



HAWAI'I STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

Komikina Ho'opono Kulekele o Hawai'i Moku'āina

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE ETHICS COMMISSION ISSUES GENERAL ADVISORY OPINIONS ON APPLICATION OF NEPOTISM LAW TO COACHING STAFF AND STATE EMPLOYEE ACCEPTANCE OF TRAVEL REWARDS

Today, the Hawai'i State Ethics Commission published two General Advisory Opinions. The Commission is authorized to issue public advisory opinions interpreting the State Ethics Code when a matter is of sufficient general interest and importance.

General Advisory Opinion No. 2026-1

The first opinion establishes a narrowly tailored “good cause” nepotism waiver for certain athletic coaching positions and related support staff when specific requirements are met.

All Department of Education (“DOE”) athletic programs must comply with the State’s Nepotism law. However, many DOE coaching and support positions are short-term, casual hires that provide low pay and no benefits. Filling these positions is a challenge.

Accordingly, when:

- (1) Open and diligent recruitment has occurred,
- (2) No other qualified candidates apply,
- (3) Oversight is provided by an athletic director or equivalent position,
- (4) The position is temporary or seasonal in nature, and
- (5) Compensation is below \$5,000 per season and no benefits,

a state employee is not required to seek an individual good cause waiver under the nepotism law. General Advisory Opinion No. 2026-1 can be found at

<https://files.hawaii.gov/ethics/advice/AO2026-1.pdf>

General Advisory Opinion No. 2026-2

The second opinion concludes that travel rewards earned through official state travel, such as frequent flyer miles and similar promotional benefits, may be retained by state officers and employees when those benefits are offered on the same terms available to the general public and are obtained at no additional cost to the State of Hawai'i.

The Commission conditioned this decision on the State Comptroller's commitment to implement safeguards ensuring that official travel decisions are cost-effective and are not influenced by personal benefit. General Advisory Opinion No. 2026-2 can be found at

<https://files.hawaii.gov/ethics/advice/AO2026-2.pdf>

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About the Hawai'i State Ethics Commission:

The Hawai'i State Ethics Commission is an independent state agency committed to promoting and ensuring ethical conduct in state government. Established to foster public trust, the Commission administers the state's ethics code and lobbyists law. For more information, visit ethics.hawaii.gov.