

# Wisconsin Ethics Commission

## *For State And Local Government Officials*

### Letters Of Reference

The Wisconsin Ethics Commission offers these suggestions to state and local government officials who write a letter of reference.

#### **Stationery**

The type of stationery to be used depends upon how the public official knows the person for whom the reference letter is being written.

- If the official knows the subject through state government business, then state government stationery is appropriate.
- If the subject of the letter is known to the official primarily in a social context, *e.g.*, a relative, friend, neighbor or a school or social acquaintance, personal stationery should be used.
- If the subject of the reference is known to the official primarily through a personal business relationship, (*e.g.*, as a client, customer, or employee), either private business letterhead or personal stationery is the appropriate choice.

#### **Dissemination of references**

For references sent to organizations that do not employ lobbyists and have no special interests in the official's government actions, no restraints will apply.

If the letter of reference is likely to be used in support of an application to a lobbyist or lobbying principal, then a "To whom it may concern" letter is a good choice. This approach is designed to relieve a lobbyist of a sense that a state official is pressuring the lobbyist to employ a specific person.

By writing a reference letter that the subject may convey to any number of schools, scholarship committees, potential employers, *et cetera*:

- The official demonstrates support for the person who has sought the reference.
- The person who has sought the reference may use the letter for multiple applications.
- The official is not in direct correspondence with (or solicitation of) anyone.