

**THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WAWZONEK  
MINISTER OF FINANCE**

**Assessing and Managing Conflict of Interest in the Government**

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Deh Cho on March 9, 2021, regarding assessing and managing conflict of interest in the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT).

In order to preserve the impartiality and integrity of the Public Service, the *Code of Conduct Respecting Conflict of Interest and Oath of Office and Secrecy* (Code of Conduct) identifies standards of conduct for GNWT employees, including steps that employees can take to ensure they do not place themselves in situations that could be perceived as being a conflict of interest.

Deputy Head approval is required before employees begin any employment, service or volunteer activities outside of their employment with the GNWT. If a new request is received from an employee to participate in an outside activity, and the activity is considered to be a conflict or potential conflict of interest, the Deputy Head, upon consultation, has the authority to issue a letter denying the request. The letter would stipulate that the employee is prohibited from engaging in the activity, and would inform the employee of possible disciplinary measures should they proceed with the activity. Depending on the circumstances, upon consultation, the Deputy Head also has the discretion to limit or restrict an employees' participation in part of the activities requested.

If a conflict of interest is suspected regarding an employees' already existing and approved outside activity, the supervisor will discuss with the employee, and approval of the activity can be revoked by the Deputy Head if, upon consultation, a conflict of interest is found.

The Labour Relations Division of the Department of Finance is asked to review employee requests to participate in outside activity, when Departments have questions or when a possible conflict may exist. All requests are conditionally approved, to allow for the approval to be revisited in the event that circumstances change. The conditional approval in most cases relates to adhering to the conditions outlined in the Code of Conduct; however, there could be approvals that have other conditions, such as an employee removing themselves from a meeting if a topic comes up where they have knowledge obtained through their employment.

An employee can ask that a decision to deny their participation in an outside activity be reviewed by the Deputy Minister of Finance, or in the case of employees of the Department of Finance, a request can be made to the Secretary to Cabinet, or the Ethics Counsellor. Should an employee not agree with any decision or action taken as a result of the application of the Code of Conduct, the employee may access the grievance process contained in the appropriate collective agreement or the *Public Service Act*.

On initial hire, all employees are required to read the Code of Conduct, as well as sign the 'Oath or Affirmative of Office and Secrecy,' and are encouraged to speak with their supervisor if they have questions. Departments are also encouraged to send out yearly reminders to ensure employees are aware of the requirement to request approval before engaging in employment or activities outside of the government.

The mandatory onboarding training for all GNWT employees also contains information on conflicts of interest and outside activity, specifically in 'Module 4 - Important Policies and Programs.' The training highlights the importance of adhering to the Code of Conduct while engaging in outside activity.

Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table a document that serves as a breakdown, over the past 10 years, of the number of conflicts of interest that have been found, based on the requests reviewed by the Labour Relations Division.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.