

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Betsy K. Dawson, Executive Director
DATE: August 6, 1999
RE: IO-99-146

The ethics commission has determined that the members and staff of the county council, who received paperweights engraved with the name of the community college, can accept this gift as a permitted exception under §3-106(c)(2), "ceremonial gifts or awards that have insignificant value". The value of \$13.50, which you indicated was the approximate cost of the gift would qualify as "insignificant". However, the commission is not willing to conclude that all ceremonial gifts of this or any other amount may be accepted without further consideration. The exceptions to the prohibition on receiving gifts is very limited. Even where a gift appears to fall within a permitted exception, an employee would still be prohibited from accepting the gift if it would tend to impair, give the appearance of impairing, or be designed to impair, the recipient's independent and impartial judgment. So, while the paperweight may be acceptable at a function of the community college held for public relations purposes, the same gift would not be acceptable if it were offered to the members of the county council when the community college is presenting its annual budget request. Therefore, at least for the present time, the ethics commission requests that questions about gifts be handled on an individual basis. Thank you for your inquiry. Please call if you have any further questions.