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COOK COUNTY POLITICAL ACTIVITY PROHIBITIONS

The Cook County Ethics Ordinance § 2-583 places strict prohibitions on the use of taxpayer-funded County time and resources for political activity. This guide provides an overview. As a County official, appointee or employee, you cannot:

- 1) Engage in any political activity during any compensated time;
- 2) Use County property or resources for political activity;
- 3) Require or coerce any County employee to perform any political activity during work hours, during any County compensated time off or as a condition of employment;
- 4) Compel or intimidate any other official or employee to make or refrain from making any political contribution.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the restrictions regarding political fundraising? Fundraising on County time is strictly prohibited. County officials, appointees and employees may not compel or intimidate any other official or employee to make or refrain from making a political contribution. A County elected official cannot personally solicit any political contributions from his or her employees or their spouses or immediate family members. County employees with contract management authority (e.g., responsibility for preparing bid specifications, evaluating bid proposals, negotiating contract terms, or supervising contract performance) may not serve on the political fundraising committee of any elected County official or candidate for County office. All candidates for County office are limited in the amount of money that they can raise from County vendors, prospective County vendors and registered lobbyists.

What kinds of activities are prohibited? The Ethics Ordinance defines “political activity” broadly. You should not use compensated County time to conduct any activity to further a campaign, political organization, or position on a referendum question. Some examples of prohibited conduct include:

- Planning or participation in political events or fundraisers.
- Buying tickets to any political fundraiser or making a political contribution.
- Making any contact with voters on behalf of a candidate, political organization, or for or against any referendum question.
- Conducting any research on behalf of a candidate, political organization, or for or against any referendum question.

- Campaigning or volunteering/working for a campaign.
- Circulating political petitions or working to uphold or challenge signatures.
- Advocating on Election Day on behalf of a candidate, political organization, or for or against a referendum question.
- Check the Ethics Ordinance or call the Board of Ethics if you have questions on this.

What about political activity on my own time? Nothing in the Ordinance prohibits a County employee from voluntarily engaging in political activity on his or her own time (including vacation, personal or compensatory time off).

What about using County funds for political materials? County funds cannot be used to print or mail an official's newsletters or brochures during election season (January 1 to primary election day and September 1 to general election day), if the official is a candidate. No public service announcement or advertisement on behalf of any County program may contain an elected County official's image, name or voice at any time after the official has filed nominating papers and as long as the official remains a candidate. Public funds may not be used to purchase items like stickers, pins, buttons or commercial billboards with the name or image of any County elected official.

Tell me about the *Employees as Election Day Workers Program*. County employees may not work for a particular campaign or political organization on Election Day on County time. But the Cook County Clerk's Office has a program to certify employees to serve as election judges and other Election Day workers for elections administered by the Clerk. Employees in this program may be excused from their regular work assignments without being required to use vacation, personal, or compensatory time off. These employees receive their regular salary for that day in addition to a stipend. Call the Clerk's Office at (312) 603-1122 for more information.

What are the consequences of violating these provisions? Violations could lead to disciplinary action, fines, and/or, in the case of engaging in or attempting to coerce political activity on compensated time, prosecution for a Class A misdemeanor, which can include imprisonment.

What should I do if I have questions or want to report something? Prohibited political activity should be reported to the Board of Ethics, Office of Inspector General or Bureau of Human Resources. All reports are confidential and reporting employees are protected from retaliation.

The Board of Ethics is available to help County employees and officials understand and comply with these provisions. Call us at (312) 603-4304, or email us at cookcounty.ethics@cookcountyil.gov. We are here to help!