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## *Press Release*

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**For more information, contact:**

David E. Freel, Executive Director, or  
Jennifer Hardin, Chief Advisory Attorney  
(614) 466-7090

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**ETHICS COMMISSION ADVISES FOUR CUYAHOGA  
COUNTY COUNCIL CANDIDATES AND PROSECUTOR  
AND ISSUES GENERAL ETHICS GUIDANCE**

At its meeting on Tuesday, the Ohio Ethics Commission issued four advisory opinions addressing potential conflicts of interest in response to questions from four different candidates for the newly-created Cuyahoga County Council. Each of the four candidates serves in a key management role with a nonprofit entity, although each nonprofit has a different level of funding from the county and governmental agencies directly connected with the county. The four candidates are:

- Christopher S. Ronayne, President of University Circle Inc., which receives less than one percent of its annual budget from the County and Cuyahoga Arts and Culture;
- Chip Joseph, Director of a transitional program for homeless men, which receives less than two percent of its annual budget from the County;
- James Levin, Artistic Director, Ingenuity Festival, which receives about eleven percent of its annual budget from Cuyahoga Arts and Culture;
- Danny Williams, Executive Director, Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland, which receives about twenty-three percent of its annual budget from Cuyahoga County and the County Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Service board.

The Commission concluded that none of these four candidates, if elected, would be prohibited from continuing to serve in their private roles because none of the organizations they served were dependent upon county funding. However, with respect to seeking any new contracts or grants from the county for their organization, each candidate would be required to observe protections to the public against any direct conflict of interest in their public role in matters involving their organization and its funding. Each candidate must objectively demonstrate that they have disclosed their conflict, have not participated in any fashion with county officials in the contracts and grants to their organization, and that the

organization is the best or only source from which the county could acquire the services, as conditions of a four-part requirement under state law.

The Commission cautioned that, if elected to county council, each would also be prohibited from: (1) participating, formally or informally, in any contract, regulatory matter, or other issue before council that affected the organization's interests; (2) performing any services, in the scope of their private employment, on matters before any county office, even if he does not participate in the matter as a county council member; and (3) disclosing or using any confidential information acquired during his public service.

The Commission separately approved an advisory opinion in response to a request from the Cuyahoga County prosecuting attorney concluding that the prosecuting attorney would be unable to serve as a board member of a nonprofit organization created by the county to oversee wind energy development, even if he were to serve in his official capacity. The Commission concluded that the prosecuting attorney would be unable to fully exercise the many duties required of his office in relation to the nonprofit if he simultaneously served as a board member of the organization.

Finally, the Commission approved guidance contained in an Information Sheet as a general overview of the Ethics Law for new officials on the Cuyahoga County Council and employees of Cuyahoga County government. The Information Sheet reminds that, in addition to any new ethical standards adopted by Cuyahoga County Council which become applicable in the future, the provisions of Ohio's Ethics Law will continue to apply to individuals elected to County Council and County Executive positions, all employees of county government, as well as to individuals appointed to other county positions and boards. The Information Sheet will be available on the Commission's Web site.

The Ohio Ethics Commission is an independent agency that oversees the Ohio Ethics Law for most state and local public officials and employees. The Commission can provide, on its own initiative or upon request, ethics advice to public officials before they act. The Commission has been serving the public and state and local government since its formation as part of the Ohio Ethics Law in 1973.