

Quick Guide to the Ethics Law

What is the purpose of the Ethics Law?

The ethics law establishes standards of conduct for county employees to guide them in performing their work impartially and in the best interest of the county and its citizens.

What agency administers the ethics law?

The Montgomery County Ethics Commission administers the ethics law. Its mission is to:

- 1) Provide training and give advice on ethical standards to anyone subject to the ethics law
- 2) When necessary for the good of the county, grant waivers of ethics requirements under certain standards provided in the ethics law
- 3) Investigate and adjudicate allegations of wrongdoing
- 4) Obtain and review financial disclosure forms filed by certain required employees and make those forms that are public available for review by the general public
- 5) Obtain, review, and disclose to the public, lobbying reports filed by lobbyists who communicate with employees for the purpose of influencing executive or legislative action, and who are compensated or spend money in this effort
- 6) Review and approve or deny outside employment requests to prevent possible conflicts of interest for employees

Who is covered by the ethics law?

Most county employees and elected and appointed officials are covered by the ethics law including unpaid volunteers who serve on county boards, commissions, and committees. Anyone who falls under the definition of a lobbyist is also covered under registration and reporting requirements. ***If you do not know whether the ethics law applies to you, please contact the Ethics Commission.***

What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest exists whenever an **employee's personal or financial interests** or the interests of the employee's family members could affect the performance of that employee's official duties.

What does the Ethics Law prohibit?

Conflict of interest provisions prohibit:

1. Employees from participating in any County matter if the employee or the employee's relative will benefit personally or financially in the outcome
2. Paid employees from taking outside jobs without outside employment approval that

- will conflict with their duties as County employees
3. Employees from asking for or accepting gifts from sources doing business with their agency or lobbying the county
 4. Employees from using confidential information obtained in their county job
 5. Employees from accepting employment for a period of time with certain entities after leaving county service
 6. Employees using county resources (uniforms, telephones, business stationery, business cards, copiers, job title, etc.) to do something for or bring benefit to one's self, a friend, a business, or an organization is an abuse of the employee's office or position

What happens if I report an ethics violation?

If you believe that a county employee, volunteer, or lobbyist has violated the ethics law, you may file a confidential complaint with the ethics commission. You will be asked to provide *under oath* as much factual information as you can including the names of potential witnesses. Ethics Commission members will review the information you provide and decide whether to open an investigation.

Do I have to ask my supervisor for permission to contact the Ethics Commission?

Absolutely not. You are encouraged to seek advice or answers to inquiries whenever you have a question.