

## POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY COUNTY EMPLOYEES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: What is “political activity”?**

A: If you are trying to convince people about something that they may have to vote on in an election, which includes working on a campaign – it is generally considered political activity.

**Q: What are the restrictions on political activity by County employees?**

A: There are three general restrictions on County employees:

1. Cannot engage in political activity while on the job, during work hours.<sup>1</sup>
2. Cannot advocate for the illegal or violent overthrow of government.
3. Cannot use County resources for private political activities.

You can participate in political activity, just not while you are working.

**Q: Do these rules apply to me?**

A: YES – they apply to all County employees.<sup>2</sup>

**Q: Don’t I have a right to free speech, even though I am a County employee?**

A: YES. County employment does NOT change your constitutional rights under federal, state, or local law. You have the right to make your PERSONAL opinion known, publicly or privately, on any matter of general interest, UNLESS it is made confidential by law. (*Example:* information prohibited from disclosure by the Maryland Public Information Act). You also have the right to refrain from giving any opinion at all.

However, even though you can express your own opinion on issues of public interest, you are restricted from expressing that opinion in your official capacity as a County employee, or representing that view as the view of a County agency.

**Q: My boss just asked me whether I will be voting for the candidate he is campaigning for. Do I have to answer?**

A: NO. You cannot be forced to give your personal opinion on political issues outside of your official duties as an employee, such as who you are voting for in the coming election.

**Q: What do “County resources” include?**

A: It includes things like computers, copiers, email, envelopes, fax machines, letterhead, paper, phones, vehicles or any other resource or material paid for OR provided by the County.

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<sup>1</sup> You can engage in political activity on your lunch break, if your lunch break is unpaid.

<sup>2</sup> There may be some differences in restrictions between Classified and Exempt employees. Please refer any questions to your Appointing Authority or the Office of Ethics and Accountability.

**Q: Can I use my County email to send out political ads or letters to the co-workers I am friendly with?**

A: NO, because your County government email address is a County resource.

**Q: I am on the campaign committee for a candidate and need to make several flyers to advertise for an upcoming campaign event. Can I use County equipment to copy the flyers on paper I personally purchased?**

A: NO, because you are still using County resources (the copy machine itself, power to run it, copier ink) to make the copies for a private political activity.

**Q: My boss told me to provide administrative support to help with campaign mailings, and I heard him telling the supervisors that they need to donate to his campaign. Is this allowed, since we work for him and he is running for office?**

A: NO. State law specifically protects employees from being forced to work for a candidate. The law also protects employees from having to provide any financial support outside of their official jobs, whether for a political cause or not.

**Q: Somehow my County email address ended up on a political email listserv. What do I do?**

A: You should “unsubscribe” from the listserv. If you aren’t sure how to do that, call OIT. You can also delete the email. If a specific person sent it to you, you should tell the person to stop sending those emails to your County government email. If you have any problems, report it to OIT.

**Q: I wear a uniform to work every day. Can I still go to the polls on my way to/from work in my uniform, or do I have to change my clothes before voting?**

A: NO. Employees may go to the polls and vote while still wearing their uniforms, if on their way to/from work. However, employees cannot wear their uniforms or use the County Seal when campaigning or engaging in any other political activity.

**Q: What happens if I don’t follow these rules?**

A: You could be disciplined and possibly terminated. **Employees should err on the side of caution and ask questions if you aren’t sure about whether something is allowed or not.**

**Q: If I have questions about this policy, who can I ask?**

A: You can ask your Appointing Authority or the Office of Ethics and Accountability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Many Exempt employees may have a “duty of political loyalty,” depending on their position and for whom they work. If you are unsure of your responsibilities or status, direct all questions to the Office of Ethics and Accountability.