

Office of Government Ethics

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Letter to an Employee dated July 8, 1991

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the programs and activities of the United States Office of Government Ethics. The Office has broad authority for setting government-wide policies designed to prevent conflicts of interest. These policies must be implemented by the ethics officials within individual Departments and agencies.

You also asked for our comments on the question of whether a Government employee may live with, and pay rent to, another Government employee who works in the same agency and is within the first employee's area of supervision.

There is no statute or regulation which specifically prohibits an employee from living with, or paying rent to, another employee. Nevertheless, in some cases, concern for the appearance of a conflict of interest may require an employee to recuse himself from official matters involving a second employee or to take some other appropriate remedial action. In the case you describe, an agency ethics official might properly determine that the supervisor recuse himself from all agency matters which would affect the employee with whom he is living. Alternatively, in some situations, an appearance of a conflict of interest may not be able to be corrected unless one of the employees is reassigned to a different office. The facts of each particular case must be examined by the agency ethics official before a determination can be made.

If you have further questions related to the particular situation described in your letter, we suggest that you direct them to the ethics official at the agency involved.

Sincerely,

Stephen D. Potts
Director