

# Tips from the Texas Ethics Commission to Comply with Judicial Campaign Fairness Act (JCFA) Contribution Limits

*This guide is not intended to provide comprehensive information about the JCFA. Please consult the “[Campaign Finance Guide for Judicial Candidates and Officeholders](#)” for more information about additional filing requirements, restrictions, and limits on certain contributions and expenditures that apply to judicial candidates and officeholders.*

## 1. Know your contribution limit

A judicial candidate cannot accept political contributions from a person that exceed certain limits in connection with an election. Elec. Code § 253.155. The contribution limits are:

- \$5,000 for candidates for statewide judicial offices;
- \$5,000 for judicial districts with a population of more than one million;
- \$2,500 for judicial districts with a population of 250,000 to one million; and
- \$1,000 for judicial districts with a population of less than 250,000.

These limits apply to total contributions, both monetary and non-monetary (in-kind), from an individual or entity in connection with an election. A political contribution is “in connection with” the next election for the office occurring after the contribution is made, *unless* the contribution is designated in writing for a specific election.

See the [current population figures for judicial districts](#) for information regarding a specific judicial district.

## 2. Do not accept more than the applicable limit from a law firm

The contribution limits in section 253.155 of the Election Code restrict how much a judicial candidate can accept from a person in connection with an election. A law firm is considered a person for purposes of the JCFA. See [Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 342 \(1996\)](#). Therefore, a judicial candidate cannot accept political contributions from a law firm that exceed the applicable contribution limit in section 253.155 of the Election Code (listed above at #1).

These limits apply to total contributions, both monetary and non-monetary (in-kind), in connection with an election.

**EXAMPLE:** Brenda Brown is a judicial candidate for a statewide judicial office. The law firm Smith & Associates would like to contribute to Brenda Brown’s campaign. The maximum amount that Brenda can accept from Smith & Associates is \$5,000 in connection with a single election.

There are additional restrictions that apply to political contributions from persons associated with a law firm. See #5 below for more information.

## 3. Do not accept more than the applicable limit from family members of contributors

The JCFA treats a political contribution from a spouse or unmarried minor child of an individual as a contribution from that individual. Thus, section 253.155 of the Election Code acts as a limit on how much a judicial candidate can accept from certain related contributors.

These limits apply to total contributions, both monetary and non-monetary (in-kind), in connection with an election.

**EXAMPLE:** Stan and Sue Smith are married. Judge Jones is a judicial candidate for a district court in a judicial district with a population of 250,000 to one million. Stan Smith contributes \$2,500 to Judge Jones for a single election. Because Stan Smith has already contributed the maximum amount for this election, Judge Jones is prohibited from accepting a political contribution of any amount from Sue Smith for the same election.

#### 4. Do not accept more than the applicable limit from persons associated with a law firm

A judicial candidate may not accept a political contribution of more than \$50 from a member of a law firm's *restricted contributor class* if the total of all political contributions already accepted from members of the class exceeds the following limits:

- \$30,000 for candidates for statewide judicial offices;
- \$30,000 for judicial districts with a population of more than one million;
- \$15,000 for judicial districts with a population from 250,000 to one million; and
- \$6,000 for judicial districts with a population of less than 250,000.

The *restricted contributor class* includes: (1) the law firm itself; (2) any partner, associate, shareholder, or employee of the law firm; (3) anyone designated "of counsel" or "of the firm"; (4) any general-purpose political committee established or controlled by the law firm or members of the firm; and (5) any spouse or minor child of a member of the restricted class.

These limits apply to total contributions, both monetary and non-monetary (in-kind), in connection with an election.

**EXAMPLE:** Lisa Lawyer, an associate at the law firm Smith & Associates, has not contributed to Judge Anderson, a judicial candidate for a statewide judicial office. Judge Anderson has accepted from the members of Smith & Associates's *restricted contributor class* \$30,000. Judge Anderson may not accept more than \$50 from Lisa Lawyer in connection with the same election despite the higher \$5,000 limit in section 253.155 of the Election Code (listed above at #1). See [Ethics Advisory Opinion No. 274 \(1995\)](#).

#### 5. Do not accept more than the applicable limit from general-purpose committees (GPACs)

A judicial candidate may not accept political contributions from GPACs that exceed certain limits in connection with an election. The contribution limits are:

- \$300,000 for statewide judicial offices;
- \$75,000 for courts of appeals if the judicial district has a population of more than one million;
- \$52,500 for courts of appeals if the judicial district has a population of one million or less;
- \$52,500 for district or county courts if the judicial district has a population of more than one million;
- \$30,000 for district or county courts if the judicial district has a population of 250,000 to one million; and
- \$15,000 for district or county courts if the judicial district has a population of less than 250,000.

These limits apply to total contributions, both monetary and non-monetary (in-kind), from all GPACs in connection with an election.

**EXAMPLE:** Walter Williams is a judicial candidate for a district court in a judicial district with a population of less than 250,000. GPACs A, B, and C each contribute \$5,000 to Walter's campaign for a single election. Because Walter has already accepted a total of \$15,000 in the aggregate from all GPACs, he is prohibited from accepted any further contributions from any other GPAC for the same election.

The contribution limits in section 253.155 of the Election Code do not apply to GPACs. However, as a practical matter, the third-party expenditure limits effectively cap the amount any single GPAC can contribute to a judicial candidate. See the "[Campaign Finance Guide for Judicial Candidates and Officeholders](#)" for more information on third-party expenditure limits.

**NOTE:** Contribution limits are increased, **for strictly limited purposes**, for a candidate who does not have an opponent on the ballot in a primary or general election. See the "[Campaign Finance Guide for Judicial Candidates and Officeholders](#)" for more information.