

Harris County Housing Authority
Employee Handbook

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK / DISCLAIMER

We prepared this handbook to assist you in finding the answers to many questions that you may have regarding your employment with Harris County Housing Authority. Please take the necessary time to read it.

We do not expect this handbook to answer all of your questions. Your Supervisor and Human Resources also will be a major source of information.

Neither this handbook nor any other verbal or written communication by a management representative, is, nor should it be considered to be, an agreement, contract of employment, express or implied, or a promise of treatment in any particular manner in any given situation. Harris County Housing Authority adheres to the policy of employment-at-will, which permits the Authority or the employee to terminate the employment relationship at any time, for any reason, with or without cause or notice.

Many matters covered by this handbook, such as benefit plan descriptions, are also described in separate the Authority documents. These the Authority documents are always controlling over any statement made in this handbook or by any member of management.

This handbook states only general Housing Authority guidelines. The Authority may, at any time, in its sole discretion, modify or vary from anything stated in this handbook, with or without notice, except for the rights of the parties to terminate employment-at-will.

This handbook supersedes all prior handbooks.

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Section 1 - Governing Principles of Employment

1-1. Welcome Statement

For those of you who are commencing employment with Harris County Housing Authority ("Harris County Housing Authority" or the "the Authority"), on behalf of Harris County Housing Authority, welcome. We hope you will enjoy your work here. We are glad to have you with us.

For those of you who have been with us, thank you for your past and continued service.

We understand that it is our employees who provide the services that our customers rely upon, and who will grow and enable us to create new opportunities in the years to come.

1-2. Equal Employment Opportunity

Harris County Housing Authority is an Equal Opportunity Employer that does not discriminate on the basis of actual or perceived race, creed, color, religion, alienage or national origin, ancestry, citizenship status, age, disability or handicap, sex, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, arrest record, or any other characteristic protected by applicable federal, state or local laws. Our management team is dedicated to this policy with respect to recruitment, hiring, placement, promotion, transfer, training, compensation, benefits, employee activities and general treatment during employment.

The Authority will endeavor to make a reasonable accommodation to the known physical or mental limitations of qualified employees with disabilities unless the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of our business. If you need assistance to perform your job duties because of a physical or mental condition, please let the HR Director or the CEO know.

The Authority will endeavor to accommodate the sincere religious beliefs of its employees to the extent such accommodation does not pose an undue hardship on the Authority's operations. If you wish to request such an accommodation, please speak to the HR Director or the CEO.

Any employees with questions or concerns about equal employment opportunities in the workplace are encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of the HR Director or the CEO. The Authority will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who raise issues of equal employment opportunity. To ensure our workplace is free of artificial barriers, violation of this policy will lead to discipline, up to and including discharge. All employees must cooperate with all investigations.

1-3. Non-Harassment

It is Harris County Housing Authority's policy to prohibit intentional and unintentional harassment of any individual by another person on the basis of any protected classification including, but not limited to, race, color, national origin, disability, religion, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation or age. The purpose of this policy is not to regulate our employees' personal morality, but to ensure that in the workplace, no one harasses another individual.

If you feel that you have been subjected to conduct which violates this policy, you should immediately report the matter to your Supervisor. If you are unable for any reason to contact this person, or if you have not received a satisfactory response within five (5) business days after reporting any incident of what you perceive to be harassment, please contact the HR Director. If the person toward whom the complaint is directed is one of the individuals indicated above, you should contact any higher-level manager in your reporting hierarchy. Every report of perceived harassment will be fully investigated and corrective action will be taken where appropriate. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All complaints will be kept confidential to the extent possible, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, the Authority will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who report unwelcome conduct to management or who cooperate in the investigations of such reports in accordance with this policy. Employees who make complaints in bad faith may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All employees must cooperate with all investigations.

1-4. Sexual Harassment

It is Harris County Housing Authority's policy to prohibit harassment of any employee by any Supervisor, employee, customer or vendor on the basis of sex or gender. The purpose of this policy is not to regulate personal morality within the Authority. It is to ensure that at the Authority all employees are free from sexual harassment. While it is not easy to define precisely what types of conduct could constitute sexual harassment, examples of prohibited behavior include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, obscene gestures, displaying sexually graphic magazines, calendars or posters, sending sexually explicit e-mails, text messages and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, such as uninvited touching of a sexual nature or sexually related comments. Depending upon the circumstances, improper conduct also can include sexual joking, vulgar or offensive conversation or jokes, commenting about an employee's physical appearance, conversation about your own or someone else's sex life, or teasing or other conduct directed toward a person because of his or her gender which is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create an unprofessional and hostile working environment.

If you feel that you have been subjected to conduct which violates this policy, you should immediately report the matter to your Supervisor. If you are unable for any reason to contact this person, or if you have not received a satisfactory response within five (5) business days after reporting any incident of what you perceive to be harassment, please contact the HR Director. If the person toward whom the complaint is directed is one of the individuals indicated above, you should contact any higher-level manager in your reporting hierarchy. Every report of perceived harassment will be fully investigated and corrective action will be taken where appropriate. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All complaints will be kept confidential to the extent possible, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, the Authority will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who report unwelcome conduct to management or who cooperate in the investigations of such reports in accordance with this policy. Employees who make complaints in bad faith may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All employees must cooperate with all investigations.

1-5. Workplace Violence

Harris County Housing Authority is strongly committed to providing a safe workplace. The purpose of this policy is to minimize the risk of personal injury to employees and damage to the Authority and personal property.

We do not expect you to become an expert in psychology or to physically subdue a threatening or violent individual. Indeed, we specifically discourage you from engaging in any physical confrontation with a violent or potentially violent individual. However, we do expect and encourage you to exercise reasonable judgment in identifying potentially dangerous situations.

Experts in the mental health profession state that prior to engaging in acts of violence, troubled individuals often exhibit one or more of the following behaviors or signs: over-resentment, anger and hostility; extreme agitation; making ominous threats such as bad things will happen to a particular person, or a catastrophic event will occur; sudden and significant decline in work performance; irresponsible, irrational, intimidating, aggressive or otherwise inappropriate behavior; reacting to questions with an antagonistic or overtly negative attitude; discussing weapons and their use, and/or brandishing weapons in the workplace; overreacting or reacting harshly to changes in the Authority's policies and procedures; personality conflicts with co-workers; obsession or preoccupation with a co-worker or Supervisor; attempts to sabotage the work or equipment of a co-worker; blaming others for mistakes and circumstances; demonstrating a propensity to behave and react irrationally

Prohibited Conduct

Threats, threatening language or any other acts of aggression or violence made toward or by any Authority employee **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED**. For purposes of this policy, a threat includes any verbal or physical harassment or abuse, any attempt at intimidating or instilling fear in others, menacing gestures, flashing of weapons, stalking or any other hostile, aggressive, injurious or destructive action undertaken for the purpose of domination or intimidation. To the extent permitted by law, employees and visitors are prohibited from carrying weapons onto the Authority's premises.

Procedures for Reporting a Threat

All potentially dangerous situations, including threats by co-workers, should be reported immediately to any member of management with whom you feel comfortable. Reports of threats may be maintained confidential to the extent maintaining confidentiality does not impede our ability to investigate and respond to the complaints. All threats will be promptly investigated. All employees must cooperate with all investigations. No employee will be subjected to retaliation, intimidation or disciplinary action as a result of reporting a threat in good faith under this policy.

If the Authority determines, after an appropriate good faith investigation, that someone has violated this policy, the Authority will take swift and appropriate corrective action.

If you are the recipient of a threat made by an outside party, please follow the steps detailed in this section. It is important for us to be aware of any potential danger in our offices. Indeed, we want to take effective measures to protect everyone from the threat of a violent act by an employee or by anyone else.

1-6.Ethics Policy

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A. PURPOSE

As a county housing authority and public corporation, the Harris County Housing Authority (“Authority”) is obligated to achieve and maintain certain standards of ethics under state law and under its Annual Contributions Contract (“ACC”) with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”). To achieve the highest standard of ethics and propriety, the Board of Commissioners adopted and established an Ethics Policy on August 15, 2012, to describe in a single document the various obligations of the Authority prescribed by federal and state law, and its contractual obligations with HUD. The purpose of the Ethics Policy is to maintain the reputation and goodwill of the Authority in Harris County and the state of Texas by ensuring that the public and other governmental entities have confidence in the integrity, independence, and impartiality of the commissioners, officers, employees, and other contractors of the Authority.

B. ENFORCEMENT

The board of commissioners shall recommend to any commissioner appropriate action to remediate or resolve any conflict or violation or shall refer to the Harris County Attorney’s Office the facts and issues regarding any unresolved conflict or violation by a commissioner that could constitute inefficiency, neglect of duty, or misconduct in office that might justify removal of the commissioner from office. The board of commissioners shall direct the executive director to remediate or resolve any conflict or violation involving an Authority employee. The executive director may take appropriate action to remedy or resolve an employee conflict or violation, including disciplinary action under the Employee Handbook.

C. ETHICS POLICY

All commissioners and employees shall abide by the provisions of Texas State law and the HUD ACC contained in the Sources of Law and Policy section below. To the extent allowed by federal or state law or the HUD ACC, the following rules shall further regulate the conduct of commissioners and employees to avoid the appearance or risk of impropriety:

Economic Benefit

A commissioner or employee shall not take any official action that he or she knows is likely to affect the economic interest of the commissioner or employee or their immediate family; an outside client or customer; a household member; the outside employer or a parent, child or spouse; a business entity or its affiliate of the commissioner or employee or their immediate family; a person or business entity from whom the commissioner or employee, or a spouse, has, within the previous 12 months, solicited, received and not rejected, or accepted an offer of employment, or with whom the commissioner or employee, or a spouse, has engaged in negotiations pertaining to business opportunities. Any commissioner or employee shall disclose such a relationship or interest and refrain from participation in any discussion or official action in the affected matter.

Unfair Participation

A commissioner or employee may not use his or her official position to unfairly advance or impede private interests, or to grant or secure, or attempt to grant or secure, for any person, including himself or herself, any form of special consideration, treatment, exemption, or advantage beyond that which is lawfully available to other persons. A commissioner or employee shall not acquire an interest in, or acquire an interest affected by, any contract, transaction, decision or other matter, if the commissioner or employee knows that the interest will be affected by the impending official action by the Authority. A commissioner or employee may not enter into any agreement or understanding with any person that official action by the commissioner or employee will be rewarded or reciprocated by the other person. A commissioner or employee shall not appoint or employ, or vote to appoint or employ, any relative within the third degree of consanguinity or second degree of affinity to any office or position within the Authority. No commissioner or employee shall supervise a relative in the third degree of consanguinity or second degree of affinity. If an employee, because of marriage, promotion, reorganization, or otherwise, is placed into the line of supervision of a proscribed relative, one of the employees must be reassigned or other arrangements made for supervision. Any commissioner or employee shall disclose such a relationship or interest and refrain from participation in any discussion or official action in the affected matter.

Gifts

A commissioner or employee, and second degree relatives or outside business associates, shall not solicit, accept, or agree to accept any gift to benefit for himself or herself or an interested business entity that reasonably tends to influence or reward official conduct or that the commissioner or employee knows is being offered with the intent to influence or reward official conduct. A commissioner or employee shall not solicit any gift or benefit but may accept or agree to accept a non-cash gift of nominal value and meals, in an individual expense of \$50 or less at any occurrence from any individual or business entity doing or seeking to do business with the Authority. However, except as provided in the sentence immediately below, such gifts may not in aggregate exceed \$250 during any 12-month period. Gifts of reasonable value related to a special occasion and the relationship between the donor and recipient, reasonable public awards, or rewards for meritorious service or professional achievement, scholarships and fellowships, admissions to events in his or her official capacity or a spouse's position, and solicitations for civic or charitable causes are excluded from this rule.

Confidential Information

A commissioner or employee shall not use his or her official position to obtain official information about any person or entity for any purpose other than in the performance of official duties. A commissioner or employee shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly disclose any confidential information concerning the property, operations, policies, affairs, or tenants of the Authority excepted as permitted by the Texas Public Information Law or applicable federal law or regulation.

Representation of Private Interests

A commissioner or employee shall not represent any person, group, or entity before the Authority's board of commissioners or before staff having policy-making or decision-making responsibility. A commissioner or employee shall not assert the prestige of the commissioner's or employee's position for the purpose of advancing private interests or state, or imply that he or she is able to influence Authority action on any basis other than the merits.

Outside Employment

A commissioner or employee shall not solicit, accept, or engage in concurrent outside employment which could be reasonably expected to impair independence of judgment in or faithful performance of official duties. A commissioner or employee shall not provide services to an outside employer related to the commissioner or employee's official duties. A commissioner or employee shall disclose any outside employment to the Authority board of commissioners upon initial appointment and annually thereafter.

Authority Property and Resources

A commissioner or employee shall not use, request, or permit the use of Authority facilities, personnel, vehicles, equipment, tools, supplies, property, or resources for personal, private, or political activities or purposes.

Political Activity

A commissioner or employee shall not induce or attempt to induce any commissioner or employee to participate in a partisan election campaign, contribute to a candidate or political action committee, or engage in any other political activity relating to a particular party, candidate, or issue, or to refrain from engaging in any lawful political activity. A commissioner or employee may encourage another to vote generally. A commissioner or employee shall not accept any compensation for services in any political activity related to any federal, state or local election for a candidate or issue.

Third-Party Actions

A commissioner or employee shall not assist or induce, or attempt to assist or induce, any person to violate any provision in the Ethics Policy. A commissioner or employee shall not circumvent the Ethics Policy through the acts of another person.

Interest in Contracts

A commissioner or employee shall not have a private or personal financial interest in any contract with the Authority or in the sale to the Authority of any land, materials, supplies, or service. A private or personal financial interest arises when a party to the contract or sale involves the commissioner or employee, or a parent, child or spouse, or a business entity in which the commissioner or employee, or a parent, child or spouse, owns 10% of the voting stock or shares, or of the fair market value of the business entity, or a business entity that is a subcontractor on an Authority contract, a partner, or a parent, or subsidiary business entity.

Disclosure, Determination, and Resolution of Conflicts and Violations

A commissioner or employee shall disclose any known conflicts of interest, proscribed relationships, or apparent or potential violations of the laws, HUD's ACC, or Ethics Policy to the board of commissioners and executive director upon initial appointment or employment and annually upon the beginning of each fiscal year. The Authority's counsel shall prepare disclosure forms, and amendments as necessary or reasonable for approval of the board of commissioners. The board of commissioners shall submit all disclosure forms to Authority counsel for review. Authority counsel shall determine whether there is any actual or potential conflict or violation of the laws, HUD's ACC, or Ethics Policy, and recommend action by the board of commissioners or executive director to resolve any conflict or violation.

Interpretation

Actions subject to the Ethics Policy shall be opined by the counsel to the Authority based on the known facts and issues and reported to the board of commissioners and executive director with recommended resolution of a conflict or violation of the law or general rules.

D. SOURCES OF LAW AND POLICY

Certain Texas laws govern the ethics of commissioners and employees of housing authorities. The Ethics Policy will be amended automatically to incorporate any legislative amendments to these statutes that become law.

Texas Housing Authorities Law

The Texas Housing Authorities Law, Tex. Local Government Code, Chapter 392, includes two provisions regarding conflicts of interest affecting commissioners and employees:

Sec. 392.042. Interested Commissioners.

(a) In this section, "housing project" includes, in addition to the works or undertakings described by Subdivision (6) of Section 392.002:

(1) a work or undertaking implemented for a reason described by Subdivision (6) of Section 392.002 that is financed in any way by public funds or tax-exempt revenue bonds; or

(2) a building over which the housing authority has jurisdiction and of which a part is reserved for occupancy by persons who receive income or rental supplements from a governmental entity.

(b) Except as provided by Subsection (c), a commissioner of an authority may not have dealings with a housing project for pecuniary gain and may not own, acquire, or control a direct or indirect interest in a:

(1) housing project;

(2) property included or planned to be included in a housing project;

(3) contract or proposed contract for the sale of land to be used for a housing project;

(4) contract or proposed contract for the construction of a housing project; or

(5) contract or proposed contract for the sale of materials or services to be furnished or used in connection with a housing project.

(c) A commissioner may:

(1) manage a housing project;

(2) own, acquire, or control a management company that renders management services to a housing project;

(3) continue to own or control an interest in a housing project held by the commissioner before the commissioner's term of office began; or

(4) own, acquire, or control an interest in, or have dealings with, a housing project over which the commissioner's housing authority does not have jurisdiction.

(d) If a commissioner manages, owns, acquires, or controls a direct or indirect interest in property included or planned to be included in a housing project or has any other dealings for pecuniary gain with a housing project, the commissioner shall immediately disclose the interest or dealings to the authority in writing. The disclosure shall be entered in the minutes of the authority. The failure to disclose the interest constitutes misconduct of office.

(e) A commissioner who knowingly or intentionally violates Subsection (b) or (d) commits an offense. An offense under this subsection is a felony of the third degree.

(f) A person finally convicted under Subsection (e) is ineligible for future employment with the state, a political subdivision of the state, or a public corporation formed under the authority of the state or a political subdivision of the state.

§ 392.043. Interested Employees

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (b), (c), or (f), an employee of an authority may not have dealings with a housing project for pecuniary gain and may not own, acquire, or control a direct or indirect interest in a:

(1) housing project;

(2) property included or planned to be included in a housing project;

(3) contract or proposed contract for the sale of land to be used for a housing project;

(4) contract or proposed contract for the construction of a housing project; or

(5) contract or proposed contract for the sale of materials or services to be furnished or used in connection with a housing project.

(b) An employee may not have any dealings with a housing project for pecuniary gain except in the performance of duties as an employee of the housing authority.

(c) Except as otherwise permitted by this chapter or another law, an employee of an authority may not be employed by or otherwise contract to provide services to another authority unless the first authority gives its written consent to the employment or contract. An employee of an authority who is employed by or who contracts to provide services to another authority under this subsection does not violate Subsection (a) or (b).

(d) An employee who knowingly or intentionally violates Subsection (a) or (c) commits an offense. An offense under this subsection is a felony of the third degree.

(e) A person finally convicted under Subsection (d) is ineligible for future employment with the state, a political subdivision of the state, or a public corporation formed under the authority of the state or a political subdivision of the state.

(f) An employee of an authority may be a party to or otherwise participate in a contract or agreement for assistance under a housing program, including a contract or agreement for public housing, Section 8 housing assistance, low-interest home loans, lease-purchase assistance, or down payment assistance, to the same extent as a member of the public if the employee qualifies for assistance under the program.

(g) In this section, "Section 8 housing assistance" means housing assistance provided under Section 8, United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. Section 1437f).

Local Public Official Conflict of Interest

The Texas Government Code, Chapter 171, establishes conflict of interest boundaries for local public officials. Those applicable to housing authority commissioners and officers are included below:

§ 171.001. Definitions

In this chapter:

(1) "Local public official" means a member of the governing body or another officer, whether elected, appointed, paid, or unpaid, of any district (including a school district), county, municipality, precinct, central appraisal district, transit authority or district, or other local governmental entity who exercises responsibilities beyond those that are advisory in nature.

(2) "Business entity" means a sole proprietorship, partnership, firm, corporation, holding company, joint-stock company, receivership, trust, or any other entity recognized by law.

§ 171.002. Substantial Interest in Business Entity

(a) For purposes of this chapter, a person has a substantial interest in a business entity if:

(1) the person owns 10 percent or more of the voting stock or shares of the business entity or owns either 10 percent or more or \$15,000 or more of the fair market value of the business entity; or

(2) funds received by the person from the business entity exceed 10 percent of the person's gross income for the previous year.

(b) A person has a substantial interest in real property if the interest is an equitable or legal ownership with a fair market value of \$2,500 or more.

(c) A local public official is considered to have a substantial interest under this section if a person related to the official in the first degree by consanguinity or affinity, as determined under Chapter 573, Government Code, has a substantial interest under this section.

§ 171.003. Prohibited Acts; Penalty

(a) A local public official commits an offense if the official knowingly:

(1) violates Section 171.004;

(2) acts as surety for a business entity that has work, business, or a contract with the governmental entity; or

(3) acts as surety on any official bond required of an officer of the governmental entity.

(b) An offense under this section is a Class A misdemeanor.

§ 171.004. Affidavit and Abstention From Voting Required

(a) If a local public official has a substantial interest in a business entity or in real property, the official shall file, before a vote or decision on any matter involving the business entity or the real property, an affidavit stating the nature and extent of the interest and shall abstain from further participation in the matter if:

(1) in the case of a substantial interest in a business entity the action on the matter will have a special economic effect on the business entity that is distinguishable from the effect on the public; or

(2) in the case of a substantial interest in real property, it is reasonably foreseeable that an action on the matter will have a special economic effect on the value of the property, distinguishable from its effect on the public.

(b) The affidavit must be filed with the official record keeper of the governmental entity.

(c) If a local public official is required to file and does file an affidavit under Subsection (a), the official is not required to abstain from further participation in the matter requiring the affidavit if a majority of the members of the governmental entity of which the official is a member is composed of persons who are likewise required to file and who do file affidavits of similar interests on the same official action.

§ 171.005. Voting on Budget

(a) The governing body of a governmental entity shall take a separate vote on any budget item specifically dedicated to a contract with a business entity in which a member of the governing body has a substantial interest.

(b) Except as provided by Section 171.004(c), the affected member may not participate in that separate vote. The member may vote on a final budget if:

(1) the member has complied with this chapter; and

(2) the matter in which the member is concerned has been resolved.

§ 171.006. Effect of Violation of Chapter

The finding by a court of a violation under this chapter does not render an action of the governing body voidable unless the measure that was the subject of an action involving a conflict of interest would not have passed the governing body without the vote of the person who violated the chapter.

§ 171.007. Common Law Preempted; Cumulative of Municipal Provisions

(a) This chapter preempts the common law of conflict of interests as applied to local public officials.

(b) This chapter is cumulative of municipal charter provisions and municipal ordinances defining and prohibiting conflicts of interests.

§ 171.009. Service on Board of Corporation for No Compensation

It shall be lawful for a local public official to serve as a member of the board of directors of private, nonprofit corporations when such officials receive no compensation or other remuneration from the nonprofit corporation or other nonprofit entity.

Texas Nepotism Law

The Texas Nepotism Law, Texas Government Code, Chapter 573, limits the relationships of a public official to employees and candidates for public positions:

§ 573.001. Definitions

In this chapter:

(1) "Candidate" has the meaning assigned by Section 251.001, Election Code.

(2) "Position" includes an office, clerkship, employment, or duty.

(3) "Public official" means:

(A) an officer of this state or of a district, county, municipality, precinct, school district, or other political subdivision of this state;

(B) an officer or member of a board of this state or of a district, county, municipality, school district, or other political subdivision of this state; or

(C) a judge of a court created by or under a statute of this state.

§ 573.002. Degrees of Relationship

Except as provided by Section 573.043, this chapter applies to relationships within the third degree by consanguinity or within the second degree by affinity.

SUBCHAPTER B. RELATIONSHIPS BY CONSANGUINITY OR BY AFFINITY

§ 573.021. Method of Computing Degree of Relationship

The degree of a relationship is computed by the civil law method.

§ 573.022. Determination of Consanguinity

(a) Two individuals are related to each other by consanguinity if:

- (1) one is a descendant of the other; or
- (2) they share a common ancestor.

(b) An adopted child is considered to be a child of the adoptive parent for this purpose.

§ 573.023. Computation of Degree of Consanguinity

(a) The degree of relationship by consanguinity between an individual and the individual's descendant is determined by the number of generations that separate them. A parent and child are related in the first degree, a grandparent and grandchild in the second degree, a great-grandparent and great-grandchild in the third degree and so on.

(b) If an individual and the individual's relative are related by consanguinity, but neither is descended from the other, the degree of relationship is determined by adding:

- (1) the number of generations between the individual and the nearest common ancestor of the individual and the individual's relative; and
- (2) the number of generations between the relative and the nearest common ancestor.

(c) An individual's relatives within the third degree by consanguinity are the individual's:

- (1) parent or child (relatives in the first degree);
- (2) brother, sister, grandparent, or grandchild (relatives in the second degree); and
- (3) great-grandparent, great-grandchild, aunt who is a sister of a parent of the individual, uncle who is a brother of a parent of the individual, nephew who is a child of a brother or sister of the individual, or niece who is a child of a brother or sister of the individual (relatives in the third degree).

§ 573.024. Determination of Affinity

(a) Two individuals are related to each other by affinity if:

(1) they are married to each other; or

(2) the spouse of one of the individuals is related by consanguinity to the other individual.

(b) The ending of a marriage by divorce or the death of a spouse ends relationships by affinity created by that marriage unless a child of that marriage is living, in which case the marriage is considered to continue as long as a child of that marriage lives.

(c) Subsection (b) applies to a member of the board of trustees of or an officer of a school district only until the youngest child of the marriage reaches the age of 21 years.

§ 573.025. Computation of Degree of Affinity

(a) A husband and wife are related to each other in the first degree by affinity. For other relationships by affinity, the degree of relationship is the same as the degree of the underlying relationship by consanguinity. For example: if two individuals are related to each other in the second degree by consanguinity, the spouse of one of the individuals is related to the other individual in the second degree by affinity.

(b) An individual's relatives within the third degree by affinity are:

(1) anyone related by consanguinity to the individual's spouse in one of the ways named in Section 573.023(c); and

(2) the spouse of anyone related to the individual by consanguinity in one of the ways named in Section 573.023(c).

SUBCHAPTER C. NEPOTISM PROHIBITIONS

§ 573.041. Prohibition Applicable to Public Official

A public official may not appoint, confirm the appointment of, or vote for the appointment or confirmation of the appointment of an individual to a position that is to be directly or indirectly compensated from public funds or fees of office if:

(1) the individual is related to the public official within a degree described by Section 573.002; or

(2) the public official holds the appointment or confirmation authority as a member of a state or local board, the legislature, or a court and the individual is related to another member of that board, legislature, or court within a degree described by Section 573.002.

§ 573.062. Continuous Employment

(a) A nepotism prohibition prescribed by Section 573.041 or by a municipal charter or ordinance does not apply to an appointment, confirmation of an appointment, or vote for an appointment or confirmation of an appointment of an individual to a position if:

(1) the individual is employed in the position immediately before the election or appointment of the public official to whom the individual is related in a prohibited degree; and

(2) that prior employment of the individual is continuous for at least:

(A) 30 days, if the public official is appointed;

(B) six months, if the public official is elected at an election other than the general election for state and county officers; or

(C) one year, if the public official is elected at the general election for state and county officers.

(b) If, under Subsection (a), an individual continues in a position, the public official to whom the individual is related in a prohibited degree may not participate in any deliberation or voting on the appointment, reappointment, confirmation of the appointment or reappointment, employment, reemployment, change in status, compensation, or dismissal of the individual if that action applies only to the individual and is not taken regarding a bona fide class or category of employees.

SUBCHAPTER E. ENFORCEMENT

§ 573.081. Removal In General

(a) An individual who violates Subchapter C or Section 573.062(b) shall be removed from the individual's position. The removal must be made in accordance with the removal provisions in the constitution of this state, if applicable. If a provision of the constitution does not govern the removal, the removal must be by a quo warranto proceeding.

(b) A removal from a position shall be made immediately and summarily by the original appointing authority if a criminal conviction against the appointee for a violation of Subchapter C or Section 573.062(b) becomes final. If the removal is not made within 30 days after the date the conviction becomes final, the individual holding the position may be removed under Subsection (a).

§ 573.082. Removal by Quo Warranto Proceeding

(a) A quo warranto proceeding under this chapter must be brought by the attorney general in a district court in Travis County or in a district court of the county in which the defendant resides.

(b) The district or county attorney of the county in which a suit is filed under this section shall assist the attorney general at the attorney general's discretion.

§ 573.083. Withholding Payment of Compensation

A public official may not approve an account or draw or authorize the drawing of a warrant or order to pay the compensation of an ineligible individual if the official knows the individual is ineligible.

§ 573.084. Criminal Penalty

(a) An individual commits an offense involving official misconduct if the individual violates Subchapter C or Section 573.062(b) or 573.083.

(b) An offense under this section is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not less than \$100 or more than \$1,000.

HUD Annual Contributions Contract

The Annual Contributions Contract (Form HUD-53012A) (ACC) between HUD and the Housing Authority prohibits certain interests involving commissioners and employees:

Section 19 – Conflict of Interest

(A)(1) In addition to any other applicable conflict of interest requirements, neither the Authority nor any of its contractors or their contractors may enter into any contract, subcontract, or arrangement in connection with a project under this ACC in which any of the following classes of people has an interest, direct or indirect, during his or her tenure or for one year thereafter:

(i) Any present or former member or officer of the governing body of the HA, or any member of the officer's immediate family. There shall be excepted from this prohibition any present or former tenant commissioner who does not serve on the governing body of a resident corporation, and who otherwise does not occupy a policymaking position with the resident corporation, the Authority or a business entity.

(ii) Any employee of the Authority who formulates policy or who influences decisions with respect to the project(s), or any member of the employee's immediate family, or the employee's partner.

(iii) Any public official, member of the local governing body, or State or local legislator, or any member of such individual's immediate family, who exercises functions or responsibilities with respect to the project(s) or the HA.

(2) Any member of these classes of persons must disclose the member's interest or prospective interest to the Authority and HUD.

(3) The requirements of this subsection (A) (1) may be waived by HUD for good cause, if permitted under State and local law. No person for whom a waiver is requested may exercise responsibilities or functions with respect to the contract to which the waiver pertains.

(4) The provisions of this subsection (A) shall not apply to the General Depository Agreement entered into with an institution regulated by a Federal agency, or to utility service for which rates are fixed or controlled by a State or local agency.

(5) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a tenant of the Authority from serving on the governing body of the HA.

(B)(1) The Authority may not hire an employee in connection with a project under this ACC if the prospective employee is an immediate family member of any person belonging to one of the following classes:

(i) Any present or former member or officer of the governing body of the HA. There shall be excepted from this prohibition any former tenant commissioner who does not serve on the governing body of a resident corporation, and who otherwise does not occupy a policymaking position with the HA.

(ii) Any employee of the Authority who formulates policy or who influences decisions with respect to the project(s).

(iii) Any public official, member of the local governing body, or State or local legislator, who exercises functions or responsibilities with respect to the project(s) or the HA.

(2) The prohibition referred to in subsection (B) (1) shall remain in effect throughout the class member's tenure and for one year thereafter.

(3) The class member shall disclose to the Authority and HUD the member's familial relationship to the prospective employee.

(4) The requirements of this subsection (B) (1) may be waived by the Authority Board of Commissioners for good cause, provided such waiver is permitted by State and local law.

(C) [Applies only to an Indian Housing Authority]

(D) For purposes of this section, the term “immediate family member” means the spouse, mother, father, brother, sister, or child of a covered class member (whether related as a full blood relative, or as a “half” or “step” relative, e.g., a half-brother of stepchild).

1-8.Nepotism Policy

STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Harris County Housing Authority (“Authority”) employs individuals based upon professional merit.

A. PURPOSE

This nepotism policy has been established to ensure that all Authority employees are hired based upon their professional qualifications. A violation of this policy may not be defended on the grounds that it was in the best interest of the Authority to hire an individual whose employment violates this policy.

B. DEFINITIONS

- Affinity: A relationship created by marriage.
 - First degree: anyone related by consanguinity to the individual’s spouse within the first or second degrees.
 - Second degree: the spouse of anyone related to the individual by consanguinity within the first or second degrees.
- Child: includes an independent, adult child.
- Consanguinity: A blood relationship between two individuals who share a common ancestor or where one individual is descended from the other.
 - First degree: the individual’s parent or child.
 - Second degree: the individual’s brother, sister, grandparent, or grandchild.
 - Third degree: the individual’s great-grandparent, great-grandchild, aunt who is the sister of a parent, uncle who is a brother of a parent, nephew who is a child of a sibling, or niece who is a child of a sibling.
- Relative: Any person who is related to another within the third degree of consanguinity or the second degree of affinity as defined in this policy. Under this policy, the degree of relationship by half-blood and legal adoption is computed just as though the individuals are related by full blood.
- Supervisory Responsibility: Involvement in the decision making process to hire, fire, promote, discipline, discharge or assign work to a particular employee.

C. NEPOTISM POLICY REQUIREMENTS

The Authority will not employ an individual who is a relative:

- of the Executive Director;
- of his or her supervisor or anyone with supervisory responsibility for his or her supervisor;
- of anyone for whom he or she will have supervisory responsibility; or
- of another employee who works in the same section or department at the Authority.

The Authority may employ a relative of another employee provided the employment does not violate the provisions above.

Section 2 - Operational Policies

2-1. Employee Classifications

For purposes of this handbook, all employees fall within one of the classifications below.

Full-Time Employees - Employees who regularly work at least 40 hours per week who were not hired on a short-term basis.

Part-Time Employees - Employees who regularly work fewer than 40 hours per week who were not hired on a short-term basis.

Short-Term Employees - Employees who were hired for a specific short-term project, or on a short-term freelance, per diem or temporary basis. Short-Term Employees generally are not eligible for the Authority's benefits, but are eligible to receive statutory benefits.

In addition to the above classifications, employees are categorized as either "**exempt**" or "**non-exempt**" for purposes of federal and state wage and hour laws. Employees classified as exempt do not receive overtime pay; they generally receive the same weekly salary regardless of hours worked. Such salary may be paid less frequently than weekly. You will be informed of your classifications upon hire and informed of any subsequent changes to your classifications.

2-2. Trial Period

The first three months of your employment is a probationary period. This is an opportunity for the Authority to evaluate your performance. It also is an opportunity for you to decide whether you are happy being employed by the Authority. The Authority may extend the probationary period if it desires. Completion of the probationary period does not alter an employee's at-will status.

2-3. Your Employment Records

In order to obtain your position, you provided us with personal information, such as your address and telephone number. This information is contained in your personnel file.

Please keep your personnel file up to date by informing the Director of Human Resources of any changes. Also, please inform the Director of Human Resources of any specialized training or skills you may acquire in the future, as well as any changes to any required visas. Unreported changes of address, marital status, etc. can affect your withholding tax and benefit coverage. Further, an "out of date" emergency contact or an inability to reach you in a crisis could cause a severe health or safety risk or other significant problem.

2-4. Working Hours and Schedule

Harris County Housing Authority normally is open for business from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. You will be assigned a work schedule and you will be expected to begin and end work according to the schedule. To accommodate the needs of our business, at some point we may need to change individual work schedules on either a short-term or long-term basis.

Employees will be provided meal and rest periods as required by law. Your Supervisor will provide further details.

2-5. Compressed Work Schedule and Procedures

I. Purpose:

To provide employees guidance on Compressed Work Schedules (CWS) and define office coverage procedures to participating employees.

II. Policy:

- A.** A Compressed Work Schedule is a management tool to improve employee efficiency and customer service. The opportunity to work a compressed work schedule is a privilege and not an entitlement. This option may be terminated at any time at management's discretion.
- B.** The Harris County Housing Authority 9/80-work schedule is the standard and is based upon a nine-hour workday. Employees are expected to work nine hours per day for eight days, and work one eight hour day in each consecutive two-week period and receive one earned day off (EDO). Non-exempt employees shall only take earned time off within the same work week (7 consecutive 24-hour periods) – unauthorized overtime is prohibited.
- C.** Employees shall be required to use the EDO on its regularly scheduled day during a paid time off period or a day within the same pay period. EDOs are required to be taken on the day scheduled unless prior approval is secured from your supervisor. EDOs are not eligible to be banked or stored for later use.

- D. Compressed Work Schedules may only be changed with the approval of your supervisor. Other work schedules may be offered with approval from the Department's Director.
- E. It is vital for management to ensure adequate coverage prior to approving a CWS schedule. Therefore, every department will identify the minimum number of personnel expected to be physically on-site at all times. This should assure adequate departmental coverage and ability to provide service. In the event of an emergency situation, the most senior on-site employee will be contacted.
- F. At all times, management or executive level employees will designate one director or manager as "on call" in which Earned Days Off (EDO) are normally utilized. This will assist receptionists in directing important telephone calls or visitors. If this person cannot be on-site, it is required that he/she be immediately available by telephone, pager or cellular phone.
- G. When a paid holiday falls on an employee's regularly scheduled day off, the employee will be given another day off during that pay period. The paid holiday will require the additional hour to be made from the employee's appropriate time off accrual.
- H. If an employee working an approved 4 day a week compressed work week takes a day off (sick, vacation or comp), the day off will be counted as 1.25 days off and should be deducted accordingly from the employee's appropriate time off accrual.

2-6. Timekeeping Procedures

Employees must record their actual time worked for payroll and benefit purposes. Non-exempt employees must record the time work begins and ends, as well as the beginning and ending time of any departure from work for any non-work-related reason, on forms as prescribed by management.

Altering, falsifying or tampering with time records is prohibited and subjects the employee to discipline, up to and including discharge.

Exempt employees are required to record their daily work attendance and report full days of absence from work for reasons such as leaves of absence, sick leave or personal business.

Non-exempt employees may not start work until their scheduled starting time.

It is your responsibility to sign your time record to certify the accuracy of all time recorded. Any errors in your time record should be reported immediately to your Supervisor, who will attempt to correct legitimate errors.

2-7. Overtime

Like most successful companies, we experience periods of extremely high activity. During these busy periods, additional work is required from all of us. Your Supervisor is responsible for monitoring business activity and requesting overtime work if it is necessary. Effort will be made to provide you with adequate advance notice in such situations.

Any non-exempt employee who works overtime will be compensated at the rate of one and one-half times (1.5) his/her normal hourly wage for all time worked in excess of forty (40) hours each week, unless otherwise required by law.

Employees may work overtime only with prior management authorization.

For purposes of calculating overtime for non-exempt employees, the workweek begins at 12 a.m. on Saturday and ends 168 hours later at 12 a.m. on the following Saturday.

2-8. Safe Harbor Policy for Exempt Employees

It is our policy and practice to accurately compensate employees and to do so in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws. To ensure that you are paid properly and that no improper deductions are made, you must review your pay stubs promptly to identify and report all errors.

If you are classified as an exempt salaried employee, you will receive a salary which is intended to compensate you for all hours you may work for the Company. This salary will be established at the time of hire or when you become classified as an exempt employee. While it may be subject to review and modification from time to time, such as during salary review times, the salary will be a predetermined amount that will not be subject to deductions for variations in the quantity or quality of the work you perform.

Under federal and state law, your salary is subject to certain deductions. For example, unless state law requires otherwise, your salary can be reduced for the following reasons:

- Full-day absences for personal reasons.
- Full-day absences for sickness or disability.
- Full-day disciplinary suspensions for infractions of our written policies and procedures.
- Family and Medical Leave absences (either full- or partial-day absences).
- To offset amounts received as payment for jury and witness fees or military pay.
- The first or last week of employment in the event you work less than a full week.
- Any full work week in which you do not perform any work.

Your salary may also be reduced for certain types of deductions such as your portion of health, dental or life insurance premiums; state, federal or local taxes; social security; or voluntary contributions to a 401(k) or pension plan.

In any work week in which you performed any work, your salary will not be reduced for any of the following reasons:

Partial day absences for personal reasons, sickness or disability.

Your absence on a day because your employer has decided to close a facility on a scheduled work day.

Absences for jury duty, attendance as a witness, or military leave in any week in which you have performed any work.

Any other deductions prohibited by state or federal law.

However, unless state law provides otherwise, deductions may be made to your accrued leave for full- or partial-day absences for personal reasons, sickness or disability.

If you believe you have been subject to any improper deductions, you should immediately report the matter to your supervisor. If the supervisor is unavailable or if you believe it would be inappropriate to contact that person (or if you have not received a prompt and fully acceptable reply), you should immediately contact the Director of Human Resources or any other supervisor in the Company with whom you feel comfortable.

2-9. Your Paycheck

You will be paid bi-weekly for all the time you have worked during the past pay period.

Your payroll stub itemizes deductions made from your gross earnings. By law, the Authority is required to make deductions for Social Security, federal income tax and any other appropriate taxes. These required deductions also may include any court-ordered garnishments. Your payroll stub will also differentiate between regular pay received and overtime pay received.

If you believe there is an error in your pay, bring the matter to the attention of the Director of Human Resources immediately so the Authority can resolve the matter quickly and amicably.

Your paycheck will be given only to you, unless you request that it be mailed, or authorize in writing another person to accept your check for you.

2-10. Direct Deposit

Harris County Housing Authority strongly encourages employees to use direct deposit. Authorization forms are available from the Director of Human Resources.

2-11. Performance Reviews

Depending on your position and classification, Harris County Housing Authority endeavors to review your performance annually. However, please understand that a positive performance evaluation does not guarantee an increase in salary, a promotion, or continued employment. Compensation increases and the terms and conditions of employment, including job assignments, transfers, promotions, and demotions, are determined by and at the discretion of management.

In addition to these formal performance evaluations, the Authority encourages you and your Supervisor to discuss your job performance on a frequent and ongoing basis.

2-12. Record Retention

The Authority acknowledges its responsibility to preserve information relating to litigation, audits and investigations. Failure on the part of employees to follow this policy can result in possible civil and criminal sanctions against the Authority and its employees and possible disciplinary action against responsible individuals (up to and including termination of employment). Each employee has an obligation to contact the Director of Human Resources to inform them of a potential or actual litigation, external audit, investigation or similar proceeding involving the Authority that may have an impact on record retention protocols.

2-13. Job Postings

The Authority is dedicated to assisting employees in managing their careers and reaching their professional goals through promotion and transfer opportunities. This policy outlines the internal posting program which is in place for all employees. To be eligible to apply for an open position, employees must meet several requirements:

- Should be a current, regular, full-time or part-time employee
- Been in your current position for at least six months
- Maintain a performance rating of satisfactory or above
- Should not be on an employee conduct/performance-related probation or warning
- Must meet the job qualifications listed on the job posting
- Required to provide your manager with notice prior to applying for the position

Not all positions are guaranteed to be posted. The Authority reserves the right to seek applicants solely from outside sources or to post positions internally and externally simultaneously.

For specific information about the program, please contact the Human Resources Department.

2-14. Inclement Weather Policy

Closing During Inclement Weather

While we generally enjoy excellent weather, there are occasions when there can be the potential for flooding, tornados, and ice storms.

Generally, all employees are expected to report to work unless major thoroughfares have been closed due to extreme weather. Quite often, bad weather conditions are localized in our area and, simply by waiting, you may be able to safely arrive at work later in the day. Under these circumstances, you should call your immediate supervisor to advise them of the poor weather conditions in your area and your expected time of arrival. Depending upon the circumstances, your supervisor may tell you simply to remain at home that day.

If you believe that the weather conditions are occurring generally in our area, you should try to contact your supervisor at home or call the office to determine if it is to be closed. Typically, if the school system (Houston Independent School District) is closed, our office will also be closed. If the schools are open and if the radio station does not list us as closed or as having a delayed opening, you should assume that the office is open as normal.

On occasion, bad weather occurs during the day after you have arrived at work. Depending upon the circumstances, you may be directed to a place of safety within the building or you may be told to leave. As an example, if there is a tornado warning, you should proceed to the safest location, as marked in the office emergency plan. On the other hand, if an ice storm is threatening, the office may be closed early to allow you additional time to get home before the storm arrives.

In the event that the office is opened late or closed early because of hazardous weather, the following will be applied for paying wages to hourly employees:

- If the office is closed during the day to permit employees to leave early, employees will be paid for actual hours worked.
- If there is a delay in opening the office, employees reporting before 10:00 a.m. will be paid for eight hours.
- If the opening of the office is delayed, employees reporting after 10:00 a.m. will be paid for actual hours worked.
- Employees who do not report to work when the office is open will not be paid for the day. With supervisor approval, the individual may take the day as a vacation day.

Exempt Employees Leave Options: Employees who are unable to report to work because of bad weather or because the Authority has closed may use accrued vacation or compensatory time to cover the work time missed. Use of accrued sick leave is appropriate only in the case of illness.

As you are provided an option to remain home during inclement weather, the company will not be responsible for any personal injuries or property damage if you attempt to arrive at work. You should use your best judgment in deciding whether it is reasonable for you to attempt to get to work.

Section 3 - Benefits

3-1. Benefits Overview

In addition to good working conditions and competitive pay, it is Harris County Housing Authority's policy to provide a combination of supplemental benefits to all eligible employees. In keeping with this goal, each benefit program has been carefully devised. These benefits include time-off benefits, such as vacations and holidays, and insurance and other plan benefits. We are constantly studying and evaluating our benefits programs and policies to better meet your present and future requirements. These policies have been developed over the years and continue to be refined to keep up with changing times and needs.

The next few pages contain a brief outline of the benefits programs Harris County Housing Authority provides for you and your family. Of course, the information presented here is intended to serve only as guidelines.

The descriptions of the insurance and other plan benefits merely highlight certain aspects of the applicable plans for your general information only. The details of those plans are spelled out in the official plan documents, which are available for review upon your request from the Director of Human Resources. Additionally, the provisions of the plans, including eligibility and benefits provisions, are summarized in the summary plan descriptions ("SPDs") for the plans (which may be revised from time to time). In the determination of benefits and all other matters under each plan, the terms of the official plan documents shall govern over the language of any descriptions of the plans, including the SPDs and this handbook.

Further, Harris County Housing Authority (including the officers and administrators who are responsible for administering the plans) retains full discretionary authority to interpret the terms of the plans, as well as full discretionary authority with regard to administrative matters arising in connection with the plans and all issues concerning benefit terms, eligibility and entitlement.

While the Authority intends to maintain these employee benefits, it reserves the absolute right to modify, amend or terminate these benefits at any time and for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding your benefits, please contact the Director of Human Resources.

3-2. Holidays

Full-time employees will be paid for the following holidays:

New Year's Day
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Good Friday
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Thanksgiving Day
Day After Thanksgiving
Christmas Eve
Christmas Day
New Year's Eve
One Floating Holiday

When holidays fall or are celebrated on a regular work day, eligible employees will receive one (1) day's pay at their regular straight-time rate. Eligible employees who are called in to work on a holiday will receive one (1) day's pay at their regular straight-time rate, and an additional payment of straight-time for the actual time they work that day.

If a holiday falls within an eligible employee's approved vacation period, the eligible employee will be paid for the holiday (at the regular straight-time rate) in addition to the vacation day, or the eligible employee will receive an additional vacation day at the option of the Authority.

If a holiday falls within a jury duty or bereavement leave, the eligible employee will be paid for the holiday (at the regular straight-time rate) in addition to the leave day, or the eligible employee will receive an additional day off at the option of the Authority.

3-3. Vacations

We know how hard you work and recognize the importance of providing you with time for rest and relaxation. We fully encourage you to get this rest by taking your vacation time. Full-time employees accrue paid vacation time as follows:

After 90 calendar days of employment, full-time employees can accrue up to ten (10) days of vacation per year. Vacation is accrued on a pro-rata basis throughout the year.

After five (5) calendar years of employment, full-time employees can accrue up to fifteen (15) days of vacation per year. Vacation is accrued on a pro-rata basis throughout the year.

After ten (10) calendar years of employment, full-time employees can accrue up to twenty (20) days of vacation per year. Vacation is accrued on a pro-rata basis throughout the year.

After fifteen (15) calendar years of employment, full-time employees can accrue up to twenty-five (25) days of vacation per year. Vacation is accrued on a pro-rata basis throughout the year.

The maximum vacation entitlement for part-time employees is pro-rated based on hours worked.

Vacations should be taken during the year accrued, unless otherwise required by law. Accrued, unused vacation time can be carried over to the following calendar year only if approved by the Director of Human Resources.

Every effort will be made to grant your vacation preference, consistent with our operating schedule. However, if too many people request the same period of time off, the Authority reserves the right to choose who may take vacation during that period. Individuals with the longest length of service generally will be given preference. Vacation requests must be submitted to your manager at least 2 weeks in advance of your requested vacation dates.

Vacation may be used in hourly increments.

Accrued, unused vacation is paid out upon separation.

Advanced but unaccrued vacation will be deducted from your final paycheck, to the extent permitted by law.

3-4. Sick Days

Full-time employees are eligible to receive up to ten (10) paid sick days each year. If you will be out of work due to illness, you must call in and notify your supervisor as early as possible, but at least by the start of your workday. If you call in sick for three (3) or more consecutive days, you may be required to provide your supervisor with a doctor's note on the day you return to work.

Sick days must be taken during the year they are received. Accrued, unused sick time cannot be carried over from one year into the next and is not paid out at separation.

Sick days may be used in hourly increments.

While sick days are intended to cover only your own illnesses, if required by state law, up to half of your sick days may be used to care for a family member's (including civil union partners') illness.

Advanced but unaccrued sick days will be deducted from your final paycheck, to the extent permitted by state law.

3-5. Lactation Breaks

The Authority will provide a reasonable amount of break time to accommodate an employee desiring to express breast milk for the employee's infant child, in accordance with and to the extent required by applicable law. The break time, if possible, must run concurrently with rest and meal periods already provided to the employee. If the break time cannot run concurrently with rest and meal periods already provided to the employee, the break time will be unpaid, subject to applicable law.

The Authority will make reasonable efforts to provide employees with the use of a room or location other than a toilet stall for the employee to express milk in private. This location may be the employee's private office, if applicable. The Authority may not be able to provide additional break time if doing so would seriously disrupt the Company's operations, subject to applicable law. Please consult the Human Resources Department if you have questions regarding this policy.

Please advise management if you need break time and an area for this purpose. Employees will not be discriminated against or retaliated against for exercising their rights under this policy.

3-6. Insurance Programs

Full-time employees may participate in the Authority's insurance programs. Under these plans, eligible employees will receive comprehensive health and other insurance coverage for themselves and their families, as well as other benefits.

Upon enrolling, you will receive summary plan descriptions (SPDs) describing the benefits in greater detail. Please refer to the SPDs for detailed plan information. Of course, feel free to speak to Human Resources if you have any further questions.

3-7. Workers' Compensation

On-the-job injuries are covered by our Workers' Compensation Insurance Policy, which is provided at no cost to you. If you are injured on the job, no matter how slightly, report the incident immediately to your Supervisor. Failure to follow the Authority's procedures may affect your ability to receive Workers Compensation benefits.

This is solely a monetary benefit and not a leave of absence entitlement. Employees who need to miss work due to a workplace injury must also request a formal leave of absence. See the Leave of Absence sections of this handbook for more information.

3-8. Jury Duty Leave

Harris County Housing Authority realizes that it is the obligation of all U.S. citizens to serve on a jury when summoned to do so. All employees will be allowed time off to perform such civic service as required by law. You are expected, however, to provide the Authority with proper notice of your request to perform jury duty and with your verification of service. You also are expected to keep management informed of the expected length of your jury duty service and to report to work for the major portion of the day if you are excused by the court. If the required absence presents a serious conflict for management, you may be asked to try to postpone your jury duty. Employees on jury duty leave will be paid for their jury duty service in accordance with state law; however, exempt employees will be paid their full salary for any week in which they perform any work for the Authority.

3-9. Bereavement Leave

We know the death of a family member is a time when you wish to be with the rest of your family. If you are a full-time employee and you lose a close relative, you will be allowed paid time off of up to three (3) days to assist in attending to your obligations and commitments. For the purposes of this policy, a close relative includes a spouse, domestic partner, child, parent, sibling, spouses parent, child, sibling, employee's child's spouse, grandparent, grandchild or any other relation required by applicable law. Paid leave days only may be taken on regularly scheduled, consecutive workdays following the day of death. You must inform your Supervisor prior to commencing bereavement leave. In administering this policy, the Authority may require verification of death.

3-10. Voting Leave

In the event an employee does not have sufficient time outside of working hours to vote in a statewide election, if required by state law, the employee may take off enough working time to vote. Such time will be paid if required by state law. This time should be taken at the beginning or end of the regular work schedule. Where possible, your Supervisor should be notified at least two days prior to the voting day.

3-11. Employee Assistance Program

Harris County Housing Authority provides an employee assistance program for employees. This program offers qualified counselors to help you cope with personal problems you may be facing. Further details can be obtained by contacting an EAP counselor at (888) 231-7015.

3-12. Retirement Plan

Eligible employees are able to participate in the Authority's retirement plan. Plan participants may make pre-tax contributions to a retirement account.

Upon becoming eligible to participate in this plan, you will receive an SPD describing the plan in greater detail. Please refer to the SPD for detailed plan information. Of course, feel free to speak to the Director of Human Resources if you have any further questions.

Section 4 - Leaves of Absence

4-1. Personal Leave

If you are ineligible for any other the Authority leave of absence, Harris County Housing Authority, under certain circumstances, may grant you a personal leave of absence without pay. A written request for a personal leave should be presented to management at least two (2) weeks before the anticipated start of the leave. If the leave is requested for medical reasons and you are not eligible for leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or any state leave law, medical certification also must be submitted. Your request will be considered on the basis of staffing requirements and the reasons for the requested leave, as well as your performance and attendance records. Normally, a leave of absence will be granted for a period of up to 180 calendar days every year. However a personal leave may be extended if, prior to the end of your leave, you submit a written request for an extension to management and the request is granted. During your leave, you will not earn vacation, personal days or sick days. We will continue your health insurance coverage during your leave if you submit your share of the monthly premium payments to the Authority in a timely manner, subject to the terms of the plan documents.

When you anticipate your return to work, please notify management of your expected return date. This notification should be made at least one week before the end of your leave.

Upon completion of your personal leave of absence, the Authority will attempt to return you to your original job, or to a similar position, subject to prevailing business considerations. Reinstatement, however, is not guaranteed.

Failure to advise management of your availability to return to work, failure to return to work when notified, or your continued absence from work beyond the time approved by the Authority, will be considered a voluntary resignation of your employment.

Personal leave runs concurrently with any the Authority-provided Short-Term Disability Leave of Absence.

4-2. Military Leave

If you are called into active military service or you enlist in the uniformed services, you will be eligible to receive an unpaid military leave of absence. To be eligible for military leave, you must provide management with advance notice of your service obligations unless you are prevented from providing such notice by military necessity or it is otherwise impossible or unreasonable for you to provide such notice. Provided your absence does not exceed applicable statutory limitations, you will retain reemployment rights and accrue seniority and benefits in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. Please ask management for further information about your eligibility for Military Leave.

If you are required to attend yearly Reserves or National Guard duty, you can apply for an unpaid temporary military leave of absence not to exceed the number of days allowed by law (including travel). You should give management as much advance notice of your need for military leave as possible so that we can maintain proper coverage while you are away.

Section 5 - General Standards of Conduct

5-1. Workplace Conduct

Harris County Housing Authority endeavors to maintain a positive work environment. Each employee plays a role in fostering this environment. Accordingly, we all must abide by certain rules of conduct, based on honesty, common sense and fair play.

Because everyone may not have the same idea about proper workplace conduct, it is helpful to adopt and enforce rules all can follow. Unacceptable conduct may subject the offender to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge, in the Authority's sole discretion. The following are examples of some, but not all, conduct which can be considered unacceptable:

1. Obtaining employment on the basis of false or misleading information.
2. Stealing, removing or defacing Harris County Housing Authority property or a co-worker's property, and/or disclosure of confidential information.
3. Completing another employee's time records.
4. Violation of safety rules and policies.
5. Fighting, threatening or disrupting the work of others or other violations of Harris County Housing Authority's Workplace Violence Policy.
6. Failure to follow lawful instructions of a supervisor.
7. Failure to perform assigned job duties.
8. Violation of the Punctuality and Attendance Policy, including but not limited to irregular attendance, habitual lateness or unexcused absences.
9. Gambling on the Authority's property.
10. Willful or careless destruction or damage to Company assets or to the equipment or possessions of another employee.
11. Wasting work materials.
12. Performing work of a personal nature during working time.
13. Violation of the Solicitation and Distribution Policy.

14. Violation of Harris County Housing Authority's Harassment or Equal Employment Opportunity Policies.
15. Violation of the Communication and Computer Systems Policy.
16. Unsatisfactory job performance.
17. The unlawful or unauthorized use, abuse, solicitation, distribution, theft, possession, transfer, purchase, or sale of drugs, drug paraphernalia or alcohol by an individual anywhere on Company premises, while on Company business (whether or not on Company premises) or while representing the Company or reporting to work or remaining on duty after using drugs or alcohol in any amount that adversely affects the employee's ability to perform the functions of the job. Please refer to your Company's specific policy (if any) for additional information.
18. Any other violation of Company policy.

Obviously, not every type of misconduct can be listed. Note that all employees are employed at-will, and Harris County Housing Authority reserves the right to impose whatever discipline it chooses, or none at all, in a particular instance. The Authority will deal with each situation individually and nothing in this handbook should be construed as a promise of specific treatment in a given situation. However, Harris County Housing Authority will endeavor to utilize progressive discipline but reserves the right in its sole discretion to terminate an employee at any time for any reason.

The observance of these rules will help to ensure that our workplace remains a safe and desirable place to work.

5-2. Punctuality and Attendance

You were hired to perform an important function at Harris County Housing Authority. As with any group effort, operating effectively takes cooperation and commitment from everyone. Therefore, your attendance and punctuality are very important. Unnecessary absences and lateness are expensive, disruptive and place an unfair burden on your fellow employees and your Supervisors. We expect excellent attendance from each of you. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness will result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

We do recognize, however, that there are times when absences and tardiness cannot be avoided. In such cases, you are expected to notify your Supervisor as early as possible, but no later than the start of your work day. Asking another employee, friend or relative to give this notice is improper and constitutes grounds for disciplinary action. Please call, stating the nature of your illness and its expected duration, every day that you are absent.

Unreported absences of three consecutive work days generally will be considered a voluntary resignation of your employment with the Authority.

5-3. Use of Communication and Computer Systems

Harris County Housing Authority's communication and computer systems are intended for business purposes and may be used only during working time. This includes the voice mail, e-mail and Internet systems. Users have no legitimate expectation of privacy in regard to their use of the systems.

Harris County Housing Authority may access the voice mail and e-mail systems and obtain the communications within the systems, including past voice mail and e-mail messages, without notice to users of the system, in the ordinary course of business when the Authority deems it appropriate to do so. The reasons for which the Authority may obtain such access include, but are not limited to: maintaining the system; preventing or investigating allegations of system abuse or misuse; assuring compliance with software copyright laws; complying with legal and regulatory requests for information; and ensuring that the Authority's operations continue appropriately during an employee's absence.

Further, Harris County Housing Authority may review Internet usage to ensure that such use with the Authority's property, or communications sent via the Internet with the Authority's property, are appropriate. The reasons for which the Authority may review employees' use of the Internet with the Authority's property include, but are not limited to: maintaining the system; preventing or investigating allegations of system abuse or misuse; assuring compliance with software copyright laws; complying with legal and regulatory requests for information; and ensuring that the Authority's operations continue appropriately during an employee's absence.

The Authority may store electronic communications for a period of time after the communication is created. From time to time, copies of communications may be deleted.

The Authority's policies prohibiting harassment, in their entirety, apply to the use of the Authority's communication and computer systems. No one may use any communication or computer system in a manner that may be construed by others as harassing or offensive based on race, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious beliefs or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law.

Since the Authority's communication and computer systems are intended for business use, these systems may not be used to solicit for religious or political causes or outside organizations.

Further, since the Authority's communication and computer systems are intended for business use, all employees, upon request, must inform management of any private access codes or passwords.

Unauthorized duplication of copyrighted computer software violates the law and is strictly prohibited.

No employee may access, or attempt to obtain access to, another employee's computer systems without appropriate authorization.

Violators of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.

5-4. Use of Social Media

Harris County Housing Authority respects the right of any employee to maintain a blog or web page or to participate in a social networking, Twitter or similar site, including but not limited to Facebook and LinkedIn. However, to protect the Authority's interests and ensure employees focus on their job duties, employees must adhere to the following rules:

Employees may not post on a blog or web page or participate on a social networking, Twitter or similar site during working time or at any time with the Authority's equipment or property.

All rules regarding confidential and proprietary business information apply in full to blogs, web pages, social networking, Twitter and similar sites. Any information that cannot be disclosed through a conversation, a note or an e-mail also cannot be disclosed in a blog, web page, social networking, Twitter or similar site.

Whether an employee is posting something on his or her own blog, web page, social networking, Twitter or similar site or on someone else's, if the employee mentions the Authority and also expresses either a political opinion or an opinion regarding the Authority's actions, the poster must include a disclaimer. The poster should specifically state that the opinion expressed is his/her personal opinion and not the Authority's position. This is necessary to preserve the Authority's good will in the marketplace.

Any conduct that is impermissible under the law if expressed in any other form or forum is impermissible if expressed through a blog, web page, social networking, Twitter or similar site. For example, posted material that is discriminatory, obscene, defamatory, libelous or threatening is forbidden. The Authority's policies apply equally to employee social media usage. Employees should review their Employee Handbook for further guidance.

Harris County Housing Authority encourages all employees to keep in mind the speed and manner in which information posted on a blog, web page, and/or social networking site is received and often misunderstood by readers. Employees must use their best judgment. Employees with any questions should review the guidelines above and/or consult with their manager. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in discipline, up to and including termination.

5-5. Personal and Company-Provided Portable Communication Devices

The Authority-provided portable communication devices (PCDs), including cell phones and personal digital assistants, should be used primarily for business purposes. Employees have no reasonable expectation of privacy in regard to the use of such devices, and all use is subject to monitoring, to the maximum extent permitted by applicable law. This includes as permitted the right to monitor personal communications as necessary.

Some employees may be authorized to use their own PCD for business purposes. These employees should work with the IT department to configure their PCD for business use. Communications sent via a personal PCD also may be subject to monitoring if sent through the Authority's networks and the PCD must be provided for inspection and review upon request.

All conversations, text messages and e-mails must be professional. When sending a text message or using a PCD for business purposes, whether it is an Authority-provided or personal device, employees must comply with applicable Authority guidelines, including policies on sexual harassment, discrimination, conduct, confidentiality, equipment use and operation of vehicles.

If an employee who uses a personal PCD for business resigns or is terminated, the employee will be required to submit the device to the IT department for resetting on or before his or her last day of work. At that time, the IT department will reset and remove all information from the device, including but not limited to, the Authority's information and personal data (such as contacts, e-mails and photographs). The IT department will make efforts to provide employees with the personal data in another form (e.g., on a disk) to the extent practicable; however, the employee may lose some or all personal data saved on the device.

Employees may not use their personal PCD for business unless they agree to submit the device to the IT department on or before their last day of work for resetting and removal of the Authority's information. This is the only way currently possible to ensure that all the Authority's information is removed from the device at the time of termination. The removal of the Authority's information is crucial to ensure compliance with the Authority's confidentiality and proprietary information policies and objectives.

Please note that whether employees use their personal PCD or an Authority-issued device, the Authority's electronic communications policies, including but not limited to, proper use of communications and computer systems, remain in effect.

Portable Communication Device Use While Driving

Employees who drive on the Authority's business must abide by all state or local laws prohibiting or limiting PCD (cell phone or personal digital assistant) use while driving. Further, even if usage is permitted, employees may choose to refrain from using any PCD while driving. "Use" includes, but is not limited to, talking or listening to another person or sending an electronic or text message via the PCD.

Regardless of the circumstances, including slow or stopped traffic, if any use is permitted while driving, employees should proceed to a safe location off the road and safely stop the vehicle before placing or accepting a call. If acceptance of a call is absolutely necessary while the employee is driving, and permitted by law, the employee must use a hands-free option and advise the caller that he/she is unable to speak at that time and will return the call shortly.

Under no circumstances should employees feel that they need to place themselves at risk to fulfill business needs.

Since this policy does not require any employee to use a cell phone while driving, employees who are charged with traffic violations resulting from the use of their PCDs while driving will be solely responsible for all liabilities that result from such actions.

Texting and e-mailing while driving is prohibited in all circumstances.

5-6. Camera Phones/Recording Devices

Due to the potential for issues such as invasion of privacy, sexual harassment, and loss of productivity, no employee may use a camera phone function on any phone on company property or while performing work for the Authority.

The use of tape recorders, dictaphones or other types of voice recording devices anywhere on the Authority's property, including to record conversations or activities of other employees or management, or while performing work for the Authority, is also strictly prohibited, unless the device was provided to you by the Authority and is used solely for legitimate business purposes.

5-7. Inspections

Harris County Housing Authority reserves the right to require employees while on the Authority's property, or on client property, to agree to the inspection of their persons, personal possessions and property, personal vehicles parked on the Authority or client property, and work areas. This includes lockers, vehicles, desks, cabinets, work stations, packages, handbags, briefcases and other personal possessions or places of concealment, as well as personal mail sent to the Authority or to its clients. Employees are expected to cooperate in the conduct of any search or inspection.

5-8. Personal Visits and Telephone Calls

Disruptions during working time can lead to errors and delays. Therefore, we ask that personal telephone calls be kept to a minimum, and only be made or received after working time, or during lunch or break time.

For safety and security reasons, employees are prohibited from having personal guests visit or accompany them anywhere in our facilities other than the reception areas.

5-9. Solicitation and Distribution

To avoid distractions, solicitation by an employee of another employee is prohibited while either employee is on working time. "Working time" is the time an employee is engaged, or should be engaged, in performing his/her work tasks for Harris County Housing Authority. Solicitation of any kind by non-employees on the Authority's premises is prohibited at all times.

Distribution of advertising material, handbills, printed or written literature of any kind in working areas of the Authority is prohibited at all times. Distribution of literature by non-employees on the Authority's premises is prohibited at all times.

5-10. Bulletin Boards

Important notices and items of general interest are continually posted on our bulletin board. Make it a practice to review it frequently. This will assist you in keeping up with what is current at Harris County Housing Authority. To avoid confusion, please do not post or remove any material from the bulletin board.

5-11. Confidential Company Information

During the course of work, an employee may become aware of confidential information about Harris County Housing Authority's business, including but not limited to information regarding the Authority's finances, pricing, products and new product development, software and computer programs, marketing strategies, suppliers, customers and potential customers. An employee also may become aware of similar confidential information belonging to the Authority's clients. It is extremely important that all such information remain confidential, and particularly not be disclosed to our competitors. Any employee who improperly copies, removes (whether physically or electronically), uses or discloses confidential information to anyone outside of the Authority may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. Employees may be required to sign an agreement reiterating these obligations.

5-12. Conflict of Interest and Business Ethics

It is Harris County Housing Authority's policy that all employees avoid any conflict between their personal interests and those of the Authority. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Authority's honesty and integrity, and therefore its reputation, are not compromised. The fundamental principle guiding this policy is that no employee should have, or appear to have, personal interests or relationships that actually or potentially conflict with the best interests of the Authority.

It is not possible to give an exhaustive list of situations that might involve violations of this policy. However, the situations that would constitute a conflict in most cases include but are not limited to:

1. Holding an interest in or accepting free or discounted goods from any organization that does, or is seeking to do, business with the Authority, by any employee who is in a position to directly or indirectly influence either the Authority's decision to do business, or the terms upon which business would be done with such organization.
2. Holding any interest in an organization that competes with the Authority.
3. Being employed by (including as a consultant) or serving on the board of any organization which does, or is seeking to do, business with the Authority or which competes with the Authority.
4. Profiting personally, e.g., through commissions, loans, expense reimbursements or other payments, from any organization seeking to do business with the Authority.

A conflict of interest would also exist when a member of an employee's immediate family is involved in situations such as those above.

This policy is not intended to prohibit the acceptance of modest courtesies, openly given and accepted as part of the usual business amenities, for example, occasional business-related meals or promotional items of nominal or minor value.

It is your responsibility to report any actual or potential conflict that may exist between you (and your immediate family) and the Authority.

5-13. Use of Facilities, Equipment and Property, Including Intellectual Property

Equipment essential in accomplishing job duties is often expensive and may be difficult to replace. When using property, employees are expected to exercise care, perform required maintenance, and follow all operating instructions, safety standards and guidelines.

Please notify your Supervisor if any equipment, machines, or tools appear to be damaged, defective, or in need of repair. Prompt reporting of loss, damages, defects, and the need for repairs could prevent deterioration of equipment and possible injury to employees or others. The Supervisor can answer any questions about an employee's responsibility for maintenance and care of equipment used on the job.

Employees also are prohibited from any unauthorized use of the Authority's intellectual property, such as audio and video tapes, print materials and software.

Improper, careless, negligent, destructive, or unsafe use or operation of equipment can result in discipline, up to and including discharge.

Further, the Authority is not responsible for any damage to employees' personal belongings unless the employee's Supervisor provided advance approval for the employee to bring the personal property to work.

5-14. Health and Safety

The health and safety of employees and others on the Authority's property are of critical concern to Harris County Housing Authority. The Authority intends to comply with all health and safety laws applicable to our business. To this end, we must rely upon employees to ensure that work areas are kept safe and free of hazardous conditions. Employees are required to be conscientious about workplace safety, including proper operating methods, and recognize dangerous conditions or hazards. Any unsafe conditions or potential hazards should be reported to management immediately, even if the problem appears to be corrected. Any suspicion of a concealed danger present on the Authority's premises, or in a product, facility, piece of equipment, process or business practice for which the Authority is responsible should be brought to the attention of management immediately.

Periodically, the Authority may issue rules and guidelines governing workplace safety and health. The Authority may also issue rules and guidelines regarding the handling and disposal of hazardous substances and waste. All employees should familiarize themselves with these rules and guidelines, as strict compliance will be expected.

Any workplace injury, accident, or illness must be reported to the employee's Supervisor as soon as possible, regardless of the severity of the injury or accident.

5-15. Hiring Relatives/Employee Relationships

A familial relationship among employees can create an actual or at least a potential conflict of interest in the employment setting, especially where one relative supervises another relative. To avoid this problem, Harris County Housing Authority may refuse to hire or place a relative in a position where the potential for favoritism or conflict exists.

In other cases such as personal relationships where a conflict or the potential for conflict arises, even if there is no supervisory relationship involved, the parties may be separated by reassignment or terminated from employment, at the discretion of the Authority. Accordingly, all parties to any type of intimate personal relationship must inform management.

If two employees marry, become related, or enter into an intimate relationship, they may not remain in a reporting relationship or in positions where one individual may affect the compensation or other terms or conditions of employment of the other individual. The Authority generally will attempt to identify other available positions, but if no alternate position is available, the Authority retains the right to decide which employee will remain with the Authority.

For the purposes of this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

5-16. Employee Dress and Personal Appearance

You are expected to report to work well groomed, clean, and dressed according to the requirements of your position. Some employees may be required to wear uniforms or safety equipment/clothing. Please contact your Supervisor for specific information regarding acceptable attire for your position. If you report to work dressed or groomed inappropriately, you may be prevented from working until you return to work well groomed and wearing the proper attire.

Please note that jeans are acceptable to wear on Fridays only.

5-17. Publicity/Statements to the Media

All media inquiries regarding the position of the Authority as to any issues must be referred to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Only the CEO is authorized to make or approve public statements on behalf of the Authority. No employees, unless specifically designated by the CEO, are authorized to make those statements on behalf of the Authority. Any employee wishing to write and/or publish an article, paper, or other publication on behalf of the Authority must first obtain approval from the CEO.

5-18. Operation of Vehicles

All employees authorized to drive the Authority-owned or leased vehicles or personal vehicles in conducting the Authority's business must possess a current, valid driver's license and an acceptable driving record. Any change in license status or driving record must be reported to management immediately.

A valid driver's license must be in your possession while operating a vehicle off or on Firm property. It is the responsibility of every employee to drive safely and obey all traffic, vehicle safety, and parking laws or regulations. Drivers must demonstrate safe driving habits at all times.

Firm-owned or leased vehicles may be used only as authorized by management.

Portable Communication Device Use While Driving

Employees who drive on the Authority's business must abide by all state or local laws prohibiting or limiting portable communication device (PCD) use, including cell phones or personal digital assistants, while driving. Further, even if use is permitted, employees may choose to refrain from using any PCD while driving. "Use" includes, but is not limited to, talking or listening to another person or sending an electronic or text message via the PCD.

Regardless of the circumstances, including slow or stopped traffic, if any use is permitted while driving, employees should proceed to a safe location off the road and safely stop the vehicle before placing or accepting a call. If acceptance of a call is absolutely necessary while the employee is driving, and permitted by law, the employee must use a hands-free option and advise the caller that he/she is unable to speak at that time and will return the call shortly.

Under no circumstances should employees feel that they need to place themselves at risk to fulfill business needs.

Since this policy does not require any employee to use a PCD while driving, employees who are charged with traffic violations resulting from the use of their PCDs while driving will be solely responsible for all liabilities that result from such actions.

Texting and e-mailing while driving is prohibited in all circumstances.

5-19. Business Expense Reimbursement

Employees may be reimbursed for reasonable approved expenses incurred in the course of business. These expenses must be approved by your Supervisor, and may include air travel, hotels, motels, meals, cab fare, rental vehicles, or gas and car mileage for personal vehicles. All expenses incurred should be submitted to the Payroll Clerk along with the receipts in a timely manner.

5-20. Travel Policy

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide consistent travel regulations and reimbursement. It is the intent of the Harris County Housing Authority (the “Authority”) Board of Commissioners to establish a policy that provides fair and equitable treatment to all individuals traveling on Authority business at Authority expense.

ENFORCEMENT

The chief financial officer (CFO) of the Authority or the designee of the CFO shall be responsible for the enforcement of these travel regulations.

TRAVEL POLICY

- A. In the interpretation and application of this policy, the term “traveler” or “authorized traveler” means any appointed Authority officer or employee, including members of Authority board of commissioners and committees appointed by the board, and the employees of such boards and committees who are traveling on official Authority business and whose travel was authorized in accordance with this policy. An “authorized traveler” shall not include the spouse, children, other relatives, friends, or companions accompanying the authorized traveler on Authority business, unless the person(s) otherwise qualifies as an authorized traveler under this policy.
- B. Authorized travelers are entitled to reimbursement of certain expenditures incurred while traveling on official business for the Authority. Reimbursable expenses shall include expenses for transportation; lodging; meals; registration fees for conferences, conventions and seminars; and other actual and necessary expenses related to official business as determined by the CFO.
- C. Authorized travelers can request either a travel advance for the projected cost of authorized travel, or advance billing directed to the Authority for registration fees, air fares, meals, lodging, conferences and similar expenses.
Travel advance requests are not considered documentation of travel expenses. If travel advances exceed documented expenses, the traveler must immediately reimburse the Authority. It will be the responsibility of the CFO to initiate action to recover any undocumented travel advances.
- D. Travel advances are available only for special travel and only after completion and approval of the Authority’s travel authorization form.
- E. The travel expense reimbursement form will be used to document all expense claims.
- F. To qualify for reimbursement, travel expenses must be:

- Directly related to the conduct of Authority business for which travel was authorized;
- Actual, reasonable, and necessary under the circumstances;
- Approved by the CFO, if the travel does not require an overnight stay; and
- Approved by the Board of Commissioners, if the travel requires an overnight stay.

Expenses considered excessive will not be allowed.

- G. Claims of \$5 or more for travel expense reimbursement must be supported by the original paid receipt for lodging, vehicle rental, phone call, public carrier travel, conference fee(s), meals and other reimbursable costs.
- H. Any person attempting to defraud the Authority or misuse Authority travel funds is subject to legal action for recovery of fraudulent travel claims and/or advances.
- I. Mileage and lodging expenses incurred within Harris County are not ordinarily considered eligible expenses for reimbursement, except that mileage within Harris County is a reimbursable expense if a pool car is not available for use.

TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT RATE SCHEDULES

Authorized travelers shall be reimbursed in accordance with federal travel regulation rates. The Authority's travel reimbursement rates will automatically change as federal rates are adjusted.

The Authority may pay directly to the provider for expenses such as meals, lodging and registration fees for conferences, conventions, seminars and other education programs.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

TRAVEL REQUESTS

To ensure reimbursement for official travel, an approved travel authorization form is required. Lack of pre-approval does not prohibit reimbursement, but it does assure reimbursement within the limits of the Authority travel policy. All costs associated with the travel should be reasonably estimated and shown on the travel authorization form. An approved authorization form is needed before advanced expenses are paid or travel advances are authorized. A copy of the conference program, if applicable, should be attached to the Authority's travel authorization form or submitted with the Authority's reimbursement form.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION

It is the responsibility of the authorized traveler to:

1. Prepare and accurately describe the travel;
2. Certify the accuracy of the reimbursement request;

3. Note on the reimbursement form all direct payments and travel advances made by the Authority; and
4. File the reimbursement form with all supporting documents and original receipts.

The reimbursement form should be filed with the finance department within 10 days of return or at the end of the month, whichever is more practical.

TRANSPORTATION

All potential costs should be considered when selecting the modes of transportation. For example, airline travel may be cheaper than automobile when time away from work and increased meal and lodging costs are considered. When time is important, or when the trip is so long that other modes of transportation are not cost beneficial, air travel is encouraged.

If the traveler goes outside the state by means other than air, the reimbursement will be limited to air fare at tourist or economy class, ordinary expenses during the meeting dates, and one day's meals and lodging before and after the meeting. The traveler will be required to take annual leave for any additional time taken beyond the day before and the day after the meeting dates.

Exceptions: When the traveler extends the trip with personal time to take advantage of discount fares, the reimbursement will be limited to the lesser of the:

1. Actual expenses incurred; or
2. Amount that would have been incurred for the business portion only. The calculations for the business portion of the trip must be made using the least expensive rates available.

All expenses and savings associated with extending the trip must be submitted with the expense reimbursement form.

A. Air

When possible, the traveler should make full use of discounts for advance airline reservations and registration. The traveler should request conference, government, or weekend rates, whichever is less, when making lodging or rental car reservations. The Authority will pay for tourist or economy class air travel. The traveler should get the most affordable, least expensive and reasonable fare and take advantage of discount fares. Airline travel may be paid by direct billing to the Authority.

Mileage credits for frequent flyer programs accrue to the individual traveler. However, the Authority will not reimburse for additional expenses — such as circuitous routing, extended stays, layovers to schedule a particular carrier, upgrading from economy to first class — for travelers to accumulate additional mileage or for other personal reasons. The Authority will not reimburse travel by private aircraft under any circumstances.

B. Rail or Bus

The Authority will pay for the actual cost of a rail or bus fare ticket.

C. Vehicles

Automobile transportation may be used when a common carrier cannot be scheduled, when it is more economical, when a common carrier is not practical, or when expenses can be reduced by two or more Authority employees traveling together.

The use of a personal, an Authority, or rental vehicle is governed by the HCHA Vehicle

Use and Driver Responsibilities Policy.

- Fines for traffic or parking violations incurred by an authorized traveler using a personal, an Authority, or rental vehicle will not be reimbursed by the Authority.
- Reasonable tolls will be allowed when the most direct travel route requires them.

D. Taxi, Limousine and Other Transportation Fares

When an individual travels by common carrier, reasonable fares will be allowed for necessary ground transportation. Bus or limousine service to and from airports should be used when available and practical. The Authority will reimburse mileage for travel to and from the local airport and parking fees, provided such costs do not exceed normal taxi/limousine fares to and from the airport. Receipts are required and shall be submitted with the Authority's travel reimbursement form.

For travel between lodging quarters and meetings, conferences, or meals, reasonable taxi fares will be allowed. Remember, original receipts are required for claims of \$5 or more. Transportation to and from shopping, entertainment, or other personal trips is the choice of the traveler and not reimbursable by the Authority.

Reimbursement claims for taxis, limousines, or other ground transportation must be listed separately on the expense form, claiming the destination and amount of each fare.

Lodging

The amount allocated for lodging shall not ordinarily exceed the maximum per diem rates authorized by the federal or state rate schedule, whichever is chosen by the Authority.

- A. If the Authority reimburses using the federal rates, the Government Services Administration provides guidelines for determining the maximum that can be reimbursed for lodging. These amounts are available on line at <http://www.gsa.gov>. The rates are the maximum reimbursable rates for hotel rooms plus appropriate taxes.

- B. Original lodging receipts must be submitted with the reimbursement form. Photocopies are not acceptable.
- C. If a traveler exceeds the maximum lodging per diem, excess costs are the responsibility of the traveler.
- D. If the best rate is secured, and it still exceeds the maximum lodging per diem, the CFO may authorize a higher reimbursement amount.

Even if it costs more, travelers may be allowed to stay at the officially designated hotel of the meeting; however, more moderately priced accommodations must be requested whenever possible. It will be the traveler's responsibility to provide documentation of the "officially designated meeting site" room rates, if these rates are higher than the normal reimbursable amounts.

- E. If two or more Authority employees travel together and share a room, the lodging reimbursement rate will be the maximum of two single rooms. If an employee shares a room with a non-employee, the actual cost will be allowed up to the maximum reimbursable amount. The receipt for the entire amount must be submitted with the expense form.

Meals and Incidentals

Receipts are not required for meals and incidentals. The authorized traveler may be reimbursed the daily amount based on the rate schedule and the authorized length of stay. The per diem meal amounts are expected to cover meals, tips, porters and incidental expenses. The authorized traveler will not be reimbursed for an amount in excess of the per diem.

Whether meals may be claimed depends on when the traveler leaves and returns to the official station. The traveler's official station is home or work, whichever produces the least cost to the Authority. Under the state travel regulations, reimbursement for meals is not permitted for one-day travel status with no overnight stay.

Regardless of which reimbursement rate the Authority uses, the amounts include tip, gratuity, etc. The hour and date of departure and return must be shown on the expense reimbursement form.

The excess cost of an official banquet may be allowed provided proper documentation or explanation is submitted with the expense reimbursement form. If a meal is included as part of a conference or seminar registration, or is included with the air fare, then the allowance for that meal should be subtracted from the total allowance for the day. For example, if a dinner is included as part of the conference fee, the maximum meal allowance for the day should be reduced by the allowed dinner amount.

PLEASE NOTE:

The Authority has selected to reimburse travelers at the federal travel regulation rates. The Authority's rates will automatically change when the federal rates are adjusted.

Miscellaneous Expenses

- A. Registration fees for approved conferences, conventions, seminars, meetings and other educational programs will be allowed and will generally include the cost of official banquets, meals, lodging and registration fees. Registration fees should be specified on the original travel request form and can include a request for pre-registration fee payment.
- B. A \$5 allowance will be reimbursable for hotel/motel check-in and baggage handling expenses.
- C. Laundry, valet service, tips and gratuities are considered personal expenses and are not reimbursable.
- D. For travel outside the United States, all expenses claimed must be converted to U.S. dollars. The conversion rate and computation should be shown on each receipt.

Entertainment

The Authority may pay for certain entertainment expenses provided that the:

- A. Entertainment is appropriate in the conduct of Authority business;
- B. Entertainment is approved by the CFO;
- C. Group or individuals involved are identified; and
- D. Documentation is attached to the expense form to support the entertainment expense claims.

To request reimbursement for authorized entertainment expenses, be sure to include with the expense reimbursement form:

- A. Required receipts. All requests must be supported by original receipts from the vendor (restaurant, caterer, ticket office, etc.) Reasonable tips and gratuities included on the receipt by the vendor are reimbursable.
- B. A disclosure and explanation statement, explaining the purpose of the entertainment and identifying the group and the number of people entertained (or individual names listed if not a recognized group).

TRAVEL RECONCILIATION

- A. Within 10 days of return from travel, or by the end of the month, the traveler is expected to complete and file the expense reimbursement form. The reimbursement form must be certified by the traveler that the amount due is true and accurate. Original lodging, travel, taxi, parking and other receipts must be attached. If the Authority provided a travel advance or made advanced payment, the traveler should include that information on the expense form. In the case of advances, the form should have a reconciliation summary, reflecting total claimed expenses with advances and Authority prepayments indicated. The balance due the traveler or the refund due the Authority should be clearly shown below the total claim on the form or in a cover memo attached to the front of the form.
- B. If the traveler received a travel advance and spent less than the advance, the traveler should attach a check made payable to the Authority for that difference.
- C. The CFO will address special circumstances and issues not covered in this policy on a case-by-case basis.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Employees found in violation of the Authority's travel policy will be subject to disciplinary action. Any fraudulent actions will be investigated and may result in criminal prosecution.

5-21. Automobile Policy

STATEMENT OF POLICY

All vehicles insured by the Harris County Housing Authority will be used only for Authority business or for transportation that fulfills the Authority mission. Only employees or authorized individuals that meet the Driver Requirements listed below may operate a vehicle insured by the Harris County Housing Authority.

- A. Purpose
- B. Definition
- C. Driver Requirements
- D. Driver Authorization
- E. Supervisor's Responsibility
- F. Use of Authority Insured Vehicles
- G. Vehicle Insurance
- H. Automobile Liability Insurance Card
- I. Use of Personal Vehicles

- J. Safety Recommendations
- K. Accident Procedures
- L. Enforcement and Discipline
- M. Amendments
- N. Effective Date

A. PURPOSE

This vehicle use policy has been established to provide information and guidelines to employees regarding responsibilities for the safe operation of Authority insured vehicles. Employees who are authorized to drive on behalf of Harris County Housing Authority will receive a copy of this policy to review and use as a reference.

B. DEFINITION

An Authority insured vehicle is defined as owned, rented or leased in the name of Harris County Housing Authority.

C. DRIVER REQUIREMENTS

1. Possess a valid Texas driver's license.
2. Must be at least 21 years of age and have a driving record deemed acceptable by the Authority's insurance carrier.
3. Submit a copy of the driver's license to the Finance Department.
4. Agree to Authority driving policies stated in Vehicle Use and Driver Responsibilities Policy.

Drivers should be conscientious and courteous drivers and understand the importance of driving safely. Drivers should conduct themselves in a professional manner as representatives of Harris County Housing Authority and honestly report any accident or damage that may occur involving a vehicle under their care and control. Drivers will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to assure they maintain a safe driving record. Any changes to the status of the driver's license must be reported immediately through the supervisor to the Finance Department.

D. DRIVER AUTHORIZATION

To obtain authorization to drive an Authority insured vehicle, an HCHA employee will:

- Obtain approval from the employee's immediate supervisor to obtain authorization, and
- Submit a copy of the employee's driver's license to the Finance Department.

E. SUPERVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY

It is essential for supervisors who are charged with supervising employee drivers to take an active role in assuring the safe operation of motor vehicles. Supervisors are in the best position to observe and correct inappropriate or unsafe behavior. Any report of unsafe operation of a vehicle received by Finance Department will be communicated directly to the supervisor or department head of the area involved. Supervisors should be aware of all trips taken and driving assignments made. Supervisors are also responsible for reporting accidents.

F. USE OF AUTHORITY INSURED VEHICLES

Short Term Rental Vehicles

Short term rental vehicles must be rented under the name of Harris County Housing Authority. The rental agency may require the driver's name to be on the rental agreement. In this case, after your name write "for Harris County Housing Authority."

Prior to leaving the rental agency, a physical inspection of the rental vehicle should be made, noting any defects on the rental agreement and confirmed by the rental agency. A final inspection should be conducted upon return of the rental vehicle. Charges made by the rental agency for pre-existing damage that was not noted by Authority's authorized driver renting the vehicle will be the responsibility of the driver.

For domestic rentals, decline to purchase the comprehensive and collision liability coverage offered by the rental agency. The Authority carries full automobile liability insurance coverage including for rented cars. It is not necessary to specifically schedule short term rentals with the insurance carrier to qualify for this coverage. Authority insurance is only available on vehicles used for approved Authority functions/business.

All incidents involving rental vehicles should be reported promptly to the rental agency and to the Authority's Finance Department.

Maintenance

Maintenance of a vehicle is the responsibility of the assigned individual or department.

G. VEHICLE INSURANCE Harris County Housing Authority maintains extensive business automobile insurance coverage for Authority insured vehicles. This coverage includes liability, physical damage and uninsured motorist. All authorized drivers are covered. Specific information regarding insurance coverage is available in the Finance Department.

H. AUTOMOBILE LIABILITY INSURANCE I.D. CARD All Authority owned vehicles should carry an automobile liability insurance card indicating proof of insurance. Please keep this card in the vehicle's glove box. Additional identification cards are available in the Finance Department for rental or leased vehicles.

I. USE OF PERSONAL VEHICLES Personal vehicles may be used at the employee's option and at their own risk and must be insured by the owner. The owner's automobile liability insurance is the primary coverage. There is no physical damage (collision and comprehensive) coverage through the Authority on a personal vehicle, even those operated for Authority business.

Authority employees who drive their own vehicles and who receive mileage reimbursement must provide proof of insurance coverage to the Finance Department. Limits of liability shall be in accordance with state and/or Authority requirements. Physical damage (collision and comprehensive) limits and deductible are at the discretion of the owner.

J. SAFETY ISSUES

Alcohol and Drug Use

No alcoholic beverages, illegal drugs, or controlled substances are to be used or consumed by the driver or any passenger at any time while operating or riding in an Authority insured vehicle.

Seat Belt Use

Use of seat belt(s) is required for any person(s) occupying the vehicle. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all persons are properly secured before the vehicle is put in motion.

Cell Phone Use

Drivers are to refrain from any use of cell phones or other personal devices when the vehicle is in motion. This prohibition covers the sending and receiving of texts and emails from both personal and Authority phones or other personal devices.

Traffic Laws

Driver must operate the vehicle in accordance with all traffic laws, ordinances and regulations. Any fines resulting from violations are the responsibility of the driver and not the Authority. This policy applies to both moving and non-moving violations.

Safe Operation

All authorized drivers are expected to operate vehicles safely and with great care. Especially when transporting passengers, the driver must make a concerted effort to provide for the safety and wellbeing of those aboard. If a driver is found to have committed any unsafe act while driving, disciplinary action may be initiated. Intentional reckless or unsafe driving will not be tolerated.

Smoking

Smoking is not permitted in Authority owned, leased, or rented vehicles.

Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials should not be transported in Authority insured vehicles unless approved by the Authority.

K. ACCIDENT PROCEDURES. Each accident must be reported to the proper police jurisdiction as soon as it occurs and to the Authority's Finance Department within 24 hours. Do not hesitate to call the police. They will usually respond even if the accident involves only property damage. While the police may not make a determination of responsibility, they will at least document the obvious facts, which will be of help. If you have questions or are not sure what to do, please contact the Finance Department.

The police will ask for evidence of liability insurance. This information can be found on the auto liability insurance identification card which should be located in the glove box of every Authority insured vehicle. However responsible you may feel for the accident, do not admit to liability. The Authority's insurance carrier and/or the other party's insurance company will likely assign a claims adjustor, coordinated through the Finance Department.

The driver will be held personally responsible for all costs of the accident if the driver is found to be operating the vehicle in a reckless manner due to the use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and/or controlled substances. The Authority has the right to require drug/alcohol testing in the event of an accident caused by an employee.

L. ENFORCEMENT AND DISCIPLINE

The chief financial officer (CFO) of the Authority or the designee of the CFO shall be responsible for the enforcement of this Vehicle Use and Driver Responsibilities Policy. Failure to adhere to the Vehicle Use and Driver Responsibilities Policy may result in disciplinary action.

M. AMENDMENTS

This policy is subject to change as deemed appropriate by the Authority. Notice of changes to this policy will be posted on the Authority's website.

N. EFFECTIVE DATE

The official version of this policy is located on the Harris County Housing Authority website www.hchatexas.org/policies and became effective August 15, 2012.

5-22. References

Harris County Housing Authority will respond to reference requests through the Human Resources Department. The Authority will provide general information concerning the employee such as date of hire, date of termination, and positions held. Requests for reference information must be in writing, and responses will be in writing. Please refer all requests for references to the Human Resources Department.

Only the Human Resources Department may provide references.

5-23. If You Must Leave Us

Should you decide to leave the Authority, we ask that you provide your Supervisor with at least two (2) weeks advance notice of your departure. Your thoughtfulness will be appreciated.

All the Authority's property including, but not limited to, keys, security cards, parking passes, laptop computers, fax machines, uniforms, etc. must be returned at separation. Employees also must return all of the Authority's Confidential Information upon separation. To the extent permitted by law, employees will be required to repay the Authority (through payroll deduction, if lawful) for any lost or damaged the Authority's property.

As noted previously, all employees are employed at-will and nothing in this handbook changes that status.

General Handbook Acknowledgment

This Employee Handbook is an important document intended to help you become acquainted with Harris County Housing Authority. This document is intended to provide guidelines and general descriptions only; it is not the final word in all cases. Individual circumstances may call for individual attention.

Because the Authority's operations may change, the contents of this Handbook may be changed at any time, with or without notice, in an individual case or generally, at the sole discretion of management.

Please read the following statements and sign below to indicate your receipt and acknowledgment of this Employee Handbook.

I have received and read a copy of Harris County Housing Authority's Employee Handbook. I understand that the policies, rules and benefits described in it are subject to change at the sole discretion of the Authority at any time.

I further understand that my employment is terminable at will, either by myself or the Authority, with or without cause or notice, regardless of the length of my employment or the granting of benefits of any kind.

I understand that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand the above statements and that I have received a copy of the Authority's Employee Handbook.

Employee's Printed Name: _____ Position: _____

Employee's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The signed original copy of this acknowledgment should be given to management - it will be filed in your personnel file.

Receipt of Sexual Harassment Policy

It is Harris County Housing Authority's policy to prohibit harassment of any employee by any Supervisor, employee, customer or vendor on the basis of sex or gender. The purpose of this policy is not to regulate personal morality within the Authority. It is to ensure that at the Authority all employees are free from sexual harassment. While it is not easy to define precisely what types of conduct could constitute sexual harassment, examples of prohibited behavior include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, obscene gestures, displaying sexually graphic magazines, calendars or posters, sending sexually explicit e-mails, text messages and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, such as uninvited touching of a sexual nature or sexually related comments. Depending upon the circumstances, improper conduct also can include sexual joking, vulgar or offensive conversation or jokes, commenting about an employee's physical appearance, conversation about your own or someone else's sex life, or teasing or other conduct directed toward a person because of his or her gender which is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create an unprofessional and hostile working environment.

If you feel that you have been subjected to conduct which violates this policy, you should immediately report the matter to your Supervisor. If you are unable for any reason to contact this person, or if you have not received a satisfactory response within five (5) business days after reporting any incident of what you perceive to be harassment, please contact the HR Director. If the person toward whom the complaint is directed is one of the individuals indicated above, you should contact any higher-level manager in your reporting hierarchy. Every report of perceived harassment will be fully investigated and corrective action will be taken where appropriate. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All complaints will be kept confidential to the extent possible, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, the Authority will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who report unwelcome conduct to management or who cooperate in the investigations of such reports in accordance with this policy. Employees who make complaints in bad faith may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All employees must cooperate with all investigations.

I have read and I understand Harris County Housing Authority's Sexual Harassment Policy.

Employee's Printed Name: _____ Position: _____

Employee's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The signed original copy of this receipt should be given to management - it will be filed in your personnel file.

Receipt of Non-Harassment Policy

It is Harris County Housing Authority's policy to prohibit intentional and unintentional harassment of any individual by another person on the basis of any protected classification including, but not limited to, race, color, national origin, disability, religion, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation or age. The purpose of this policy is not to regulate our employees' personal morality, but to ensure that in the workplace, no one harasses another individual.

If you feel that you have been subjected to conduct which violates this policy, you should immediately report the matter to your Supervisor. If you are unable for any reason to contact this person, or if you have not received a satisfactory response within five (5) business days after reporting any incident of what you perceive to be harassment, please contact the HR Director. If the person toward whom the complaint is directed is one of the individuals indicated above, you should contact any higher-level manager in your reporting hierarchy. Every report of perceived harassment will be fully investigated and corrective action will be taken where appropriate. Violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All complaints will be kept confidential to the extent possible, but confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. In addition, the Authority will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who report unwelcome conduct to management or who cooperate in the investigations of such reports in accordance with this policy. Employees who make complaints in bad faith may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. All employees must cooperate with all investigations.

Employee's Printed Name: _____ Position: _____

Employee's Signature: _____ Date: _____

The signed original copy of this receipt should be given to management - it will be filed in your personnel file.