

SOCIETY OF TOXICOLOGIC PATHOLOGY



June 28, 2011

Richard M. Thomas, Associate General Counsel
Office of Government Ethics, Suite 500
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20005-3917

Dear Mr. Thomas,

This letter is written in support of the proposed rule exemption and amendment under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(2) (RIN 3209-AA09). The letter is offered by seven societies listed below, which are members of the Scientific Liaison Coalition (SLC), a coalition of 14 national scientific societies formed in 2010 to increase the impact of science in the field of toxicology to improve public health.

Public/private partnerships benefit both professional societies and the federal government. Many members of our societies are federal government employees who have contributed in many ways to the progress of scientific knowledge in support of public health, including through service on committees and as officers of scientific societies. The officers of our societies are generally nominated and elected to office by the membership. The leadership formulates policies and has full power to act for the societies within the provisions of the constitution and bylaws of the organizations. The leadership is responsible for the financial matters of the societies, which may include setting dues, raising and investing funds, and authorizing disbursement of funds. These efforts are typically voluntary and without remuneration. As Section 208(a) of title 18 of the United States Code is currently written, organization members who are federal employees and serve in an official capacity, such as in leadership positions, are prohibited from engaging in meaningful and productive discussion about budgetary items even if that member has no personal financial interest in the society. In addition, the current restrictions make it virtually impossible for government employees to serve as president of such societies. It is in the best interest of the societies to have members from all professional sectors, including federal employees. Further they should be allowed to participate fully in all aspects of the society, including serving as officers and oversight of financial matters. For this reason, we are in full support of the proposed rule amendment to allow such participation to occur.

With regard to proposed Section 2640.203(m) that addresses the issue of allowing federal employees to participate on the boards of directors of certain outside nonprofit organizations, including professional associations and scientific societies, in an official capacity, we are again in agreement with the proposed change. Allowing federal employees to serve as representatives of the federal government on the boards of such organizations generates the greatest possible interaction between federal employees and other scientists, improving the quality of scientific discussion for all parties and providing the opportunity for representatives of government organizations to express views from the government perspective. Moreover, the use of official time to engage in such duties should be allowed and encouraged in that their effort could be a direct benefit to the quality of government programs.

In conclusion, the undersigned societies of the SLC are in full support of the proposed rule exemption and amendment under 18 U.S.C. 208(b)(2). We agree with the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) that “such financial interests are too remote or inconsequential to affect the integrity of employees’ services....” As stated, appropriate controls are currently in place to reasonably ensure against a conflict of interest. We, the undersigned seven toxicology-related societies, whose total membership exceeds 13,600, appreciate the efforts of the OGE to foster the continued and positive participation of federal employees in professional scientific societies such as ours.

Respectfully,

The American Academy of Clinical Toxicology

Environmental Mutagen Society

Safety Pharmacology Society

Society for the Study of Reproduction

Society of Toxicology

Society of Toxicologic Pathology

Teratology Society