

Ethics Alert

Prohibited Political Activity

Section 2-583 of the Cook County Ethics Ordinance, as well as a number of other laws and County rules, places strict prohibitions on the use of taxpayer-funded County time and resources for political activity. As we head into the 2018 and 2019 election seasons, please review the guidance below to ensure that you understand your rights and responsibilities as a County employee, appointee or official.

A County employee, appointee or official may not:

- Engage in prohibited political activity on County compensated time;
- Use County property or resources for prohibited political activity;
- Compel or coerce any County employee into performing prohibited political activity during County work hours, compensated time off or as a condition of employment;
- Reward or punish a County employee for engaging in or refusing to engage in political activity; and/or
- Solicit a political contribution from a County employee or the employee's immediate family.

What are some examples of "prohibited political activity"?

- Assisting at the polls on Election Day on behalf of a candidate or political organization or regarding any referendum question.
- Preparing or distributing campaign literature, campaign signs, or other campaign material on behalf of any candidate or regarding any referendum question.
- Soliciting votes, petition signatures, or contributions on behalf of a candidate or political organization, or regarding any referendum question.

What is County compensated time?

County compensated means any time during a regularly scheduled work day that an employee is being compensated by the County (including a paid lunch hour), except for vacation, personal time or compensatory time off.

What are the penalties for engaging in prohibited political activity?

Penalties for violating Section 2-583 of the Ethics Ordinance may include employment sanctions (up to discharge), fines of up to \$5,000, and criminal prosecution.



Are there any special ethical prohibitions for County employees with contract management authority?

Yes. 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.

Am I allowed to engage in any election-related activities?

Yes. County employees may voluntarily engage in political activity on their own time (including vacation, personal or compensatory time off).

May I participate in the County Clerk's Election Day Worker Program?

Yes. Although County employees are prohibited from working for a particular political campaign or political organization on Election Day during County compensated time, County employees may participate in the Cook County Clerk's Election Day Worker Program. Employees that participate in the Election Day Work Program are not required to use vacation, personal or comp time while doing so. For additional information, please contact the Cook County Clerk's Office for additional information at (312) 603-0965.

May I vote during my County compensated lunch break?

Yes. Voting during your County compensated lunch period is permitted under the Ethics Ordinance. However, you may not engage in any prohibited political activity during your lunch period such as phone banking or soliciting political campaign contributions.



May I engage in political activity during my unpaid lunch break?

Yes, but County employees who do are wholly responsible for ensuring that they do not run afoul of the County's Ethics Ordinance. If an employee chooses to participate in political activity during his or her unpaid lunch break, he or she must:

- remove any County related clothing or equipment before doing so;
- use a personal vehicle, not a County vehicle, for associated travel;
- return to work on time (without exceeding his/her allotted unpaid lunch break); and
- put away any campaign related materials (e.g., buttons, bumper stickers, petitions, yard signs and petitions) before returning to his or her work location.

Am I required to report violations of Section 2-583 of the Cook County Ethics Ordinance?

Yes. All County employees have an affirmative duty to report violations of Section 2-583 of the Ethics Ordinance. If you need to report a violation, please contact the Board of Ethics at (312) 603-1100 or CookCounty.Ethics@cookcountyil.gov.

Whistleblower Protections Apply.