



POLICY TITLE: Use of Social Media

POLICY NO.: PR-38

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to provide guidelines that assist Employees with understanding the risks and responsibilities of using Social Media and making responsible decisions regarding appropriate use of Social Media.

II. SCOPE

- A. This Policy applies to all Employees, defined for purposes of this Policy as all elected and appointed officials, department heads, division directors, all full- and part-time employees, board and commission members, and unpaid volunteers. The same definition applies to the use of the singular word, "Employee," in this Policy.
- B. This Policy applies to Employees' use of all forms of Social Media, defined for purposes of this Policy as all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the internet, including Employees' or third parties' web logs or blogs, journals or diaries, personal web sites, social networking or affinity web sites, web bulletin boards or chat rooms, and any other forms of electronic communication, whether or not associated with the Board of County Commissioners of Washington County, Maryland, or Washington County government.

III. GENERAL POLICY

Employees are solely responsible for the online content which they choose to post and, therefore, must consider the risks and rewards involved prior to posting on Social Media. An Employee's use of Social Media which adversely affects that Employee's job performance or the job performance of the Employee's co-workers, or that otherwise adversely affects customers, vendors, contractors, and all others who work for or on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners, as well as the Board's legitimate business interests, may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR POLICY COMPLIANCE

- A. Guiding and Governing Documents

Employees are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to the principles, guidelines, and requirements of the following as they apply to Employees' use of Social Media:

1. this Policy;
2. the Washington County Ethics Ordinance;
3. the Washington County Information Technologies Policy;
4. Policy No. PR-13 Anti-Harassment and Complaint Procedure; and
5. Policy No. PR-37 Anti-Discrimination and Complaint Procedure.

B. Content of Posts on Social Media

1. Be fair and courteous to co-workers, customers, vendors, contractors, and all others who work for or on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners, including individuals and entities. Bear in mind that work-related complaints and issues are more likely resolved by speaking directly with co-workers and supervisory personnel rather than by posting complaints to a Social Media outlet.
2. Be honest and accurate when posting information or news, and correct any discovered mistake as soon as possible. Be transparent about any previous posts which have been altered as the internet archives almost all information; therefore, most deleted postings are searchable and discoverable. Do not post any information or rumors about the Board, County government, co-workers, customers, vendors, contractors, and all others who work for or on behalf of the Board when that information or rumors are known to be false.
3. If the Board of County Commissioners or County government is the subject of posted content, be clear and open about the relationship between the author and the Board or County government. Make clear that the posted statements are not officially those of the Board or of co-workers, customers, vendors, contractors, and all others who work for or on behalf of the Board, by the use of a disclaimer such as the following: “The postings on this site are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Board of County Commissioners of Washington County, Maryland.”

C. Privacy and Confidentiality

1. Maintain the integrity of the Board of County Commissioners’ private and confidential information. Do not post reports, policies, procedures, or other business-related information, including personnel information, which is of an internal and confidential or private nature.

2. This prohibition on the posting of private and confidential information also applies to the use of electronic communication for transmitting such information, whether within the body of the electronic communication itself, as an attachment in any form, or through the use of a hyperlink to such information that is posted or accessible elsewhere.

D. Violations

1. Employees are responsible for ensuring that their online postings, use of Social Media, and electronic communications comply with the foregoing listed in paragraph IV.A. of this Policy.
2. Employees may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination for inappropriate or non-compliant online postings or electronic communications which include discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence, unlawful conduct, or content that is otherwise in violation of the foregoing listed in paragraph IV.A. of this Policy such as statements, photographs, videos, or audio recordings that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, or intimidating; that disparage co-workers, customers, vendors, contractors, and all others who work for or on behalf of the Board; or that might constitute any type of harassment or bullying. Examples of such postings and online conduct might include, but are not limited to, offensive posts meant to intentionally harm an individual's or an entity's reputation or posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment on the basis of race, sex, disability, religion, or any other status protected by law or applicable County policy.

V. **USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK**

- A. Unless authorized by supervisory staff, or consistent with the Washington County Information Technologies Policy, employees are prohibited from using Social Media while on work time or on equipment that is owned or otherwise provided by the County.
- B. Employees are not permitted to use County-assigned email addresses to register on personal social networks, personal blogs, or other online tools utilized for personal use.

VI. MEDIA OUTLET INQUIRIES

- A. All media outlet inquiries should be directed to the Public Relations and Community Affairs Department.
- B. No Employee is permitted to speak with a media outlet representative on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners without first contacting the Public Relations and Community Affairs Department.

VII. RETALIATION PROHIBITED

- A. This Policy prohibits retaliation and the taking of any negative action against any Employee for reporting a possible deviation from or violation of this Policy or for cooperating in an investigation related to such a report.
- B. Any Employee who retaliates against another Employee for reporting a possible deviation from or violation of this Policy or for cooperating in an investigation related to such a report will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

VIII. POINT OF CONTACT

Questions regarding this Policy or requests for more information or further guidance should be directed to the Department of Health and Human Services.

