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## **COOK COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS**

69 W. WASHINGTON STREET, SUITE 3040  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602  
312/603-4304 OFFICE  
312/603-3760 FAX 312/603-1011 TT/TDD

### **COOK COUNTY POLITICAL ACTIVITY PROHIBITIONS**

The Cook County Ethics Ordinance, as well as a number of other laws and County rules, place strict prohibitions on the use of taxpayer-funded County time and resources for political activity. This guide provides an overview of the limits on political activity set forth in the Ethics Ordinance.

#### **Section 2.12 - Prohibitions on Political Activity**

##### **Performance of Political Activity by County Employees**

- County employees shall not engage in political activity during any compensated time (other than vacation, personal, or compensatory time off) and shall not use County property or resources for political activities for the benefit of any candidate or political organization.
- At no time shall any County official and employee *require* any County employee to perform any prohibited political activity during work hours, during any County compensated time off or as a condition of employment.
- Participation in political activity shall not be a condition of, or rewarded by, any employees' salary, bonus, compensatory time or continued employment.

##### **Fundraising Prohibitions**

- County officials and employees shall not compel or intimidate any other official or employee to make or refrain from making any political contribution.
- County elected officials shall not personally solicit any political contributions from their employees, or spouses or immediate family members of their employees.
- County employees with contract management authority (e.g., responsibility for preparing bid specifications, evaluating bid proposals, negotiating contract terms, or supervising contract performance) shall not serve on the political fundraising committee of any elected County official or candidate for County office.

### **What Kind of Political Activity is Prohibited?**

- Preparing for, organizing, or participating in any political meeting, rally, demonstration, or other political event.
- Fundraising, including but not limited to the buying, selling, distributing, or receiving payments for tickets for any political fundraiser, political meeting, or other political event.
- Soliciting, planning the solicitation of, or preparing any document or report regarding any thing of value intended as a campaign contribution.
- Planning, conducting, or participating in a public opinion poll in connection with a political campaign, a political organization or referendum question.
- Surveying or gathering information from potential or actual voters to determine probable vote.
- Assisting at the polls on election day on behalf of a candidate, political organization, or for or against any referendum question.
- Soliciting votes on behalf of a candidate, political organization, or for or against any referendum question, or helping in an effort to get voters to the polls.
- Initiating for circulation, preparing, circulating, reviewing, or filing any petition on behalf of a candidate for elective office or for or against any referendum question.
- Making contributions on behalf of any candidate for elective office in that capacity or in connection with a campaign for elective office.
- Preparing or reviewing responses to candidate questionnaires in connection with a campaign for elective office or on behalf of a political organization for political purposes.
- Distributing, preparing for distribution, or mailing campaign literature, campaign signs, or other campaign material on behalf of any candidate, or for or against any referendum question.
- Campaigning for any elective office or for or against any referendum question.
- Managing or working on a campaign for elective office or for or against any referendum question.
- Serving as a delegate, alternate, or proxy to a political party convention.
- Participating in any recount or challenge to the outcome of any election.

### **What Activity is Not Covered?**

Nothing in the Ordinance prohibits a County employee from engaging in activities related to his or her official duties or from voluntarily engaging in political activity on his or her own time (including vacation, personal or compensatory time off).

## **Section 2.15 - Newsletters, PSAs and Other Materials**

- County funds or resources may not be used by elected County officials to print or mail newsletters or brochures during election season (defined as February 1 to primary election day and September 1 to general election day), if the official is a candidate.
- An elected County official's image, name or voice shall not appear in any public service announcement or advertisement on behalf of any County program at any time after the official has filed nominating papers and as long as the official remains a candidate.
- The name or image of any County elected official shall not appear on any bumper stickers, pins, buttons or commercial billboards paid for with public funds.

### **Penalties**

Penalties for violating the various political activity provisions of the Ordinance, or knowingly furnishing false or misleading information to the Board of Ethics regarding a violation of the political activity provisions of the Ordinance, may include:

- employment sanctions (including discharge)
- fines ranging from \$500 to \$5,000
- prosecution for a Class A misdemeanor with up to 1 year in a penal institution

### **Where to Report Violations or Ask Questions**

Violations of the prohibitions on political activity should be reported to the Cook County Board of Ethics, Office of Inspector General or Bureau of Human Resources. All reports are confidential and employees are protected from retaliation for reporting violations.

The Board of Ethics is available to assist County employees and officials in understanding and complying with the prohibitions on political activity. Brochures and training are available. Contact the Board of Ethics at 312/603-4304.

*Copies of the Cook County Ethics Ordinance are available online at [www.cookcountygov.com](http://www.cookcountygov.com) (follow links to Board of Ethics page) or by request to the Board of Ethics, 69 West Washington Street, Suite 3040, Chicago, Illinois, 60602, (312) 603-4304.*