

# Wisconsin Ethics Commission

## *For State Public Officials*

### Telephone Calls

It is improper and illegal for a state public official to charge the State of Wisconsin for a telephone call if the call is not primarily related to the person's official responsibility – even if the official later reimburses the State for its costs. If a telephone call is related primarily to official business, it is appropriately paid by the State of Wisconsin. If a telephone call is primarily personal, the call should not be billed to the State of Wisconsin, even if some official activities are discussed in the course of the conversation. The identification of telephone calls properly paid by the State of Wisconsin requires the exercise of judgment – judgment most appropriately exercised and responsibility most appropriately borne by the official making or authorizing the telephone call.

#### **CALL PROPERLY PAID BY THE STATE**

Although a state public official's purpose determines whether his or her telephone call should be billed to the State of Wisconsin, telephone calls of the types described below are usually properly paid by the State:

1. A telephone call between a state public official and his or her government office (e.g., a vacationing official calls his or her government office; or a legislator's aide calls the legislator at the legislator's home or place of private employment).
2. A telephone call between a state public official and the official's home or place of private employment at which the official regularly receives messages related to his or her official duties (e.g., a state public official publishes his or her home telephone number on official stationery and uses the home as an extension of his or her government office).
3. A telephone call made by a state public official required being away from home on official business because the official's schedule is changed abruptly (e.g., an official at an out-of-state conference or a legislator at the Capitol calls home because his or her schedule has been changed abruptly).
4. A state public official's telephone call to a representative of the press.

#### **CALLS USUALLY PAID BY INDIVIDUAL**

Telephone calls described below are of types likely to be made to further a personal interest. If a state public official makes one of these calls, he or she should be certain that it arises because of official functions before billing it to Wisconsin's taxpayers:

1. A telephone call made to any political campaign headquarters or political committee.
2. A telephone call made by a state public official to a relative, business associate, or personal friend or to the official's place of private employment.
3. A telephone call made by a full-time, salaried, appointed state public official from his or her government office to his or her home.

Although an official receiving a message to return a telephone call is sometimes unable to know the call's purpose, the Wisconsin Ethics Commission's suggestions apply to calls returned as well as to calls initiated by a state public official.

#### **THE TEST IS WHETHER THE TELEPHONE CALL ARISES INDEPENDENTLY OF OFFICIAL FUNCTIONS OR BECAUSE OF THEM.**

*This is a guide. For authoritative information consult Wisconsin Statutes.*

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*Website: <http://ethics.wi.gov> Visit the Commission's website to ensure you have the most current version of this Guideline.*

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