



# **Model Code Of Conduct For Legislative Staff**

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**The Model Code of Conduct for Legislative Staff was adopted in 1995 at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures and serves as a guide for the conduct of legislative staff as they serve state legislatures, state legislators, and the public. The code was developed by legislative staff working under the National Conference of State Legislatures.**

# Statement of Intent

This code is intended to express an ideal for and provide guidance to legislative staff members. It is intended to be a model for adoption and modification by each state legislature and contains no recommendations for enforcement. That is a matter for consideration by any legislative body or staff agency that adopts it or uses it as a basis for its own code.

This code applies to all legislative staff members. The various staff functions and staffing structures within the legislature requires legislative staff members to interpret the code from different perspectives. It is particularly important when a staff member works primarily or exclusively for an individual legislator, for a committee, for a partisan or other caucus, for a chamber, or for the entire legislature.

# Statement of Intent

This code is intended to supplement existing codes which legislative staff may be required to follow. Legislative staff member obligations under these and other professional codes are recognized and accepted.

This code is intended to support the sense of personal responsibility legislative staff members feel for their actions. Although life and work present conflicts and difficult choices, legislative staff members have the responsibility to make daily judgments necessary for this code to guide their service to the state legislature.

# General Principles of Conduct

## Public Servant

A legislative staff member is a public servant who works to assist the state legislature in promoting the common good of the citizens of the state.

*Legislative staff members, as employees of the government, have placed their efforts in the service of the common good and as stewards of public resources staff members are responsible for ensuring these resources promote the public good and not their own private good.*

# General Principles of Conduct

## Loyalty to the Legislative Branch

The mission of legislative staff members is to support the state legislature in its mission which is to represent the people in deciding about issues affecting the common good. Any action or inaction which infringes upon the authority of the legislative branch of government conflicts with this service.

*The mission of legislative staff members is to support the state legislature in making laws and allocating public resources for the good of the citizens of a state. The citizens have delegated this power to the legislature. Legislative staff members are obligated to be loyal to the legislature.*

# General Principles of Conduct

## Trustworthy

A legislative staff member is placed in a position of trust, confidence, and responsibility to the state legislature and should act in a manner worthy of the trust and confidence the state legislature places in its staff members.

*Legislative staff members are entrusted with various responsibilities that give them an important role in the process by which decisions are made by the legislature. In order to carry out these responsibilities, legislative staff members should give the legislature the benefit of their knowledge and skills without usurping the authority of legislators to make legislative decisions. A legislative staff member should meet certain obligations to legislators, colleagues, and the general public to be worthy of this special relation of trust.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Honest

A legislative staff member demonstrates the highest standards of honesty and personal integrity during his or her work for the legislature.

*A trustworthy staff member does not steal from his or her employer by taking public property, by using public property or his or her employment for personal gain, or by failing to give full effort for pay received. A legislative staff member does not lie to his or her employer. Dishonesty in any aspect of a staff member's life casts doubt of his or her honesty in work and can harm the legislature's reputation.*



# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Discrete

A legislative staff member is discrete in what work he or she has done for a legislator and subject to the law and in accordance with custom or policy of a legislative body, maintains confidentiality in all communications with all legislators.

*Discretion includes knowing when information is confidential and treating it as such, when carrying out a request must involve revealing some information, and when not to speak about non-confidential matters. Many legislative staff members may work for more than one legislator, including working on a single project or piece of legislation for legislators with opposing objectives and it can be difficult to meet this obligation. To minimize these difficulties, legislatures must clarify staff responsibility to maintain confidentiality.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Candid

A legislative staff member provides impartial advice to legislators on policy and procedure within the staff member's specific area of work.

*Candor is the full sharing of one's knowledge, in the form of information and advice, with a legislator who needs it in order to make an informed decision. The ability of a legislator to make a good decision may be lessened if a staff member fails to give the legislator the full benefit of his or her knowledge or expertise. Regardless of who the staff member works for, a staff member is obligated to give each legislator the full benefit of his or her knowledge and skills and hold communications with legislators in confidence, when appropriate.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Objective

A legislative staff member provides objective advice, information, and alternatives to legislators, independent of the staff member's own personal beliefs or the interests of third parties. A staff member should avoid activities that conflict with his or her ability to be objective or give the appearance of conflict.

*When carrying out his or her job a legislative staff member should not let personal beliefs be limiting, but be open to alternatives and be committed to being comprehensive in presenting information and providing support. Staff members and their legislative employers have the obligation to assess the effect of participation in activities which can make it difficult to be objective or appear to be objective. Also, staff members and their employers must evaluate outside employment for its potential to compromise objectivity as well as weaken diligence.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Competent

A legislative staff member works to obtain and maintain the knowledge and skills that are needed to do the work expected and recognizes when to ask for assistance from others.

*To support the legislature in its mission, a staff member should be aware of his or her kind and degree of expertise, to be forthright with legislators about what he or she can do, to know when to ask for assistance and utilize opportunities to continue to learn.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Diligent

A legislative staff member makes an effort to work hard on each task, using available time in a productive and efficient manner while completing work in the most timely manner possible.

*While diligence requires the application of full effort to the performance of one's work in the time and with the resources available, the demands of the legislative process make it hard for a staff member to be careful and thorough in the completion of a task. It is always appropriate to discuss the constraints of time and resources with a legislator and determine what can reasonably be accomplished.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Legislators

## Fair

A legislative staff member treats all legislators with respect and provides quality services to all legislators.

*Legislators deserve to be treated respectfully by all legislative staff members. All legislators have the right to request and receive services from legislative staff members and expect a diligent effort will not be lacking due to the legislator's political or religious beliefs, race, ethnic origin, sex, or physical ability.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Each Other

## Respectful

A legislative staff member treats all fellow legislative staff members with respect, appreciating the pressure they work under and the difficult choices they must sometimes make.

*Legislative staff members are in the best position to understand the circumstances and obligations of other staff members and they have an obligation to be considerate of each other.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To Each Other

## Supportive

A legislative staff member supports fellow legislative staff members in meeting their obligations and performing their work assignments.

*A staff member's failure to support a colleague's efforts to perform his or her work lessens the ability of the staff as a whole to perform its work for the legislature. Because staff members depend on each other for assistance and support, they are obligated to be honest, discreet, candid, objective, competent, diligent, and fair in their relations to each other as well as in their relations to legislators.*



# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To The Public

## Courteous

A legislative staff member is courteous to all members of the public during the course of his or her work.

*Legislative staff members are hired to provide direct services to the public and some will from time to time have direct contact with the public. Staff members will respect the need of members of the general public, the press, members of other governmental agencies and lobbyists to have information about the legislature. They should provide information subject to the legal and policy guidelines of their legislative employer. If a staff member doesn't have the information that has been requested, he or she should assist citizens in getting the information.*

# Obligations Of Legislative Staff Members To The Public

## Law-Abiding

A legislative staff member is law-abiding and encourages lawfulness in the activities of all participants in the legislative process.

*As the employee of a law-making organization, the staff member is subject to a high standard of knowledge and conduct. A staff member should pursue appropriate channels consistent with this code or other codes and obligations, if he or she is aware of unlawful activities which involve the legislative process.*

# Staff Expectations Of The Legislature

## Supportive

Using their knowledge and skills in service for the legislature, legislative staff members expect the legislature to clarify staff responsibilities and support staff members in fulfilling their responsibilities under this code of conduct.

# Conclusion

The advice contained in this code provides guidance for legislative staff as they conduct daily business serving state legislatures. Through their dedication to the principles contained in this code and their overall professionalism, legislative staff have a significant impact in promoting strong, independent state legislatures.



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