

July 19, 2000
Re: IO-00-116

You inquired whether you may accept a complimentary ticket to a charitable fund raiser that is going to be held by and for the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, Inc. The donor has offered you a choice of a free ticket, a discounted ticket, or ticket in exchange for your participation as a celebrity bartender at the event.

Maryland Hall is a controlled donor under §3-106 (b)(3) of the Public Ethics Law. As a recipient of county grants, Maryland Hall ". . . has financial interests that may be substantially and materially affected, in a manner distinguishable from the public generally, by the performance or nonperformance of any official duty of the employee." Although gifts from controlled donors may not generally be accepted by county employees, there is an exception for tickets to charitable events offered to the county executive or members of the county council. Section 3-106(c)(5) of the Public Ethics Law, permits the acceptance of these tickets if the purpose of the gift is to take part in a ceremony involving the office. The ethics commission has determined that such a ceremony may be as simple as a formal introduction during the event.

However, if there is pending legislation involving Maryland Hall, or a dispute between Maryland Hall and the county that may involve the county council, the tickets may not be accepted. A gift that is permitted under a specific exception may still be prohibited if there is reason to believe that the gift is designed to impair the impartial and independent judgment of the recipient. §3-106(c). Absent these complications, you may accept the complementary ticket to the event. You may also participate as a celebrity bartender, assuming that you know how to make a decent martini.

Thank you for your inquiry. If you have other questions, please call any time.

Sincerely,

Betsy K. Dawson
Executive Director