



Te Kawa Mataaho

Public Service Commission

23 May 2025

9(2)(a) privacy

9(2)(a) privacy

Official Information Request

Our Ref: PSCR 2025-0494

I refer to your official information request received on 9 May 2025 for:

“Is there a specific document or section in a document that explicitly bans civil servants from paid interest representation?”

As a second question: Are civil servants explicitly banned from promoting specific interests of third parties, if so, where is that outlined?”

On 13 May 2025 you clarified your request:

“Paid interest representation would be lobbying activity, for example, being paid by another company/organisation to advance a specific political/policy agenda desired by the company/organisation. This could be conducted outside of working hours. Are civil servants explicitly banned from conducting paid lobbying activity on behalf of third parties? Is there a document that outlines this?”

The second question is similar to question 1, but the civil servant is not being paid to promote the interest. They could be associated with the company/organisation in some form, but not paid. This could include various forms of lobbying activity, such as meetings with policymakers where they explicitly promote the interests of the third party. This could include bans on advocating on behalf of a third-party (company/organisation) activity during working hours, but as a private citizen, they are free to lobby the government on behalf of third parties. Regarding “specific interests”, it may be the case that a civil servant is prevented from advocating on behalf of an interest related to their public department (e.g. an NZTA employee not being able to lobby the government on behalf of a car sales company). Is there a document that outlines any of this?”

Our response

In this response, where we refer to the term 'lobbying' we mean the practice of engaging in advocacy activities to influence government policies and decisions. The below information responds to each of your questions.

Question 1: Is there a specific document or section in a document that explicitly bans civil servants from paid lobbying? This includes lobbying conducted outside of working hours.

No. The Public Service Commission does not have any official documents that explicitly ban public servants from paid lobbying, whether during or outside of work hours. However, several of our documents guide public servants in how to behave and work, and outline how agencies are expected to operate, which provide clear rules and guidance on whether to engage in lobbying activities. These are outlined below.

Standards of Integrity and Conduct and related guidance

Public servants must comply with the [Standards of Integrity and Conduct](#) (the Code) under section 17 of the [Public Service Act 2020](#) (the Act). The purpose of the Code is to set minimum standards of integrity and conduct for the public service, thereby preserving the trust and confidence of the public and the Government of the day.

Relevant to your query, the standards include to:

- maintain the political neutrality required to enable them to work with current and future governments
- carry out the functions of their organisation, unaffected by their personal beliefs
- respect the authority of the government of the day
- act lawfully and objectively
- ensure that their actions are not affected by their personal interests or relationships, and
- avoid any activities, work or non-work, that may harm the reputation of their organisation or of the State Services.

Our [Guidance](#), (p 30-31) which supports agencies and public servants to understand how the Code is applied says:

'Before starting a business activity, or accepting any secondary or additional employment, whether or not it is for payment, we should obtain specific approval from their organisation. We should ensure that there will be no conflict with our official duties and no adverse effect on their efficiency or performance, and that the additional work can be performed wholly in our own time...We must have clear authorisation from our organisation before we begin any secondary or additional work.'

and

'Additional employment may create a conflict if it involves:

- *a business that lobbies Ministers, or Members of Parliament, or government organisations...'*

Model standards: Conflicts of interest

We have issued [model standards on conflicts of interest](#) to outline the Commissioner's expectations for public service agencies to support the identification, assessment, and ongoing management and monitoring of conflicts of interest.

In relation to your request, this means that any perceived, potential or actual lobbying interests are expected to be identified and managed at the agency level. Interests are expected to be brought to the attention of a relevant supervisor by the individual, for discussion, and development of a management plan where appropriate.

The model standard on conflicts of interest also has information about secondary employment as a specific type of conflict of interest. Considerations include whether the secondary employment conflicts with the primary role. This includes the duties owed to each organisation, the powers exercised, the information the employee has access to, and whether it is clear to others which role the person is undertaking. You can find out more about this here: [Model standards on conflicts of interest](#)

Public service principles guidance

The principle of [political neutrality](#) is about public servants serving New Zealand's democratically elected government to the best of their professional abilities, irrespective of their own personal political opinions.

As such, it is never acceptable for a public servant acting in an official capacity to pursue their own political interests or objectives or to express their personal political views in a way that raises questions about their ability to perform their role in a politically neutral way.

You can find out more about this here: [Political neutrality for public servants in their official role - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#)

Political neutrality does not generally prevent public servants from being politically active and expressing personal political opinions outside of work in their own time, provided that they do not:

- represent or give the impression that they represent their agency, or
- disclose or utilise confidential government information.

Despite this, it may be difficult for public servants to reconcile any:

- overlap between political activity they engage in and the scope of the portfolio agency in which they are employed, or
- conflict of interest that is raised as a result of engaging in paid political lobbying.

Any potential overlap or conflict will depend on what the public service role involves and the requirements of the role. Roles that are more likely to be impacted by a public servant's political activity outside work include those involving regular, direct contact with Ministers, communication on behalf of the agency, or advising Ministers on politically topical issues.

You can find out more about this here: [Political neutrality for public servants as individuals - Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission](#)

Question 2: Are civil servants explicitly banned from promoting, advocating, or lobbying for specific third-party interests for which they are not being paid? If so, where is that outlined?

Our answer to Question 1, above, also addresses this question, as the Code, conflicts of interest and public service principles are key considerations for public servants in considering whether to engage in lobbying in their work or private lives, whether paid or unpaid.

Summary

While the above standards and guidance do not explicitly ban public servants from engaging in paid or unpaid lobbying during or outside of work hours, taken together these guide individuals in determining whether their actions are appropriate for them, in the context in which they operate. As such, for the reasons provided above, it would be unacceptable for some public servants to engage in paid lobbying during or outside working hours, e.g., Chief Executives of public service agencies.

If you have not already, you may be interested in learning more about work that the Ministry of Justice has undertaken on [political lobbying in New Zealand](#).

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact Enquiries@publicservice.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that we intend to publish this letter (with your personal details removed) on the Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission's website.

Yours sincerely



Nicky Dirks

Manager – Ministerial and Executive Services
Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission