



U.S. SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

Franking

Quick Reference

Definition of the Frank

The frank is the facsimile signature of a Senator in the corner of an envelope that takes the place of a stamp and authorizes sending official material through the domestic mail without prepayment of postage. Senators and certain Senate officers are authorized to send, as franked mail, material relating to the official business, duties, and activities of their offices.

Franking Highlights

- The frank is not free postage—delivery costs are paid using the sending office’s taxpayer-funded franking allotment.
- The frank may only be used for official Senate business.
- The frank may not be used in any manner that results in an economic benefit to a non-Senate organization that otherwise would have had to pay postage. For example:
 - The frank may not be loaned to a non-Senate organization (*e.g.*, an outside organization’s pamphlet may not be included in a franked mailing).
 - The frank may not be used to send an invitation to an event sponsored by an outside organization.

Authorized Users of the Frank

- Senators
- Senators-Elect (*for Senate-Related Duties*)
- Vice President of the U.S.
- Secretary of the Senate
- Sergeant at Arms of the Senate
- Senate Legislative Counsel
- Senate Legal Counsel
- Senate committees under the frank of the chairman for official committee business only
- Democratic Caucus and Republican Conference of the Senate (*mail must relate exclusively to official activities and may not be partisan or political*)
- Former Senators (*for 90 days after leaving office and in order to close the office*)
- Surviving Senate spouses (*for 180 days after a Senator’s death in order to send nonpolitical mail relating to the death of the Senator*)

Violations of the Frank

Each Senator is personally responsible for ensuring that the use of their frank complies with the law, Senate Rules, and *Interpretative Rulings* of the Select Committee on Ethics (the Committee). Violation of the franking privilege may result in the Senator being held personally responsible for the cost of the mailing. Misuse of the frank for personal purposes is punishable by criminal penalties.



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Examples of Frankable Mail

- Communication with any individual or government agency regarding programs and decisions or any other matters of public concern or public service, including any matter relating to past or present Congressional action
- Federal regulations or federal publications containing general information
- The *Congressional Record*
- Official newsletters and press releases
- Public service material created exclusively with appropriated funds
- Questionnaires seeking public opinion
- Nonpartisan voter registration or election information
- Biographical material and photographs sent in direct response to a specific request from the public
- Mail between Washington, D.C. and home state offices
- Mail to other Members of Congress and all other legislators
- Congratulations on a public distinction (see examples below)

Examples of Public Distinctions (Frankable)

- Recent naturalization as an American citizen
- Receipt of a high school diploma by a senior citizen through an adult education program
- Enlistment or re-enlistment in the Armed Forces or acceptance into a U.S military service academy
- Becoming an Eagle Scout, a VFW Commander, or an American Legion Commander
- Being elected or appointed to public office
- Becoming a director of a state museum

Examples of Non-Frankable Mail

- Solicitations for political support or financial assistance
- Personal mail
- Holiday greetings unless they are an incidental reference in otherwise frankable mail
- Condolences sent to the public
- Messages about a Senator's family activities, other than in connection with official duties
- Messages to a Member on a personal, rather than official, basis
- Congratulations on a personal distinction (see examples below)

Examples of Personal Distinctions (Non-Frankable)

- Birth, marriage, or anniversary
- Graduation from high school or college, or selection as class valedictorian
- Being in the top 10% of a graduating class
- Promotion in a business
- Establishing a new business
- Registering to vote
- Receiving an award from a local organization
- Being mentioned in a trade association journal, newspaper, or other media

NOTE: Senators may use officially-related funds to send mail related to personal distinctions when acting in their official capacity. Letters related to personal distinction are not rendered frankable when mailed in direct response. Whether a distinction is considered “public” or “personal” is determined by the Committee on the basis of its *Interpretative Rulings* and precedent. If you have any questions regarding the difference between public and personal distinctions, please contact the Committee.

Please note that this is intended as a quick reference and does not represent or address all applicable authority and guidance on the subject. For more information, consult the relevant laws, rules, and standards of conduct, including the Senate Ethics Manual, or contact the Committee at (202) 224-2981 for advice concerning your specific situation.

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