procedures for disability claimants.

Example 2: Consideration by the Interstate Commerce Commission of regulations establishing safety standards for trucks on interstate highways involves a particular matter.

(4) *Personal and substantial.* To participate personally means to participate directly. It includes the direct and active supervision of the participation of a subordinate in the matter. To participate substantially means that the employee's involvement is of significance to the matter. Participation may be substantial even though it is not determinative of the outcome of a particular matter. However, it requires more than official responsibility, knowledge, perfunctory involvement, or involvement on an administrative or peripheral issue. A finding of substantiality should be based not only on the effort devoted to a matter, but also on the importance of the effort. While a series of peripheral involvements may be insubstantial, the single act of approving or participating in a critical step may be substantial. Personal and substantial participation may occur when, for example, an employee participates through decision, approval, disapproval, recommendation, investigation or the rendering of advice in a particular matter.

(c) *Disqualification.* Unless the employee is authorized to participate in the particular matter by virtue of a waiver or exemption described in paragraph (d) of this section or because the interest has been divested in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section, an employee shall disqualify himself from participating in a particular matter in which, to his knowledge, he or a person whose interests are imputed to him has a financial interest, if the particular matter will have a direct and

predictable effect on that interest. Disqualification is accomplished by not participating in the particular matter.

(1) *Notification.* An employee who becomes aware of the need to disqualify himself from participation in a particular matter to which he has been assigned should notify the person responsible for his assignment. An employee who is responsible for his own assignment should take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that he does not participate in the matter from which he is disqualified. Appropriate oral or written notification of the employee's disqualification may be made to co-workers by the employee or a supervisor to ensure that the employee is not involved in a matter from which he is disqualified.

(2) *Documentation.* An employee need not file a written disqualification statement unless he is required by part 2634 of this chapter to file written evidence of compliance with an ethics agreement with the Office of Government Ethics or is asked by an agency ethics official or the person responsible for his assignment to file a written disqualification statement. However, an employee may elect to create a record of his actions by providing written notice to a supervisor or other appropriate official.

Example 1: An Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior owns recreational property that borders on land which is being considered for annexation to a national park. Annexation would directly and predictably increase the value of her vacation property and, thus, she is disqualified from participating in any way in the Department's deliberations or decisions regarding the annexation. Because she is responsible for determining which matters she will work on, she may accomplish her disqualification merely by ensuring that she does not participate in the matter. Because of the level of her position, however, the Assistant Secretary might be wise to establish a record that she has acted properly by providing a written disqualification statement to an official superior and by providing written notification of the disqualification to subordinates to ensure that they do not raise or discuss with her any issues related to the annexation.

(d) *Waiver of or exemptions from disqualification.* An employee who would otherwise be disqualified by 18 U.S.C. 208(a) may be permitted to participate

in a particular matter where the otherwise disqualifying financial interest is the subject of a regulatory exemption or individual waiver described in this paragraph, or results from certain Indian birthrights as described in 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(4).

(1) *Regulatory exemptions.* Under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(2), regulatory exemptions of general applicability have been issued by the Office of Government Ethics, based on its determination that particular interests are too remote or too inconsequential to affect the integrity of the services of employees to whom those exemptions apply. See the regulations in subpart B of part 2640 of this chapter, which supersede any pre-existing agency regulatory exemptions.

(2) *Individual waivers.* An individual waiver enabling the employee to participate in one or more particular matters may be issued under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(1) if, in advance of the employee's participation:

(i) The employee:

(A) Advises the Government official responsible for the employee's appointment (or other Government official to whom authority to issue such a waiver for the employee has been delegated) about the nature and circumstances of the particular matter or matters; and

(B) Makes full disclosure to such official of the nature and extent of the disqualifying financial interest; and

(ii) Such official determines, in writing, that the employee's financial interest in the particular matter or matters is not so substantial as to be deemed likely to affect the integrity of the services which the Government may expect from such employee. See also subpart C of part 2640 of this chapter, for additional guidance.

(3) *Federal advisory committee member waivers.* An individual waiver may be issued under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(3) to a special Government employee serving on, or under consideration for appointment to, an advisory committee within the meaning of the Federal Advisory Committee Act if the Government official responsible for the employee's appointment (or other Government official to whom authority to issue such a waiver for the employee has been delegated):

(i) Reviews the financial disclosure report filed by the special Government

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employee pursuant to the Ethics in Government Act of 1978; and

(ii) Certifies in writing that the need for the individual's services outweighs the potential for a conflict of interest created by the otherwise disqualifying financial interest. See also subpart C of part 2640 of this chapter, for additional guidance.

(4) *Consultation and notification regarding waivers.* When practicable, an official is required to consult formally or informally with the Office of Government Ethics prior to granting a waiver referred to in paragraph (d)(2) or (3) of this section. A copy of each such waiver is to be forwarded to the Director of the Office of Government Ethics.

(e) *Divestiture of a disqualifying financial interest.* Upon sale or other divestiture of the asset or other interest that causes his disqualification from participation in a particular matter, 18 U.S.C. 208(a) and paragraph (c) of this section will no longer prohibit the employee's participation in the matter.

(1) *Voluntary divestiture.* An employee who would otherwise be disqualified from participation in a particular matter may voluntarily sell or otherwise divest himself of the interest that causes the disqualification.

(2) *Directed divestiture.* An employee may be required to sell or otherwise divest himself of the disqualifying financial interest if his continued holding of that interest is prohibited by statute or by agency supplemental regulation issued in accordance with § 2635.403(a), or if the agency determines in accordance with § 2635.403(b) that a substantial conflict exists between the financial interest and the employee's duties or accomplishment of the agency's mission.

(3) *Eligibility for special tax treatment.* An employee who is directed to divest an interest may be eligible to defer the tax consequences of divestiture under subpart J of part 2634 of this chapter. An employee who divests before obtaining a certificate of divestiture will not be eligible for this special tax treatment.

(f) *Official duties that give rise to potential conflicts.* Where an employee's official duties create a substantial likelihood that the employee may be

assigned to a particular matter from which he is disqualified, the employee should advise his supervisor or other person responsible for his assignments of that potential so that conflicting assignments can be avoided, consistent with the agency's needs.

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§ 2635.403 Prohibited financial interests.

An employee shall not acquire or hold any financial interest that he is prohibited from acquiring or holding by statute, by agency regulation issued in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section or by reason of an agency determination of substantial conflict under paragraph (b) of this section.

NOTE: There is no statute of Government-wide applicability prohibiting employees from holding or acquiring any financial interest. Statutory restrictions, if any, are contained in agency statutes which, in some cases, may be implemented by agency regulations issued independent of this part.

(a) *Agency regulation prohibiting certain financial interests.* An agency may, by supplemental agency regulation issued after February 3, 1993, prohibit or restrict the acquisition or holding of a financial interest or a class of financial interests by agency employees, or any category of agency employees, and the spouses and minor children of those employees, based on the agency's determination that the acquisition or holding of such financial interests would cause a reasonable person to question the impartiality and objectivity with which agency programs are administered. Where the agency restricts or prohibits the holding of certain financial interests by its employees' spouses or minor children, any such prohibition or restriction shall be based on a determination that there is a direct and appropriate nexus between the prohibition or restriction as applied to spouses and minor children and the efficiency of the service.

(b) *Agency determination of substantial conflict.* An agency may prohibit or restrict an individual employee from acquiring or holding a financial interest or a class of financial interests based