

**CITY OF TALLAHASSEE  
INDEPENDENT ETHICS BOARD**

AO 2025-02 – September 16, 2025

**MISUSE OF PUBLIC POSITION  
ORD. NO.: 2-8**

*To: Ms. Brittany Butler  
Captain, Training Division  
Tallahassee Fire Department  
911 Easterwood Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32311*

**SUMMARY:**

The Tallahassee Fire Department oversees Camp Ignite, an activity that introduces girls and young women to career opportunities in the field of firefighting. The two-day camp is held annually and is sponsored by the City of Tallahassee Fire Department. Last year, local businesses donated supplies for the event. As the camp enters its second year, firefighters wish to visit businesses in their official firefighter uniforms to solicit in-kind donations.

Based on the facts presented, firefighters soliciting such donations, conducted with supervisory approval and in connection with a City-sponsored program, would not violate the misuse of public position prohibition under Section 2-8 of the Tallahassee Ethics Code, so long as appropriate safeguards are followed to avoid any appearance of coercion or preferential treatment.

**FACTS:**

The inquirer holds a leadership position in the Tallahassee Fire Department (TFD) Training Division. In 2024, TFD introduced “Camp Ignite,” its first-ever girls’ camp designed to inspire and empower young women ages 14–21 who are interested in pursuing a career in firefighting. The camp allows participants to “[g]et hands-on experience with firefighting techniques, build confidence, and learn leadership skills from real female firefighters!”<sup>1</sup> The camp is a program of TFD itself and not a private nonprofit organization. It does not generate profit for any individual.

In connection with the 2024 camp, local businesses provided in-kind support to Camp Ignite, such as meals and supplies, following requests made by telephone or email. For the 2025 camp, the inquirer proposes that she and other TFD members visit businesses in person, while in uniform, to request in-kind donations such as meals, gift cards for supplies, or small items for camper gift bags. The inquirer represents that she has received authorization from her supervisors for firefighters within her command to conduct these solicitations as part of their official duties, and that all solicitations would be voluntary, conducted without pressure or favoritism, properly documented, and handled in accordance with City policies governing donations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/cotfire/posts/1002083985295904/>

**QUESTION #1:**

Does a city firefighter, whether a covered individual or city employee, violate Section 2-8 of the Tallahassee Ethics Code by soliciting in-kind donations from businesses while in uniform for a program sponsored by the City of Tallahassee and operated by the TFD?

**ANALYSIS #1:**

The City of Tallahassee Ethics Code prohibits any covered individual or city employee from improperly using his or her public position for the benefit of him or herself or for another.

The applicable ordinance reads as follows:

No public official or employee of the city shall use or attempt to use their official position or any city property or resource which may be within their trust, or perform or fail to perform, their official duties, in a manner inconsistent with the proper performance of the official's or employee's office and which the official or employee knows or should know with the exercise of reasonable care will result in a special privilege, benefit, or exemption for the employee, official, or others.

§ 2-8, *Tallahassee Code of Ordinances* (2025).

This provision is designed to prevent covered individuals and employees from leveraging their governmental position to obtain a private benefit for themselves or to confer an improper advantage upon others. Generally, covered individuals and city employees are prohibited from soliciting donations while in uniform, as the uniform conveys governmental authority and may lead to perceptions of coercion or the expectation of favorable treatment. This rule, however, is not absolute, and circumstances exist where the practice would be permissible. This is one of those cases.

The facts presented here differ significantly from a prior opinion of this Board in which the donations would be solicited by a city employee wearing an official city uniform and for the benefit of a private organization. *See* AO 2025-01 (a city employee would misuse a public position by wearing an official fire department uniform or similar apparel during events sponsored by a private organization in which the city employee would hold a material interest and receive compensation). Camp Ignite is a TFD program, administered and sponsored by the City itself, and directly connected to the Department's mission of recruitment, training, and community engagement. The solicitations would be made under supervisory authorization, as part of the firefighters' official duties, and for the exclusive benefit of a City program. Furthermore, the inquirer represents that donations will be voluntary, fully documented, and processed through established City procedures for acceptance of donations. These safeguards diminish the risk of coercion and ensure transparency.

Even so, caution is warranted. The use of a City uniform in a solicitation setting carries the potential for implied pressure. Accordingly, solicitations should be carefully controlled to avoid any suggestion that businesses are obligated to participate or that contributions could influence City decisions. Neutral scripts or written requests clarifying that participation is voluntary, coupled with supervisory oversight, would further reduce any risk of misuse.

**CONCLUSION #1:**

Accordingly, based on the facts presented by the inquirer and this Board's reliance on those facts, the Tallahassee Independent Ethics Board finds that the inquirer and similarly situated firefighters would not violate the Tallahassee Ethics Code's prohibition on misuse of public position by soliciting in-kind donations from businesses while in uniform for Camp Ignite, a City-sponsored TFD program. This conclusion, however, is conditioned upon the solicitations being authorized by supervisors, conducted solely for the benefit of Camp Ignite, and processed through City procedures, with care taken to ensure that contributions remain voluntary and free from any appearance of coercion.

**ORDERED** by the City of Tallahassee Independent Ethics Board meeting in public session on September 16, 2025, and **RENDERED** this 16<sup>th</sup> day of September 2025.

APPROVED:

*Kristen S. Costa*

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Kristen S. Costa, Chair  
Tallahassee Independent Ethics Board

ATTEST:

*Dwight A. Floyd*

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DWIGHT A. FLOYD  
Independent Ethics Officer

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

*John Laurance Reid*

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JOHN LAURANCE REID  
Board Counsel












# AO 2025-02

Final Audit Report

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