

Wayne County Ethics Policy

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SECTION 1. PURPOSE

Officers and employees of the County of Wayne hold their positions to serve and benefit the public, and not for obtaining unwarranted personal or private gain in the exercise and performance of their official powers and duties. The Wayne County Board of Supervisors recognizes that, in furtherance of this fundamental principle, there is a need for clear and reasonable standards of ethical conduct. This code of ethics establishes those standards.

The Wayne County Board of Ethics will decline to comment on, offer an opinion on or otherwise interfere with the decision(s) of any other municipality or government (including school districts) made by other Boards of Ethics within Wayne County.

The Wayne County Board of Ethics will, if asked by the governing body of any Wayne County municipality or government (including school districts), act as their Boards of Ethics but only in those instances where they do not have their own Board of Ethics.

SECTION 2. DEFINITIONS

- (a) “Board” means the governing board of a municipality and any municipal administrative board (e.g. planning board, zoning of board of appeals), commission, or other agency or body comprised of two or more municipal officers or employees.
- (b) “Code” means this code of ethics.
- (c) “Interest” means a direct or indirect financial or material benefit, but does not include any benefit arising from the provision or receipt of any services generally available to the residents or taxpayers of the municipality or an area of the municipality, or a lawful class of such residents or taxpayers. A municipal officer or employee is deemed to have an interest in any private organization when he or she, his or her spouse, or a member of his or her household, is an owner, partner, member, director, officer, employee, or directly or indirectly owns or controls more than 5% of the organization’s outstanding stock.
- (d) “Municipality” means the County of Wayne. The word “municipal” refers to the municipality.
- (e) “Municipal officer or employee” means a paid or unpaid officer or employee of the County of Wayne, including, but not limited to, the members of any municipal board.
- (f) “Relative” means a spouse, child, step-child, parent, step-parent, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, step-sibling, sibling’s spouse, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, first cousin, domestic partner or other household member of a municipal officer or employee, and individuals having any of these relationships to the spouse of the officer or employee.

SECTION 3. APPLICABILITY

This code of ethics applies to the officers and employees of the County of Wayne, and shall supersede any prior municipal code of ethics. The provisions of this code of ethics shall apply in addition to all applicable State and local laws relating to conflicts of interest and ethics including, but not limited to, article 18 of the General Municipal Law and all rules, regulations, policies and procedures of the County of Wayne.

SECTION 4. PROHIBITION ON USE OF MUNICIPAL POSITION FOR PERSONAL OR PRIVATE GAIN

No municipal officer or employee shall use his or her municipal position or official powers and duties to secure a financial or material benefit for himself or herself, a relative, or any private organization in which he or she is deemed to have an interest.

SECTION 5. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST IN LEGISLATION AND OTHER MATTERS

- (a) Whenever a matter requiring the exercise of discretion comes before a municipal officer or employee, either individually or as a member of a board, and disposition of the matter could result in a direct or indirect financial or material benefit to himself or herself, a relative, or any private organization in which he or she is deemed to have an interest, the municipal officer or employee shall disclose in writing the nature of the interest.
- (b) The disclosure shall be made when the matter requiring disclosure first comes before the municipal officer or employee, or when the municipal officer or employee first acquires knowledge of the interest requiring disclosure, whichever is earlier.
- (c) In the case of a person serving in an elective office, the disclosure shall be filed with the governing board of the municipality. In all other cases, the disclosure shall be filed with the person's supervisor or, if the person does not have a supervisor, the disclosure shall be filed with the municipal officer, employee or board having the power to appoint to the person's position. In addition, in the case of a person serving on a municipal board, a copy of the disclosure shall be filed with the board. Any disclosure made to a board shall be made publicly at a meeting of the board and must be included in the minutes of the meeting.

SECTION 6. RECUSAL AND ABSTENTION

- (a) No municipal officer or employee may participate in any decision or take any official action with respect to any matter requiring the exercise of discretion, including discussing the matter and voting on it, when he or she knows or has reason to know that the action could confer a direct or indirect financial or material benefit on himself or herself, a relative, or any private organization in which he or she is deemed to have an interest.
- (b) In the event that this section prohibits a municipal officer or employee from exercising or performing a power or duty:
 - (1) if the power or duty is vested in a municipal officer as a member of a board, then the power or duty shall be exercised or performed by the other members of the board; or
 - (2) if the power or duty that is vested in a municipal officer individually, then the power or duty shall be exercised or performed by his or her deputy or, if the officer does not have a deputy, the power or duty shall be performed by another person to whom the officer may lawfully delegate the function.
 - (3) if the power or duty is vested in a municipal employee, he or she must refer the matter to his or her immediate supervisor, and the immediate supervisor shall designate another person to exercise or perform the power or duty.

SECTION 7. PROHIBITION INAPPLICABLE; DISCLOSURE, RECUSAL AND ABSTENTION NOT REQUIRED

- (a) This code's prohibition on use of a municipal position (section 4), disclosure requirements (section 5), and requirements relating to recusal and abstention (section 6), shall not apply with respect to the following matters:
 - (1) adoption of the municipality's annual budget;
 - (2) any matter requiring the exercise of discretion that directly affects any of the following groups of people or a lawful class of such groups:
 - (i) all municipal officers or employees;
 - (ii) all residents or taxpayers of the municipality or an area of the municipality;
 - or
 - (iii) the general public; or
 - (3) any matter that does not require the exercise of discretion.
- (b) Recusal and abstention shall not be required with respect to any matter:
 - (1) which comes before a board when a majority of the board's total membership would otherwise be prohibited from acting by section 6 of this code;

- (2) which comes before a municipal officer when the officer would be prohibited from acting by section 6 of this code and the matter cannot be lawfully delegated to another person.

SECTION 8. INVESTMENTS IN CONFLICT WITH OFFICIAL DUTIES

- (a) No municipal officer or employee may acquire the following investments:
 - (1) investments that can be reasonably expected to require more than sporadic recusal and abstention under section 6 of this code; or
 - (2) investments that would otherwise impair the person's independence of judgment in the exercise or performance of his or her official powers and duties.
- (b) This section does not prohibit a municipal officer or employee from acquiring any other investments or the following assets:
 - (1) real property located within the municipality and used as his or her personal residence;
 - (2) less than five percent of the stock of a publicly traded corporation; or
 - (3) bonds or notes issued by the municipality and acquired more than one year after the date on which the bonds or notes were originally issued.

SECTION 9. PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT IN CONFLICT WITH OFFICIAL DUTIES

No municipal officer or employee, during his or her tenure as a municipal officer or employee, may engage in any private employment, including the rendition of any business, commercial, professional or other types of services, when the employment:

- (a) can be reasonably expected to require more than sporadic recusal and abstention pursuant to section 6 of this code;
- (b) can be reasonably expected to require disclosure or use of confidential information gained by reason of serving as a municipal officer or employee;
- (c) violates section 805-a (1)(c) or (d) of the General Municipal Law; or
- (d) requires representation of a person or organization other than the municipality in connection with litigation, negotiations or any other matter to which the municipality is a party.

SECTION 10. FUTURE EMPLOYMENT

- (a) No municipal officer or employee may ask for, pursue or accept a private post-government employment opportunity with any person or organization that has a matter requiring the exercise of discretion pending before the municipal officer or employee, either individually or as a member of a board, while the matter is pending or within the 30 days following final disposition of the matter.
- (b) No municipal officer or employee, for the one-year period after serving as a municipal officer or employee, may represent or render services to a private person or organization in connection with any matter involving the exercise of discretion before the municipal office, board, department or comparable organizational unit for which he or she serves.
- (c) No municipal officer or employee, at any time after serving as a municipal officer or employee, may represent or render services to a private person or organization in connection with any particular transaction in which he or she personally and substantially participated while serving as a municipal officer or employee.

SECTION 11. PERSONAL REPRESENTATIONS AND CLAIMS PERMITTED This code shall not be construed as prohibiting a municipal officer or employee from:

- (a) representing himself or herself, or his or her spouse or minor children before the municipality; or
- (b) asserting a claim against the municipality on his or her own behalf, or on behalf of his or her spouse or minor children.

SECTION 12. USE OF MUNICIPAL RESOURCES

- (a) Municipal resources shall be used for lawful municipal purposes. Municipal resources include, but are not limited to, municipal personnel, and the municipality's money, vehicles, equipment, materials, supplies or other property.
- (b) No municipal officer or employee may use or permit the use of municipal resources for personal or private purposes, but this provision shall not be construed as prohibiting:
 - (1) any use of municipal resources authorized by law or municipal policy;
 - (2) the use of municipal resources for personal or private purposes when provided to a municipal officer or employee as part of his or her compensation; or
 - (3) the incidental use during the business day of municipal telephones and computers for necessary personal matters such as family care and changes in work schedule.
- (c) No municipal officer or employee shall cause the municipality to spend more than is reasonably necessary for transportation, meals or lodging in connection with official travel.

SECTION 13. INTERESTS IN CONTRACTS

- (a) No municipal officer or employee may have an interest in a contract that is prohibited by section 801 of the General Municipal Law.
- (b) Every municipal officer and employee shall disclose interests in contracts with the municipality at the time and in the manner required by section 803 of the General Municipal Law.

SECTION 14. NEPOTISM

The employment of relatives in the same area of an organization may cause serious conflicts and problems with favoritism (or the perception of such), and negatively impact morale. Decisions concerning the employment, evaluation, promotion and compensation of personnel should be based on considerations of individual merit. Wayne County hires, promotes and transfers employees based on individual merit.

DEFINITIONS:

Nepotism: the practice of an employee, board member and/or elected official giving preferential treatment to relative in areas of employment, including but not limited to: hiring, promotion, transfer, compensation, evaluation and discipline.

Relative: a spouse, child, step-child, parent, step-parent, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, step-sibling, sibling's spouse, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, first cousin, domestic partner or other household member of a municipal officer or employee, and individuals having any of these relationships to the spouse of the officer or employee.

Policy:

An employee or an elected official shall not directly supervise another relative, and shall not be directly supervised by a relative.

No employee, board member or elected official shall be involved in any part of the process of influencing or controlling the terms and conditions of another relative's employment, including: hiring, evaluation of work performance, establishing or changing work assignments, making recommendations for compensation or salary adjustments, promotions or other personnel decisions.

County employees conducting interviews for the purpose of hiring a new employee shall inquire of all interviewees or applicants whether the individual has a relative that is already employed by the County, along with the name of the relative employee. This information shall be utilized to determine if hiring the prospective employee would result in a violation of this Policy.

EXCEPTIONS:

Any pre-existing relative relationships between employees of any County Department that predate this Policy (February 15, 2022) shall be exempt under this Policy. However, if the existing employment relationship is changed so that this conflict no longer exists (i.e. the employee relative is in a position that no longer directly reports to another employee relative), this Policy would apply in future employment decisions affecting employee relatives (i.e. the supervisor of the relative could no longer reemploy the relative in a directly subordinate position).

The County recognizes that employee relative conflicts might arise when one relative gains an leadership of an office where another relative already is employed. In such cases, the County may work with such Department where the conflict exists to reduce any real or perceived conflict between the employee relative (i.e. have the subordinate relative report directly to the employee in the next level of the supervisory chain, who shall be responsible for appointment, compensation, evaluations and other terms and conditions of employment).

An appointing authority within a Department (typically the Department Head) may appoint a relative within the Department the appointing authority oversees only if the appointing authority did not participate in the hiring process, including interviews and will not directly supervise the relative employee. The appointing authority must recuse themselves from disciplinary action against the relative employed in the department.

In addition, departments may have their own procedures with regard to standards associated with nepotism and the delivery of services (i.e. Prohibition from delivering services and making decisions that benefit relatives, as consumers of the service, in the course of the employee's work)

Any violations arising from the application of this Policy should be referred to the Personnel Director, the County Compliance Officer or County Administrator for resolution.

SECTION 15. POLITICAL SOLICITATIONS

- (a) No municipal officer or employee shall directly or indirectly compel or induce a subordinate municipal officer or employee to make, or promise to make, any political contribution, whether by gift of money, service or other thing of value, including endorsing a specific candidate or party, or signing a petition.
- (b) No municipal officer or employee may act or decline to act in relation to appointing, hiring or promoting, discharging, disciplining, or in any manner changing the official rank, status or compensation of any municipal officer or employee, or an applicant for a position as a municipal officer or employee, on the basis of giving or withholding or neglecting to make any contribution of money or service or any other valuable thing for any political purpose.

SECTION 16. NON-DISCRIMINATION

No municipal officer or employee will engage in any acts of bias, prejudice or discrimination defined as any disparaging or demeaning treatment, language or acts against persons of a specific race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or religion. Municipal officers and employees will adhere to and uphold laws that protect people from discrimination and strive to foster an environment that embraces diversity.

SECTION 17. CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

No municipal officer or employee who acquires confidential information in the course of exercising or performing his or her official powers or duties may disclose or use such information unless the disclosure or use is required by law or in the course of exercising or performing his or her official powers and duties.

SECTION 18. GIFTS

Definition:

For purposes of this section, a “gift” includes anything of value, whether in the form of money, service, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, thing or promise, or in any other form. The value of a gift is the gift’s fair market value, determined by the retail cost of the item or a comparable item. The fair market value of a ticket entitling the holder to food, refreshments, entertainment, or any other benefit is the face value of the ticket, or the actual cost to the donor, whichever is greater. Determination of whether multiple gifts from a single donor exceed seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) must be made by adding together the value of all gifts received from the donor by an officer or employee during the twelve-month period preceding the receipt of the most recent gift.

Solicitation/Acceptance/Receipt of Gifts:

- (a) No municipal officer or employee shall solicit, accept or receive a gift in violation of section 805-a (1)(a) of the General Municipal Law as interpreted in this section.
- (b) No municipal officer or employee may directly or indirectly solicit any gift for personal use or gain.
- (c) No municipal officer or employee, for personal use or gain, may accept or receive any gift (including cash, checks, gift cards/certificates, or any other item of value), or multiple gifts from the same donor, when:
 - (1) the gift reasonably appears to be intended to influence the officer or employee in the exercise or performance of his or her official powers or duties;
 - (2) the gift could reasonably be expected to influence the officer or employee in the exercise or performance of his or her official powers or duties; or
 - (3) the gift is intended as a reward for any official action on the part of the officer or employee.

Perceived Intent:

- (1) A gift to a municipal officer or employee is presumed to be intended to influence the exercise or performance of his or her official powers or duties when the gift is from a private person or organization that seeks municipal action involving the exercise of discretion by or with the participation of the officer or employee.
- (2) A gift to a municipal officer or employee is presumed to be intended as a reward for official action when the gift is from a private person or organization that has obtained municipal action involving the exercise of discretion by or with the participation of the officer or employee during the preceding twelve months.

Allowable Gifts:

This section does not prohibit any other gift, including:

- (1) gifts made to the municipality;
- (2) gifts from a person with a family or personal relationship with the officer or employee when the circumstances make it clear that the personal relationship, rather than the recipient's status as a municipal officer or employee, is the primary motivating factor for the gift;
- (3) gifts given on special occasions, such as marriage, illness, or retirement, which are modest, reasonable and customary;
- (4) unsolicited advertising or promotional material of little intrinsic value, such as pens, pencils, note pads, and calendars;
- (5) awards and plaques having a value of seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) or less which are publicly presented in recognition of service as a municipal officer or employee, or other service to the community; or
- (6) meals and refreshments provided when a municipal officer or employee is a speaker or participant at a job-related professional or educational conference or program and the meals and refreshments are made available to all participants.

SECTION 19. BOARD OF ETHICS

- (a) There is hereby established a board of ethics for the municipality. The board of ethics shall consist of five members, a majority of whom shall not be officers or employees of the municipality, but at least one of whom must be a municipal officer or employee. The members of such board of ethics shall be appointed by the Wayne County Board of Supervisors, serve five (5) year terms, and receive no salary or compensation for their services as members of the board of ethics.
- (c) The board of ethics shall meet annually with the County Attorney to review the responsibilities of the appointment.
- (d) The board of ethics shall render advisory opinions to the officers and employees of the County of Wayne with respect to article 18 of the General Municipal Law and this code. Such advisory opinions must be rendered pursuant to the written request of any such officer or employee under such rules and regulations as the board of ethics may prescribe. The board of ethics shall have the advice of legal counsel employed by the board, or if none, the municipality's legal counsel. In addition, the board of ethics may make recommendations with respect to the drafting and adoption of a code of ethics, or amendments thereto, upon the request of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors.
- (e) Opinions reached by the board of ethics are to be given to the person requesting the opinion only. If further investigation or any legal action is to be taken, the matter will be referred to the County Attorney and or the County District Attorney. A copy of the BOE decision is to be kept under seal by the County Attorney.

SECTION 20. POSTING AND DISTRIBUTION

- (a) The Chairman of the Board for the County of Wayne must promptly cause a copy of this code, and a copy of any amendment to this code, to be posted publicly and conspicuously in each building under the municipality's control. The code must be posted within ten days following the date on which the code takes effect. An amendment to the code must be posted within ten days following the date on which the amendment takes effect.
- (b) The Chairman of the Board for the County of Wayne must promptly cause a copy of this code, including any amendments to the code, to be distributed to every person who is or becomes an officer and employee of the County of Wayne.
- (c) Every municipal officer or employee who receives a copy of this code or an amendment to the code must acknowledge such receipt in writing. Such acknowledgments must be filed with the Clerk of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors, who must maintain such acknowledgments as a public record.
- (d) The failure to post this code or an amendment to the code does not affect either the applicability or enforceability of the code or the amendment. The failure of a municipal officer or employee to receive a copy of this code of ethics or an amendment to the code, or to acknowledge receipt thereof in writing, does not affect either the applicability or enforceability of the code or amendment to the code.

SECTION 21. ENFORCEMENT

Any municipal officer or employee who violates this code may be censured, fined, suspended or removed from office or employment in the manner provided by law.

SECTION 23. INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENTAL CODE OF ETHICS/STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Individual county departments may have additional Code of Ethics or Standards of Conduct policies that are specific to their department's mission. Department Heads may form their own Code of Ethics Committee to address ethics issues pertinent to their charge.

SECTION 22. EFFECTIVE DATE

This local law takes effect on June 20, 2012.