

November 19, 2002  
Re: IO-02-132

The ethics commission directed me to write to you, the county executive's representative, in response to the receipt of a video, apparently featured on a local television station, showing a campaign sign on the county executive's official county vehicle. The sign read, "Janet Owens, County Executive, By authority of William F. Chaney, Treasurer." The sign was located on the passenger door of the vehicle.

The Public Ethics Law, §-104(a) prohibits an employee from using the prestige, title, and authority of office or position for the employee's private gain. While elected officials may use county vehicles for "personal purposes," the ethics law prohibits them from using vehicles - or any county resource- for economic, commercial, political or other "private gain." While an elected official may use an official vehicle for transportation, including transportation to a political event, an elected official may not use the vehicle for non-transportation purposes, e.g. campaigning.

This prohibition would not apply to a general identification of the vehicle as an elected official's vehicle, because that would be part of the elected official's public business. The sign on the county executive's vehicle however, was clearly and unequivocally a campaign sign, used during the campaign season. Therefore, the use of the sign in this situation was improper.

Thank you for your assistance in helping the commission resolve this matter.

Sincerely,

Betsy K. Dawson  
Executive Director