

COREY O'CONNOR
MAYOR



LEANNE DAVIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CITY OF PITTSBURGH
ETHICS HEARING BOARD
CITY-COUNTY BUILDING

OPINION OF THE BOARD

August 6, 2026

To the Requester:

Michael Jarrett - Innovation Team Director
Via electronic mail

RE: 26-A-028 Jarrett

Dear Mr. Jarrett:

This Opinion of the City of Pittsburgh Ethics Hearing Board ("Board") is issued in response to your inquiry conveyed on July 20, 2026.

I. Issue:

Is it a conflict of interest to engage in work duties with RAMP when a family member works for the RAMP Foundation?

II. Short Answer:

No conflicts of interest arise in the described scenario, and no recusal is needed.

III. Statement of Facts:

The Board's advice applies to the facts as summarized in this advisory, with no independent investigation as to information presented or potentially omitted. City of Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances ("Code") § 197.13. It is the burden of each requesting party to truthfully disclose all material facts relevant to the inquiry.

You are currently the Innovation Team Director with the Office of the Mayor ("Mayor's Office") in the City of Pittsburgh ("City").

Your position as the Innovation Team Director in the Mayor's Office is a contracted position. You serve through a fellowship of the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University ("the Center"). You provide documentation regarding the extended authorities and duties of this position. Generally, you are "charged with leading an [innovation] team focused on building cleaner, more resilient, and economically thriving communities." While you report to a "senior government official" and work "closely with the mayor and their leadership team, as well as departmental staff, external experts, community organizations, and residents," it appears your position lacks the independent discretion pivotal to "public employee" status, and accordingly we find your service to instead be appropriately characterized as that of a City employee. Ethics Act §1102; Code § 197.02.

Notably, our view of your relationship to the City as that of a "City employee" is exclusive of any consideration regarding traditional employment laws and limited solely to our duty to administer the Code of Conduct; for the purposes of our interpretation of responsibilities relating to conflicts, the fact that Johns Hopkins University may be your true employer is immaterial. See Code § 197.09(The Ethics Hearing Board may act with respect to "those who, although acting under contract, appear to act as government officials and employees.").

The Realtors Association of Metropolitan Pittsburgh ("RAMP") is considering working with the City on a number of projects and your role would be to provide an analysis that could help your superiors to implement or improve processes should the project(s) be adopted.

You have a family member who works for the RAMP Foundation ("Foundation"). The Foundation was formed in 1992 exclusively for charitable, educational, literary, and scientific purposes and is a Section 501(c)(3). See <https://realtorspgh.com/about/ramp-foundation/>. The Foundation operates the REALTOR® Relief Fund and also participates with other not-for-profit organizations to help support charitable endeavors to benefit the real estate industry and the community at large. *Id.* The Foundation functions independently from RAMP.

You ask the Board whether, under the Code of Conduct, there may be any conflicts of interest rules that apply to your interactions with RAMP because your family member is employed by the Foundation.

IV. Legal Analysis:

a.) Relevant Law:

This Opinion discusses conflicts of interest restrictions. Pennsylvania Public Official and Employee Ethics Act ("Ethics Act") 65 Pa.C.S. §§ 1103 and 1102; Home Rule Charter § 706; and Code § 197.03(a). Full text of these laws and related definitions follow this letter.

b.) Conflict of Interest:

The elements of a statutory conflict of interest generally include a public official or public employee's use of the authority of their position to extend influence or create a private gain to themselves, to their family, or to a business or property with which they or their family is associated. Ethics Act §§ 1103 and 1102; Code § 197.03(a); Home Rule Charter § 706. Associated businesses under the Ethics Act include "[a]ny business in which the person or a member of the person's

immediate family is a director, officer, owner, employee or has a financial interest.” Ethics Act § 1102.; Rendell v. State Ethics Commission, 603 Pa. 292 (2009).

You are not a public official or public employee, and instead we view your position as a City employee. Your position does not confer the non-ministerial authorities which could result in an economic impact on the interests of any person, and as such, the use of your position is believed by this Board to be incapable to achieve the conveyance of pecuniary gain. Should such unlawful gain result at any point in the future, this writing would be invalidated based on new and unanticipated facts.

Because no conflict results from the described facts we need not reach the question of whether RAMP and the Foundation should be treated as the same entity for the purposes of governmental ethics.

V. Reliance:

Our decision is dependent upon a snapshot of the facts as currently presented. Code §§ 197.13 and 197.16(a). Advice can be reconsidered. Please contact our staff if these facts are inaccurate or incomplete – or if the facts change in the future. Code § 197.13. Requests must be in writing, describe the error in fact or law, and be received within thirty days from the date of this letter.

The Ethics Hearing Board works with the Code of Conduct, which contains portions of our Home Rule Charter, Code, and the Ethics Act. Code § 197.01. The State Ethics Commission is the authority on the Ethics Act. If the State Ethics Commission provides a more restrictive view than this writing, the State’s position will govern. [65 Pa.C.S. §§ 1107](#), and [1109](#). In complement, the Board and its staff adopt or exceed State Ethics Commission interpretations of the Act. [65 Pa.C.S. § 1111](#). Legal issues are multi-faceted, and you may have rights or obligations beyond the ethics laws within the Board's jurisdiction.

VI. Conclusion:

We find the Code of Conduct permits you to perform your work duties without recusal as it relates to RAMP even though you have a family member employed by the Foundation. Based on the stated facts and the nature of your position, the described conduct is permitted under the Code of Conduct and no conflict of interest would result.

Thank you for contacting us for this ethics opinion. Please contact our staff with any questions.

On behalf of the Board:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maryann Herman".

Maryann Herman, Board Chair

Cited Law:

State Ethics Act § 1102(a) "Public employee." (also at Code § 197.02)

Any individual employed by the Commonwealth or a political subdivision who is responsible for taking or recommending official action of a nonministerial nature with regard to:

- (1) contracting or procurement;
- (2) administering or monitoring grants or subsidies;
- (3) planning or zoning;
- (4) inspecting, licensing, regulating or auditing any person; or
- (5) any other activity where the official action has an economic impact of greater than a de minimis nature on the interests of any person.

The term shall not include individuals who are employed by this Commonwealth or any political subdivision thereof in teaching as distinguished from administrative duties.

State Ethics Act § 1102 "Person." A business, governmental body, individual, corporation, union, association, firm, partnership, committee, club or other organization or group of persons.

Code § 197.02(c) - CITY EMPLOYEE Any individual employed by the City of Pittsburgh in any capacity. A City employee may or may not also be a public employee as that term is defined in the State Statute.

State Ethics Act § 1102 "Business." Any corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, firm, enterprise, franchise, association, organization, self-employed individual, holding company, joint stock company, receivership, trust or any legal entity organized for profit.

State Ethics Act § 1102 "Business with which he is associated." Any business in which the person or a member of the person's immediate family is a director, officer, owner, employee or has a financial interest.

State Ethics Act § 1103(a) Conflict of interest.--No public official or public employee shall engage in conduct that constitutes a conflict of interest.

State Ethics Act § 1102(a) "Conflict" or "conflict of interest." Use by a public official or public employee of the authority of his office or employment or any confidential information received through his holding public office or employment for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, a member of his immediate family or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated. The term does not include an action having a de minimis economic impact or which affects to the same degree a class consisting of the general public or a subclass consisting of an industry, occupation or other group which includes the public official or public employee, a member of his immediate family or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated.

Code § 197.03(a) - CONFLICT OF INTEREST. No public official or public employee shall exert influence with respect to property or a business with which he or a member of his or her direct family is associated.

Home Rule Charter § 706: No elected official, officer or employee shall in any manner receive benefit from the profits or emoluments of any contract, job work or service for the City, or accept any service or thing of value directly or indirectly upon more favorable terms than those granted to the public generally, from any person, firm or corporation having dealings with the City. No elected official, officer, or employee shall solicit or receive any compensation, gratuity or other thing for any act done in the course of public work. This section shall be broadly construed and strictly enforced. Any violation of this section shall cause the offending official, officer, or employee to forfeit office or employment.