



COOK COUNTY BOARD OF ETHICS

N. KEITH CHAMBERS

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TONI PRECKWINKLE

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RE: Restrictions on the Use of County Property

County officials, employees and appointees:

During the course of your service to Cook County, you may have the opportunity to use various pieces of County-owned or leased property. This property may take a wide variety of forms, including (but not limited to) computers, copying machines, office space, telephones, tools, paper, pens, printers, vehicles, *etc.* Whether directly or indirectly, all of this property is paid for by the taxpayers of this County, and has been provided to you to aid in the performance of your County duties for their benefit.

To that end, the Cook County Ethics Ordinance states that “[n]o official, board or commission appointee or employee shall engage in or permit the unauthorized use of property that is owned or leased by the County or the Board or Commission to which they are appointed.” Cook County Code of Ordinances (“County Code”), § 2-576. County property “shall only be used for official County . . . business.” *Id.* It follows that the use of County property for political or personal purposes is punishable by employment sanctions (including termination), monetary fines (up to \$5,000) and even criminal prosecution in some instances. *Id.* at §§ 2-583, 601, 602.

Recent examples of Board of Ethics investigations arising from the improper use of County property have included:

- Misusing County computers and printers for non-County employment, personal email correspondence and social media, online banking and shopping, and/or to visit online dating or gambling websites;
- Misusing County copiers and fax machines to duplicate and distribute political flyers and literature;
- Misusing County telephones and time to make social or personal phone calls during the workday; and
- Misusing County office space to plan and host a political event.

Use your personal property at the appropriate time and the appropriate location if what you are doing cannot reasonably be characterized as part of your official County service. Err on the side of caution if you have any doubts about the appropriateness of your conduct. The Board of Ethics is available to provide confidential advice on all matters related to the appropriate use of County property (and any other matter related to the interpretation and enforcement of the Ethics Ordinance). Remember that appearances matter, and the Board of Ethics would rather offer its guidance to you in advance than investigate a complaint about you after the fact.

Sincerely,

N. Keith Chambers
Director