

PROTECTION FOR REPORTING SAFETY AND FRAUD VIOLATIONS (WHISTLEBLOWERS)

State law contains a number of provisions concerning the reporting of safety and fraud violations. The following regulation gives a brief overview of these provisions.

1. **Safety Violations**

A. **Awareness and reporting of a violation**

If an employee becomes aware of a violation of any State or Federal law, or any Board policy or regulation that the District has authority to correct, and the employee reasonably believes that the violation is a criminal offense that is likely to cause an imminent risk of physical harm, a public health or safety hazard, a felony or an improper solicitation for a contribution, the employee shall orally notify his/her supervisor or other responsible administrator of the violation and subsequently file with the supervisor or administrator a written report that provides sufficient detail to identify and describe the violation.

B. **Not correcting the violation**

If the District does not correct the violation or make a reasonable and good faith effort to correct the violation within 24 hours after the oral notification or the receipt of the report, whichever is earlier, the employee may file a written report that provides sufficient detail to identify and describe the violation with the city or county prosecutor where the violation occurred, with a peace officer, with the inspector general if the violation is within the inspector general's jurisdiction, or with any other appropriate public official or agency that has regulatory authority over the District.

C. **Notifying the employee**

If an employee makes a report, the employer, within 24 hours after the oral notification was made or the report was received or by the close of business on the next regular business day following the day on which the oral notification was made or the report was received, whichever is later, shall notify the employee, in writing, of any effort of the employer to correct the alleged violation or hazard, or of the absence of the alleged violation or hazard.

D. Reporting fellow employees' violations

If an employee becomes aware of a violation by a fellow employee of any State or Federal law, any Board policy or regulation or any work rule or procedure, and the employee reasonably believes that the violation is a criminal offense that is likely to cause an imminent risk of physical harm, a public health or safety hazard, a felony or an improper solicitation for a contribution, the employee shall orally notify his/her supervisor or other responsible administrator of the violation and subsequently shall file with that supervisor or administrator a written report that provides sufficient detail to identify and describe the violation.

E. Retaliation

The District shall not take any disciplinary or retaliatory action against an employee for making any authorized report or having made any inquiry or taken any other action to ensure the accuracy of any information reported.

The District shall not take any disciplinary or retaliatory action against an employee for making any authorized report if the employee made a reasonable and good faith effort to determine the accuracy of any information so reported, or as a result of the employee's having made any inquiry or taken any other action to ensure the accuracy of any information reported.

Disciplinary or retaliatory action by the District includes, but is not limited to:

- i. removing or suspending the employee from employment;
- ii. withholding from the employee salary increases or employee benefits to which the employee is otherwise entitled;
- iii. transferring or reassigning the employee;
- iv. denying the employee a promotion that otherwise would have been received or
- v. reducing the employee in pay or position.

F. Accuracy of reports

The employee shall make a reasonable and good faith effort to determine the accuracy of any information reported. If the employee fails to make such an effort, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action, including suspension

or removal, for reporting information without a reasonable basis to do so.

G. Legal remedies for retaliation

If the District takes any disciplinary or retaliatory action against the employee as a result of the employee's having filed a report, the employee may bring a civil action in the Court of Common Pleas for appropriate injunctive relief or for the remedies set forth in the next paragraph, or both, within 180 days after the date the disciplinary or retaliatory action was taken.

The court, in rendering a judgment for the employee, may order, as it determines appropriate, reinstatement of the employee to the same position that the employee held at the time of the disciplinary or retaliatory action and at the same site of employment or to a comparable position at that site, the payment of back wages, full reinstatement of fringe benefits and seniority rights or any combination of these remedies.

The court also may award the prevailing party all or a portion of the costs of litigation and, if the employee who brought the action prevails in the action, may award the prevailing employee reasonable attorney's fees, witness fees and fees for experts who testify at trial, in an amount the court determines appropriate. If the court determines that the District has deliberately retaliated, the court, in making an award of back pay, may include interest.

2. Fraud Violations

A. Reporting of a fraud violation

If an employee becomes aware of fraud, including the misuse of public resources by a public office or public official, the employee may file a written report identifying the fraud or misuse with his/her supervisor or responsible administrator or file a complaint with the Auditor of State's (AOS) fraud-reporting system.

Timely notification to AOS via the AOS fraud reporting system or other means must be made by the following individuals if, during their term of office or in the course of their employment, they become aware of fraud, theft in office or the misuse or misappropriation of public money as defined in State law:

Board members;

employees with a fiduciary duty to the District;

employees in a supervisory position;

employees of District departments or offices who are responsible for processing any revenue or expenses of the District.

If an employee reasonably believes that the fraud or misuse of public resources is a criminal offense, the employee may, besides filing a report with his/her supervisor or responsible administrator or with the AOS's fraud-reporting system, report it to a prosecuting attorney, director of law or chief legal officer with the appropriate jurisdiction.

B. Retaliation

The District shall not take any disciplinary action against an employee for filing a report if the employee made a reasonable effort to determine the accuracy of any information in the report.

Disciplinary or retaliatory action by the District includes, but is not limited to:

- a. removing or suspending the employee from employment;
- b. withholding from the employee salary increases or employee benefits to which the employee is otherwise entitled;
- c. transferring or reassigning the employee;
- d. denying the employee a promotion that otherwise would have been received or
- e. reducing the employee in pay or position.

C. Legal remedies for retaliation

If the District takes any disciplinary or retaliatory action against the employee as a result of the employee's having filed a complaint or report, the employee may pursue relief and remedies in accordance with all applicable statutory procedures.

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Gallipolis City School District; Gallipolis, Ohio