

Kansas County Commissioners Association Code of Ethical Conduct for County Commissioners

Preamble

The opportunity to serve the public as county commissioner is a high honor and confers a sacred trust to the office holder. Stewardship of the public trust not only requires allegiance to the law, but also obligates a county commissioner to act in ways consistent with the highest standards of ethical conduct.

The Kansas County Commissioners Association has adopted this code of ethics as a means of promoting the vitality of the democratic process in county government. The Association believes that in carrying out the duties of public office, from time to time every county commissioner is confronted with ethical dilemmas. The following principles are offered to encourage commissioners to engage in ethical reflection in advance of decision making. Ultimately, the ethical course of action for a county commissioner must be discerned by the dictates of individual conscience and commitment to the public interest.

Principle 1

A county commissioner should be vigorously dedicated to the democratic ideals of honesty, openness and accountability in all public matters involving county government.

- A commissioner should exert good faith effort to communicate the full truth about county matters and avoid structuring information so as to mislead or gain personal advantage.
- Accountability requires a commissioner to accept responsibility for his or her public conduct as well as the actions of the county commission, especially when mistakes occur.
- A commitment to the spirit of open government is characterized by the broadest possible provisions for public access and information sharing, and qualified only by those instances when meetings or certain public records are shielded by state law.
- A commissioner has an obligation to report suspected illegal misconduct by another elected official to the proper investigative authorities.
- The confidentiality of executive sessions of commission meetings must be strictly honored.

Principle 2

A county commissioner should model decorum, respect for others and civility in all public relationships.

- The honor of public office requires a commissioner to behave with courtesy and respect for the dignity of others in all public relationships with other elected officials; employees; citizens, media and representatives of other units of government.
- Commissioners should affirm the value of services provided by government and maintain a constructive attitude about governmental affairs.
- Meetings of the county commission afford a prime opportunity for commissioners to promote conduct that enhances respectful civic discourse.

Principle 3

A county commissioner should actively practice stewardship of the county's human, fiscal and material resources.

- A commissioner should conserve public resources and support the wisest and best use of those resources consistent with the public interest and community need.
- The principle of merit should guide all of a commissioner's human resource management decisions associated with recruitment, hiring, compensation, promotion and discharge.
- A commissioner should advocate for and encourage county employees to adopt practices that promote the most efficient, effective and ethical county services.

Principle 4

A county commissioner should strive for excellence and continuous learning in personal development and in all operations of county government.

- A commissioner, regardless of the length of tenure in office, should actively seek opportunities to develop skills and acquire knowledge in order to perform the duties of public office more effectively.
- A commissioner should dedicate the time necessary to adequately perform the duties of the office of county commissioner.
- As a member of the governing body, a commissioner should advocate and appropriate resources for a *learning courthouse*, a county work environment in which employees are given opportunities to expand their performance capacities.

Principle 5

A county commissioner should perform the duties of public office with fairness and impartiality so as to enhance public confidence in county government.

- Impartiality requires a commissioner to engage in conduct unswayed by public clamor, without fear of criticism and without seeking personal financial gain or partisan advantage.
- A commissioner should make decisions free from the influence of family members, private business relationships, or other personal relationships.
- A commissioner should promote county business practices that contribute to public perception of the impartiality of county decisions.
- A commissioner should abstain from voting even if not required to by law if his or her impartiality might be reasonably questioned.
- A commissioner should support the principle of equal employment opportunity and vigorously oppose discrimination in county operations.

Principle 6

A county commissioner should neither seek nor accept any favor from any source that may be offered to influence his or her official decision making.

- Commissioners should decline to accept anything of value that could be construed by a reasonable and informed person as intended to influence the commissioner's actions.
- Avoiding the appearance of impropriety sustains public trust in democracy and is a necessary standard for commissioners to consider in determining an ethical course of action.