



Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS

Standard Operating Procedure

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Standard Operating Procedure: 2.19	Effective Date: October 20, 2025
Subject: Harassment & Inappropriate Behavior	Section: Human Resources
Authorized: Chief Michael Robinson	Revision Date: N/A

Applicability: ☒ Volunteer ☒ Career

I. PURPOSE

Carroll County Commissioners are committed to providing and maintaining a workplace where all people are treated with dignity, decency and respect. Carroll County Commissioners will not tolerate inappropriate behavior, discrimination, harassment, or retaliation of any kind.

Employees at every level, as well as applicants, clients, customers, contractors, vendors, volunteers, and other non-employees are expected to uphold the principles of dignity, respect, and equal opportunity. Appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, may be taken against any employee who violates this policy.

Additionally, supervisors who knowingly allow or tolerate discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, including the failure to immediately report such misconduct to Human Resources, are in violation of this policy and may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

This policy applies to all employees, regardless of their role, seniority, or employment classification. It also applies to interactions with non-employees in the workplace or during work-related activities. Additionally, employee conduct outside of work may be subject to this policy when such behavior has an adverse impact on the workplace, the county's reputation, or the safety and well-being of others.

II. DEFINITIONS

Discrimination: Any unequal treatment of an individual or group based on an actual or perceived protected characteristic that adversely affects an individual's employment opportunities or work environment. This includes based on the protected status of an individual with whom an employee or applicant associates.

Harassment: Unwelcome and offensive conduct based on an individual's actual or perceived protected characteristic that creates a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive. For purposes of this policy, 'harassment' also includes sexual harassment.

Non-employee: Anyone not employed by Carroll County Commissioners, but present in the workplace or interacting with employees, such as applicants, citizens, clients, contractors, volunteers, or other individuals who have a business or professional relationship with the County.

Protected characteristics: Includes but is not limited to age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, military or veteran status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or any other status protected by federal, state, and/or local laws.

Retaliation: Adverse action taken against an individual for filing a complaint, assisting with an investigation, opposing discrimination or harassment, and/or refusing to violate laws. This includes, but is not limited to demotion, termination, reduction in hours or pay, and/or any other adverse actions.

Sexual Harassment: In addition to all other forms of unlawful harassment, quid pro quo harassment includes conduct that consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when submission to or rejection of such conduct affects an individual's employment or creates a hostile or offensive work environment.

Substantiated / Unsubstantiated / Unfounded: Terms used to describe investigation outcomes. A substantiated complaint is supported by evidence; unsubstantiated means insufficient evidence; unfounded means no factual basis exists.

Supervisor: An employee who manages the performance of other employees, and who exercises independent judgement, making recommendations in such areas as hiring, performance reviews, promotion, discipline, and dismissal.

III. PROCEDURES

A. PROHIBITED CONDUCT:

Carroll County Commissioners, in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local anti-discrimination and harassment laws and regulations, shall administer this policy in accordance with the following guidelines:

It is a violation of this policy to discriminate in the provision of employment opportunities, benefits or privileges; to create discriminatory work conditions; or to use discriminatory evaluative standards.

Carroll County Commissioners prohibit inappropriate behavior or harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, and appropriate action will be taken in response to complaints or knowledge of violations of this policy. For purposes of this policy:

Inappropriate behavior includes any actions that create a disrespectful, offensive, or intimidating work environment or interfere with an employee's performance. Such behavior may not meet the legal threshold for harassment or discrimination, but it is still prohibited. Examples include but are not limited to insulting or belittling remarks, offensive jokes or gestures, shouting, passive-aggressive communication, or bullying.

Harassment may include but is not limited to offensive and unwelcome comments and distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material that ridicules, denigrates, insults, belittles or shows hostility, aversion or disrespect toward an individual or group.

Sexual harassment can take many forms including but not limited to unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, propositions, threats, or repeated requests for dates; the display or sharing of sexually suggestive or hostile materials, leering, whistling, obscene gestures, or inappropriate sexual content in any form of communication; and unwanted physical contact such as touching, hugging, kissing, or sexual assault; and quid pro quo harassment, where an employee's submission to (or rejection of) sexual advances is used to make decisions about hiring, promotion, compensation, job assignments, and/or discipline.

Harassment can occur when others overhear or witness the conduct, even if they are not the intended victim.

B. COMPLAINT PROCEDURES:

Carroll County Commissioners expect reporting of all actual or perceived incidents of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, regardless of the perpetrator's identity or position, even if they are unsure whether it violates this policy, and whether as a victim or witness. Harassment often escalates if not addressed early, and early reporting helps us take timely and effective action.

Employees may report complaints to their direct supervisor, any other supervisor, or Human Resources. Complaints may be made in person, in writing, by phone, or electronically. Anonymous complaints are accepted, though this may limit the ability to investigate fully.

Complaints should be submitted as soon as possible after an incident has occurred. If the recipient of the complaint is someone other than a representative of Human Resources, the recipient should document, at minimum, the date and substance of the complaint and immediately refer the matter to Human Resources. Upon receipt of a complaint, Human Resources, or their designee, will conduct a thorough and impartial investigation as expeditiously as possible.

Employees are required to cooperate fully with any investigation. Cooperation includes, but is not limited to, maintaining an appropriate level of discretion regarding the investigation and disclosing any and all information that may be pertinent to the investigation. The identity of individuals who file a complaint, alleged victims, witnesses, and alleged perpetrators will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible, and information will be disclosed strictly on a need-to-know basis, consistent with a thorough and impartial investigation. All information pertaining to a complaint or investigation under this policy will be maintained in secure files within the Human Resources department.

Carroll County Commissioners prohibit retaliation against any individual who reports discrimination or harassment or participates in an investigation. Human Resources will take adequate steps to ensure that all parties are protected from retaliation during and after the investigation.

C. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Upon completion of the investigation, if misconduct is substantiated, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken, up to and including dismissal.

Any employee found to have knowingly made false accusations or who provides false information in bad faith may also be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. However, good faith complaints that are investigated and found to be unsubstantiated will not result in disciplinary action.

D. ALTERNATIVE LEGAL REMEDIES:

Nothing in this policy may prevent an employee from pursuing formal legal remedies or resolution through local, state or federal agencies or the courts.

E. EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

This policy will be provided to all new employees during orientation. Any revisions to this policy will be provided to all employees. Periodic educational and training programs will be provided to inform all employees of methods and procedures to prevent, identify, and deal with discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.

IV. RECISION

This Standard Operating Procedure rescinds all directives regarding Harassment and Inappropriate Behavior or similar content previously issued for personnel of the Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS.

V. RELATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES / DOCUMENTS

VI. ATTACHMENTS