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***Press Release***  
***September 11, 2003***

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**ETHICS COMMISSION REMINDER: ETHICS LAWS APPLY TO  
ELECTION EQUIPMENT VENDORS AND OFFICIALS**

At its meeting yesterday, the Ohio Ethics Commission discussed recent and continuing reports of gifts being given to County Boards of Election officials and employees by elections systems vendors and consultants. The Commission reiterated its message to elections system vendors, and their lobbyists and agents, that Ohio's Ethics Law prohibits anyone from giving substantial things of value to public officials or employees, when seeking or doing business with public agencies, or when those agencies regulate their products and services. The Commission noted that prohibitions apply regardless of any legal responsibilities to later disclose the gifts.

David E. Freel, the Commission's Executive Director, stated, "Substantial gifts are always prohibited, regardless of whether they are later disclosed by a lobbyist or the official. Both the Ethics Law and the Lobbying Law are critical in helping to ensure that there is an open and impartial process to the public. The Commission believes that those involved need to carefully adhere to these and any other legal or administrative requirements in the process."

The Ethics Law also prohibits all public officials and employees, including election board members and their employees, from soliciting, accepting, or using their authority to secure improper gifts. Where these things of value are paid by persons who are attempting to market their equipment, or who are servicing existing products, before public agencies, both those who provide the gift and those who accept it may violate Ohio's Ethics Laws. Nominal promotional items or sales material are not prohibited by law.

The Commission took the occasion to also caution election board members and employees that ethics laws prohibit them from having any business association with companies that are doing or seeking to do business with, or regulated by, the county. This would include

election equipment vendors or their consultants. A board member would be prohibited, for example, from receiving consulting fees for providing services to a company that is regulated by or seeking business with that board, or any agency of that county. A board member or employee is also prohibited from any participation or vote with regard to companies or others with whom he has a business association.

The Ohio Ethics Commission is an independent state agency that applies and administers the Ethics Law for state and local public officials and employees outside of the General Assembly and judiciary. The Commission was created 30 years ago upon the enactment of the Ohio Ethics Law.