

ADVISORY OPINION

APPROVAL DATE: October 14, 2015

NUMBER: 15-03

STATUS: Current employee
N/A

SUPERSEDES:

Acceptance of Travel Vouchers by County Employees

QUESTION:

1. Can a County employee accept a \$400 travel voucher received as a result of volunteering to give up their seat in return for the voucher while traveling at County expense?

SHORT ANSWER:

1. No. The County policy does not allow employees to receive anything of value in connection with their official duties.

ANALYSIS:

The Ethics Code prohibits employees from accepting anything of value in connection with their official duties (See PCC 3.12.030.D-G). The voucher in question, which is worth \$400 toward another airline ticket, would constitute an item of value. Because funds expended by the County code were used on official travel and because the employee was on County business, the voucher would be considered to belong to the County and would be of value to the County¹. In addition, the voucher is not broadly available to a member of the public such as a group discount.

Because the County agency paid consideration for official travel, the Ethics Code requires that the traveler benefits in question that were provided solely because of official travel can only be used for subsequent official travel.

The Commission's advisory opinion is based on the general facts as stated above. The Commission does not investigate the facts. Please be aware that modification of the facts, or knowledge of more specific facts or circumstances, might cause the Board to reach a different conclusion. In addition, the Commission opinions are narrowly drawn to interpret the Pierce County Code of Ethics (Chapter 3.12). They do not address whether the proposed action is prudent, good public policy, or effective management practice.

¹ Unlike Frequent flyer miles, which are broadly available like a group discount and the value to the County is outweighed by the administrative costs to obtain (See Advisory Opinion 15-02), we assume such vouchers are good for \$400 cash equivalent and can be readily used by another County employee or by the same employee on future County travel.