

MILWAUKEE COUNTY BOARD CODE OF CONDUCT

Purpose

The Milwaukee County Board Code of Conduct ensures that all participants in county board and committee meetings—whether officials, staff, media, or members of the public—are treated with dignity, fairness, and courtesy, and that the conduct of meetings reflects the highest standards of public service.

The Code of Conduct also defines prohibited conduct for County Board Supervisors and establishes a fair and transparent process for receiving and resolving complaints. This Code of Conduct proposes proportionate sanctions with associated voting requirements in alignment with state law, County Board Rules, and existing ethics, harassment, and workplace policies.

Scope

This Code of Conduct applies to all Milwaukee County Supervisors when acting in official capacity or in connection with County business, including County Board and committee meetings and official proceedings. It also governs any conduct in the workplace or in any setting reasonably considered an extension of the workplace, including but not limited to communications via telephone, voicemail, text message, video conferencing, social media, and other online platforms.

I. Respect and Courtesy

County Board Supervisors shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of County Board Supervisors; members of boards, commissions, or committees; Milwaukee County employees, interns, and other staff; and members of the public.

All individuals attending or participating in meetings are entitled to the highest level of respect and courtesy. Disrespectful, harassing, or insulting language or behavior is strictly prohibited.

II. Responsibilities of the Chairperson

The chairperson is responsible for maintaining order and decorum. They must protect all participants from harassment, personal attacks, or inappropriate questioning. The chairperson has the authority to intervene when conduct violates this Code.

III. Conduct of Board and Committee Members

In alignment with and support of this Code of conduct, members must:

- **Maintain Professional Composure.** Avoid heated or emotional outbursts and conduct themselves in a manner that supports orderly proceedings.
- **Treat Others with Respect and Courtesy.** Use polite, respectful language and behavior toward all individuals.
- **Listen Actively and Respectfully.** Give attention to speakers, consider differing viewpoints, and engage in discussion in a respectful manner.
- **Allow Others to be Heard.** Permit others to speak without interruption and follow the direction regarding recognition and order.

- **Act Impartially.** Avoid bias, favoritism, or conduct that creates the appearance of unfair treatment.

In addition, members must refrain from **prohibited conduct**, including:

- **Offensive or Discourteous Remarks.** Language or comments that are disrespectful or insulting to participants and that distract from the dignity of the proceedings.
- **Verbal Chastisement or Accusations.** Scolding, berating, or making personal accusations directed at an individual's character or motives, rather than the matter before the body.
- **Conduct that Undermines Meeting Decorum.** Behavior that materially interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting or compromises fairness, decorum, or the ability of participants to be heard.
- **Harassment, Bullying, or Intimidation.** Unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct that a reasonable person would view as demeaning, intimidating, hostile, or abusive toward any participant, including slurs or name-calling; comments about a person's body or appearance; unwelcome personal attention or comments of a romantic or intimate nature; or conduct targeting a person based on personal characteristics (including sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or similar status).
- **Retaliation.** Adverse treatment or threats because a person raised a concern or made a complaint.
- **Neglect of Duty.** Refuse or neglect, without just cause, to perform duties required by law. Nothing in this Code limits Wis. Stat § 59.15.

IV. **Fairness and Integrity**

In alignment with this Code, members must adhere strictly to principles of fair play. No participant should be placed at a disadvantage due to arbitrary actions or unjustified comments. All individuals should feel safe, heard, and respected.

V. **Receiving and Resolving Complaints**

a. **Informal Resolution and Self-Correction**

When concerns arise, individuals are encouraged to seek timely and collegial resolution. Informal resolution and self-correction should be pursued whenever possible; formal action may be taken when other approaches are unsuccessful or inappropriate.

b. **Complaint Reporting (Referral to Chairperson)**

A person who believes this Code has been violated may submit a written complaint to the Milwaukee County Board Chairperson.

c. **Referral to Committee**

Upon receipt, the Chairperson shall refer the complaint to the appropriate Standing Committee for review.

d. **Committee Review and Recommendation**

The Committee will review the complaint, provide the Supervisor who is the subject of the complaint notice and an opportunity to respond, and review relevant information. The Committee will issue a written recommendation to the full County Board regarding disposition, which may include (1) no action; (2) information corrective action; (3) referral to another applicable process; and/or (4) if applicable, a recommendation that the Board proceed under § Wis Stat 59.15.

e. Board Action.

If the committee recommends action under § Wis Stat 59.15 (Neglect of Duty), the recommendation shall be presented to the full County Board for consideration and a vote. Under Wis. Stat. § 59.15, the Board may assess against any of its members a forfeiture of not less than \$50 nor more than \$200. Any Board action under this section shall be by simple majority vote.

VI. Implementation

As an expression of the standards of conduct for County Supervisors as expected by the county, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Code of Conduct is intended to be self-enforcing. It becomes most effective when County Board Supervisors are most familiar with it and embrace its provisions. Adherence to these guidelines will help to maintain a respectful, inclusive, and dignified environment for all who engage in the public process.

Each County Supervisor shall receive a copy of this Code upon taking office and shall acknowledge receipt of the Code. A Supervisor's failure to sign an acknowledge does not exempt the Supervisor from compliance with this Code. Any time the Code is amended, the updated version shall be distributed to all Supervisors.