

# NYC CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BOARD

## THE PUBLIC SERVICE PUZZLER

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Editor:

Rob Casimir

## THE FUTURE IS NOW\*

Flying cars! Virtual reality! Robots! *Robots!* The future we were promised was going to be so cool, but what we've got so far has been, well, let's call it *considerably less cool*: smartphones that harvest your data and apps that hurt your brain, cars that don't fly but can autopilot themselves pretty well when no obstacles/human children are nearby, and robots that can both vacuum and faint at the sight of danger at convincingly human levels.

All this ersatz futurism is enough to turn one a little cynical, but worry not, because this time: THE FUTURE IS HERE. Last time, when we said the future was about adding legs to a virtual reality avatar? Way off base. That bit where everyone was paying ten thousand dollars for a cryptocurrency JPEG? In retrospect, we probably should have known that wasn't THE FUTURE, but you have to understand: everyone was *very excited* at the time. Anyway, it doesn't matter — we learned our lesson. Which is why we're able to say now with such certainty that THE FUTURE IS HERE, and this time it's all about artificial intelligence.

This month's Public Service Puzzler is a great example of that: utilizing nothing more than an expensive subscription to the world's most comprehensive multimodal large language model and 20 seconds of government time, look how beautiful the AI is able to talk about COIB:

*The Conflicts of Interest Board stands as a functionally autonomous Mayoral agency within New York City, dedicated to the administration, enforcement, and interpretation of Chapter 68 of the New York City Charter, which encompasses the City's Conflicts of Interest Law, as well as Section 12-112 of the Administrative Code, outlining the City's Annual Disclosure Law. We invite you to expand your knowledge of this esteemed institution and the wider sphere of government ethics by exploring the various training and education resources available on our website, including information on the \$49 Gift Rule, the blanket restrictions on superiors and subordinates volunteering together, and the Lobbyist Gift Rule.*

*Our Board's objective is to proactively address ethical dilemmas for public servants through a synergistic approach of engaging educational programs, discreet counsel, and rigorous enforcement. A key aspect of our guidance involves assisting public servants in navigating potential conflicts, as, ultimately, preserving integrity within City government is a collective responsibility shared by all City employees. It is through the concerted efforts of each individual that we can uphold the public trust, which lies at the heart of public service.*

Isn't it amazing that a robot wrote all that? Think of all the tasks we could automate: all the slow, boring work we could offload to a resource like this, freeing us up to work on other tasks that require more human attention and focus! This tech is going to be revolutionary! Disruptive! But — and maybe it's just me — but, you know, the longer I look at that paragraph above, the more I notice maybe a few very small, very minor, factual errors? It's not a huge deal, I just think...well, we might have to do a quick, second, *human* pass on this information, just to make absolutely sure it's right. And Reader: maybe you can help me with this.

To win this month's Public Service Puzzler, review the above passage and email [Contest@coib.nyc.gov](mailto:Contest@coib.nyc.gov) with your list of every factual inaccuracy contained therein. A winner will be selected at random from among everyone who gets the correct answer, to be featured in next month's issue! Between me, you — the reader/next Puzzler winner — and a multi-billion dollar disruptive tech solution, we're gonna have this paragraph proofread and ready to publish quicker than ever!

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## LAST MONTH'S BIG WINNER: VINCENT RIVELLESE!



Congratulations to last month's winner: Vincent Rivellese! In a virtuosic display of government ethics bracketology, it was Vincent who was able to best predict the outcome of a Sweet 16 of Chapter 68 provisions voted on by our esteemed panel of COIB staffers!

Everyone knows the \$50 Gift Rule (aggregate and cumulative! per firm! every year!) keeps the official decisions of public servants free from the influence of fancy goods and services, but in our first Final Four matchup, it was Misuse of Resources that managed to eke out a win — while public servants accepting valuable gifts would certainly be damaging to the government's perceived integrity, a world in which every City resource (time, physical space, technology) could be coopted for private use would have quite a difficult time delivering services efficiently!

On the other side of the bracket, the transparency darling Moonlighting Waivers (the City *has to know* if you're getting paid by a firm that does business with the City, right?) ran into the buzzsaw of the Superior-Subordinate Financial Relationship Ban. Which kind of makes sense, right? If you want your decision-makers to make decisions free of bias, they probably shouldn't be getting their money mixed up with the folks they're meant to be supervising. Additionally, it's perhaps not surprising that a panel of COIB staffers tend to like the part of Chapter 68 which acts as a prophylactic measure protecting City employees from financial predation within an otherwise very useful supervisory hierarchy!

So who won the final showdown between Misuse of City Resources and the Superior-Subordinate Financial Relationship Ban? After what was the closest matchup of the entire tournament, it was the Superior-Subordinate Financial Relationship Ban that ended up trimming the proverbial nets and taking home the honor of being our panel's favorite part of Chapter 68! So who is this Vincent guy who was able to predict our picks so well?

**What is your City/office title?**

I am a Senior Appellate Attorney at the Bronx County District Attorney's Office.

**Shoutout to the Bronx on another Puzzler winner! What do you do in your job?**

Mostly, I write briefs to appellate courts in response to briefs by criminal defendants who are claiming that their trials or their sentences were unfair. I also supervise junior attorneys and provide advice and training on the law to attorneys throughout the office.

**That sounds like a lot of writing. How long have you been doing it?**

29 years. I worked for the Manhattan DA first, starting in 1994, and also clerked for a judge for a few years. I just came to the Bronx DA in December 2022, so it's been less than 5 months there.

**29 years! The City definitely thanks you for your service. What do you get up to in your free time?**

I am an avid "grip sports" aficionado. I go to competitions all over the country where the goal is to grip, crush, pinch, or squeeze various implements while lifting weights hanging from them. I am ranked 4th in my weight class (body weight under 183 pounds) in North America. I am especially proud that I am certified as having closed the IronMind Captains of Crush No. 3 hand gripper. I enjoy this hobby because it is a perfect combination of macho and geek, and because it brings together people who are otherwise very different but who share the common hobby.

**So it's no surprise you crushed last month's Puzzler challenge! OK, last question: what's your favorite part of City service?**

Because I am a lawyer for the District Attorney and not for a particular person, my "client" is "the People of the State of New York" — so I do not have to advocate for what an individual client asks, like most lawyers do, but instead simply for what I believe is just.

**Nice position to be in! Thanks again to Vincent for participating in the Public Service Puzzler, and keep on crushing it for the good people of New York! (Sorry.)**



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