TITLE 74
TRANSPARENT AND ETHICAL GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER 4
ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT

74-401. SHORT TITLE. This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Ethics in Government Act of 2015."

[74-401, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 373.]

74-402. POLICY AND PURPOSE. It is hereby declared that the position of a public official at all levels of government is a public trust and it is in the public interest to:

(1) Protect the integrity of government throughout the state of Idaho while at the same time facilitating recruitment and retention of personnel needed within government;

(2) Assure independence, impartiality and honesty of public officials in governmental functions;

(3) Inform citizens of the existence of personal interests which may present a conflict of interest between an official's public trust and private concerns;

(4) Prevent public office from being used for personal gain contrary to the public interest;

(5) Prevent special interests from unduly influencing governmental action; and

(6) Assure that governmental functions and policies reflect, to the maximum extent possible, the public interest.

[74-402, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 373.]

74-403. DEFINITIONS. For purposes of this chapter:

(1) "Official action" means any decision on, or proposal, consideration, enactment, defeat, or making of any rule, regulation, rate-making proceeding or policy action or nonaction by a governmental body or any other policy matter which is within the official jurisdiction of the governmental body.

(2) "Business" means any undertaking operated for economic gain, including, but not limited to, a corporation, partnership, trust, proprietorship, firm, association or joint venture.

(3) "Business with which a public official is associated" means any business of which the public official or member of his household is a director, officer, owner, partner, employee or holder of stock over five thousand dollars ($5,000) or more at fair market value.

(4) "Conflict of interest" means any official action or any decision or recommendation by a person acting in a capacity as a public official, the effect of which would be to the private pecuniary benefit of the person or a member of the person's household, or a business with which the person or a member of the person's household is associated, unless the pecuniary benefit arises out of the following:

(a) An interest or membership in a particular business, industry, occupation or class required by law as a prerequisite to the holding by the person of the office or position;

(b) Any action in the person's official capacity which would affect to the same degree a class consisting of an industry or occupation group in which the person, or a member of the person's household or business with which the person is associated, is a member or is engaged;

(c) Any interest which the person has by virtue of his profession, trade or occupation where his interest would be affected to the same degree as that of a substantial group or class of others similarly engaged in the profession, trade or occupation;

(d) Any action by a public official upon any revenue measure, any appropriation measure or any measure imposing a tax, when similarly situated members of the general public are affected by the outcome of the action in a substantially similar manner and degree.

(5) "Economic gain" means increase in pecuniary value from sources other than lawful compensation as a public official.

(6) "Governmental entity" means:

(a) The state of Idaho and all agencies, commissions and other governmental bodies of the state; and

(b) Counties and municipalities of the state of Idaho, all other political subdivisions including, but not limited to, highway districts, planning and zoning commissions or governmental bodies not specifically mentioned in this chapter.

(7) "Members of a household" means the spouse and dependent children of the public official and/or persons whom the public official is legally obligated to support.

(8) "Person" means an individual, proprietorship, partnership, association, trust, estate, business trust, group or corporation, whether operated for profit or not, and any other legal entity, or agent or servant thereof, or a governmental entity.

(9) "Public office" means any position in which the normal and usual duties are conducted on behalf of a governmental entity.

(10) "Public official" means any person holding public office in the following capacity:

(a) As an elected public official meaning any person holding public office of a governmental entity by virtue of an elected process, including persons appointed to a vacant elected office of a governmental entity, excluding members of the judiciary; or

(b) As an elected legislative public official meaning any person holding public office as a legislator; or

(c) As an appointed public official meaning any person holding public office of a governmental entity by virtue of formal appointment as required by law; or

(d) As an employed public official meaning any person holding public office of a governmental entity by virtue of employment, or a person employed by a governmental entity on a consultive basis.

[74-403, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 374.]

74-404. REQUIRED ACTION IN CONFLICTS. A public official shall not take any official action or make a formal decision or formal recommendation concerning any matter where he has a conflict of interest and has failed to disclose such conflict as provided in this section. Disclosure of a conflict does not affect an elected public official's authority to be counted for purposes of determining a quorum and to debate and to vote on the matter, unless the public official requests to be excused from debate and voting at his or

her discretion. In order to determine whether a conflict of interest exists relative to any matter within the scope of the official functions of a public official, a public official may seek legal advice from the attorney representing that governmental entity or from the attorney general or from independent counsel. If the legal advice is that no real or potential conflict of interest exists, the public official may proceed and shall not be subject to the prohibitions of this chapter. If the legal advice is that a real or potential conflict may exist, the public official:

(1) If he is an elected legislative public official, he shall disclose the nature of the potential conflict of interest and/or be subject to the rules of the body of which he/she is a member and shall take all action required under such rules prior to acting on the matter. If a member requests to be excused from voting on an issue which involves a conflict or a potential conflict, and the body of which he is a member does not excuse him, such failure to excuse shall exempt that member from any civil or criminal liability related to that particular issue.

(2) If he is an elected state public official, he shall prepare a written statement describing the matter required to be acted upon and the nature of the potential conflict, and shall file such statement with the secretary of state prior to acting on the matter. A public official may seek legal advice from the attorney representing that agency or from the attorney general or from independent counsel. The elected public official may then act on the advice of the agency's attorney, the attorney general or independent counsel.

(3) If he is an appointed or employed state public official, he shall prepare a written statement describing the matter to be acted upon and the nature of the potential conflict, and shall deliver the statement to his appointing authority. The appointing authority may obtain an advisory opinion from the attorney general or from the attorney representing that agency. The public official may then act on the advice of the attorney general, the agency's attorney or independent counsel.

(4) If he is an elected public official of a county or municipality, he shall disclose the nature of a potential conflict of interest prior to acting on a matter and shall be subject to the rules of the body of which he/she is a member and take all action required by the rules prior to acting on the matter. If a member requests to be excused from voting on an issue which involves a conflict or a potential conflict, and the body of which he is a member does not excuse him, such failure to excuse shall exempt that member from any civil or criminal liability related to that particular issue. The public official may obtain an advisory opinion from the attorney general or the attorney for the county or municipality or from independent counsel. The public official may then act on the advice of the attorney general or attorney for the county or municipality or his independent counsel.

(5) If he is an appointed or employed public official of a county or municipality, he shall prepare a written statement describing the matter required to be acted upon and the nature of the potential conflict, and shall deliver the statement to his appointing authority. The appointing authority may obtain an advisory opinion from the attorney for the appointing authority, or, if none, the attorney general. The public official may then act on the advice of the attorney general or attorney for the appointing authority or independent counsel.

(6) Nothing contained herein shall preclude the executive branch of state government or a political subdivision from establishing an ethics

board or commission to perform the duties and responsibilities provided for in this chapter. Any ethics board or commission so established shall have specifically stated powers and duties including the power to:

(a) Issue advisory opinions upon the request of a public official within its jurisdiction;

(b) Investigate possible unethical conduct of public officials within its jurisdiction and conduct hearings, issue findings, and make recommendations for disciplinary action to a public official's appointing authority;

(c) Accept complaints of unethical conduct from the public and take appropriate action.

[74-404, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 375.]

74-405. NONCOMPENSATED PUBLIC OFFICIAL -- EXCEPTION. When a person is a public official by reason of his appointment or election to a governing board of a governmental entity for which the person receives no salary or fee as compensation for his service on said board, he shall not be prohibited from having an interest in any contract made or entered into by the board of which he is a member, if he strictly observes the procedure set out in section 18-1361A, Idaho Code.

[74-405, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 376.]

74-406. CIVIL PENALTY. (1) Any public official who intentionally fails to disclose a conflict of interest as provided for in section 74-404, Idaho Code, shall be guilty of a civil offense, the penalty for which may be a fine not to exceed five hundred dollars ($500), provided that the provisions of this subsection shall not apply to any public official where the governmental entity on which said official serves has put into operation an ethics commission or board described in section 74-404(6), Idaho Code.

(2) The penalty prescribed in subsection (1) of this section does not limit the power of either house of the legislature to discipline its own members, nor limit the power of governmental entities, including occupational or professional licensing bodies, to discipline their members or personnel. A violation of the provisions of this chapter shall not preclude prosecution and conviction for any criminal violation that may have been committed.

[74-406, added 2015, ch. 140, sec. 5, p. 376.]

74-407. TAX-RELATED CORRESPONDENCE. (1) Neither the name of any elected public official nor any electioneering message shall appear on tax-related correspondence from the state of Idaho to a taxpayer, whether or not it includes a check, warrant, or rebate, or on county tax-related correspondence with a taxpayer, whether or not it includes a check, warrant, or rebate, unless acting as an endorser of a check, warrant, or rebate or unless otherwise necessary for the proper execution of a check, warrant, or rebate. This provision shall not apply to standard letterhead of the state or of a county.

(2) For the purposes of this section, "electioneering message" shall include statements regarding, expressing support for, or soliciting support for any:

(a) Governmental program or initiative; or

(b) Nonprofit corporation, including any program or initiative of a nonprofit corporation.

[74-407, added 2023, ch. 284, sec. 1, p. 869; am. 2024, ch. 46, sec. 1, p. 253.]