



San Francisco Ethics Commission

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Ethics Commission Fines Former SFMTA Employee \$42,611 for Violating Ethics and Gift Laws

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At its monthly public meeting Friday, the San Francisco Ethics Commission unanimously approved a stipulated agreement fining Charlie Chiem, former IT Support Administration with SFMTA, \$42,611 for nineteen counts of violating City ethics and gift laws. In the proposed Stipulation, Decision, and Order adopted by the Commission, Chiem acknowledged responsibility and agreed to pay a monetary penalty for receiving numerous gifts from restricted sources in excess of applicable gift limits and using City resources including e-mail systems, laptops, and time, for personal gain. As authorized by the City Charter, the resolution of violations through a public stipulated agreement enables Respondents and the Ethics Commission to resolve enforcement matters without the need of a lengthier and costlier process involving a hearing on the merits. The Commission is authorized to assess a monetary penalty of up to three times the amount a Respondent was enriched or \$5,000 for each violation.

Commission Chair Agemira Florez-Feng thanked Ethics Commission staff for their efficient and effective work on this case. Vice Chair Yaman Salahi commended Ethics Commission Investigators and staff for their thorough work and highlighted the severity of Chiem's actions and abuse of office.

As detailed *In the Matter of Charlie Chiem* (SFEC Case No. 24-787), while serving as an IT Operations Support Administrator with SFMTA, from 2021 – 2024, Chiem used his City computer and City email accounts to register for and attend hundreds of online webinars unrelated to his City duties, on City time. By leveraging City resources in this way, including creating additional City email addresses under false aliases in order to obtain duplicate incentives, Chiem received thousands of dollars' worth of gift cards, merchandise, alcohol, travel credits, and other benefits. By repeatedly using City resources over several years for personal gain, Chiem violated the city's prohibition on the use of City resources for non-City purposes. The Commission fined Chiem \$5,000 each for two counts related to his use of City time and resources, including his own and several false SFMTA email addresses, in attending nearly 500 webinars during work hours.

Chiem further used his City email and title to misrepresent himself as an "IT Manager" with SFMTA – a position he never held – to gain access to multiple business-sponsored events at professional sports games in the San Francisco Bay Area. These events were hosted by technology and cybersecurity companies seeking to do business with SFMTA and were marketed as opportunities to discuss IT products and for businesses to cultivate new clients. Chiem registered for and attended at least 14 such events from 2021 to 2024, often receiving additional benefits such as food, drinks, transportation, merchandise, and plus-one tickets. For 10 of these events Chiem designated himself specifically as an IT Manager with SFMTA. By holding himself out as a department representative without authorization, Chiem gave the impression that he was acting in his official capacity as an SFMTA employee and used

the prestige of office for private advantage, conferring upon himself benefits he otherwise would not have received. For this, the Commission fined Chiem \$5,000 each for three violations.

By accepting tickets and additional benefits from these companies which he knew or had reason to know were seeking to do business with his department, Chiem also violated the City's restricted source gift laws. Because the value of the tickets and incentives received far exceeded any gift-limit exception, the Commission imposed penalties equal to twice the unlawful value received for each of the remaining 14 counts.

Chiem resigned from City employment shortly after being confronted by investigators and accepted responsibility for his conduct. In total, the Commission fined Chiem \$42,611 for his repeated, long-running misuse of City resources and accepting gifts from prohibited restricted sources.

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The San Francisco Ethics Commission was created directly by the City's voters with the passage of Proposition K in November 1993 and is responsible for the independent and impartial administration and enforcement of laws related to campaign finance, public financing of candidates, governmental ethics, conflicts of interests, and registration and reporting by lobbyists, campaign consultants, permit consultants, and major developers. Our mission is to practice and promote the highest standards of integrity in government. We achieve that by delivering impactful programs that promote fair, transparent, and accountable governmental decision making for the benefit of all San Franciscans. Public service is a public trust, and our aim is to ensure that San Franciscans can have confidence that the operations of the City and County and the decisions made by its officials and employees are fair, just, and made without any regard to private or personal gain.