

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

### SOCIAL MEDIA

#### Management Directive #16-02

Date Issued: 09/02/21

- New Policy Release
- Revision of Existing Procedural Guide dated 12/5/16

**Revision Made:**

Cancels: None

### PURPOSE

The intent of this policy is to inform all Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) employees, including temporary and contracted personnel, of their obligation to maintain confidentiality, and respect the privacy of DCFS clients and other employees. This policy also provides guidance to all employees regarding unprofessional and improper posts on social media and the consequences for not adhering to policy.

For the purpose of this policy, the term “social media” includes any web-based forum and mobile technologies that allows users to interact with each other in some way by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. This open communication on the internet is including, but not limited to Social Networking Websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook; Micro-blogging Sites such as Twitter; Blogs, including departmental and personal blogs; Podcasts, Online Encyclopedias, Wikipedia; as well as video and photo sharing websites such as YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Snapchat, TikTok etc.

For the entirety of this policy, the term posting includes, but is not limited to posting on social media accounts, forwarding/sharing articles, and commenting on posts.

### GUIDELINES

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Manual Policy No. 6.101, Use of County Information Technology (IT) Resources, dated 07/13/2004, states in part: “Unless expressly authorized by department management or policy; sending, disclosing, or otherwise disseminating confidential data, protected information, or other confidential information of the County is strictly prohibited. This includes information that is protected under HIPAA or any other privacy legislation.”

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Manual Policy No. 6.105, states in part: "Except as expressly authorized in this Board of Supervisors Policy No. 6.105, no County IT user shall access or use County IT resources to create, exchange, publish, or distribute in public forums (e.g., blog postings, bulletin boards, chat rooms, Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, and other social networking services) any information (e.g., personal information, confidential information, political lobbying, religious promotion, and opinions) not specifically approved by designated County Department management."

## **POLICY**

DCFS recognizes that content of social media may potentially affect the reputation of the Department, its clients and employees. DCFS requires employee use and participation in social media to be consistent with the Department's commitment to enrich lives through effective and caring services.

DCFS requires compliance with all applicable Federal and State laws, County and DCFS policies including but not limited to those addressing harassment, confidentiality, privacy, computer usage and information while under County employment. Social media content created or posted by any DCFS employee, must not be threatening, abusive, defamatory, obscene, harassing or hostile. In addition, any social media content created or posted by any DCFS employee must be free from inappropriate conduct toward others, discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), and retaliation.

On-duty or off-duty, employees must not engage in any online conduct that negatively impacts the County and DCFS, or that negatively impacts the image of clients or employees.

Employees are not authorized to represent the Department or act as if they are a spokesperson of the Department, unless explicitly given permission. Employees must not post on personal social media content that implies it is endorsed by the Department.

Employees must not use the Department's name, symbols and logos to promote a product, service, cause, political party, or candidate, on a personal social media account.

DCFS is aware that employees may share posted news/media articles containing child-welfare related content on social media. However, employees should use discretion when sharing information or opinions that may conflict with the mission of DCFS. The following disclaimer should accompany such content to ensure that readers are aware that the employee is not speaking on behalf of DCFS:

"The postings on this website are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)."

If employees regularly share posted news/media articles containing child-welfare related content on social media, they may consider adding this disclaimer to the home page of their social media account.

Employees must not post any confidential information provided by clients. This includes photos of clients, client families, or documents submitted, even if blurred out, redacted or covered up. All material, including information submitted by clients or regarding clients may not be posted or discussed without prior permission from the client and the Office head.

Employees must not disclose any regulated, restricted, or otherwise non-public information on social media about the Department or its clients and employees.

Employees must not disclose:

- Any case specific information – including which DCFS office or DCFS staff a case/referral is assigned to
- Outcomes of an investigation
- Components of a case (court/voluntary)
- Information regarding which Court Department a DCFS case is assigned to
- Information specific to collaboration with other Departments such as Police, DMH, Medical, etc.
- Outcomes of tools utilized to support investigations/services, such as Warrants, Structured Decision Making tools, etc.
- Placement details
- Details of conversations with clients, supervisors, coworkers, County Counsel, or other case-related personnel
- Gifts or donations that are given to specific clients
- Information/photographs from DCFS Special Events

Even if employees do not share specific information regarding a client (e.g., full or partial name or home address), the identity of a client should not be able to be inferred by online readers. Employees should not share any details that may be pieced together to identify a client (e.g., school they attend or a sports team that they are part of.)

Employees must not post or disclose any sensitive, private, or confidential information about the County, DCFS, clients or employees on personal or DCFS social media accounts.

When sharing photography/videos of DCFS offices/buildings (including courthouses and other buildings/locations where official County business is being conducted), employees must ascertain that case files or other sensitive and confidential information is not exposed.

Photography/Videos on social media of clients with a “blurred face” or emoji covering face is not permitted (clients can still be identified). All photography during County business

should be for case servicing purposes only. Personal social media accounts should not include:

- Photography/videos of clients during visitation
- Photography/videos of client neighborhoods (identifiable aspects of family)

DCFS employees are prohibited to utilize their own personal social media accounts to conduct searches (i.e., when searching for missing children/parents). Social media algorithms can make DCFS employee's personal social media accounts discoverable (i.e., suggested friends.)

DCFS employees are encouraged to set up artificial social media accounts, such as Facebook, as an investigative tool when conducting searches. However, per County policy, employees are not to use County assigned email addresses to conduct searches or open social media accounts. Additionally, accounts set up for investigative purposes are to only be used for County business and not for personal use.

Any time DCFS employees use a social media account for investigative purposes and make contact with an individual, DCFS employees must identify themselves as an employee of DCFS, provide their job title, and state the general purpose for the contact.

Employees should not "Friend" or "Follow" the social media accounts of DCFS clients, except when the participant is a relative of the employee; friend prior to employment or a person whom the employee does not know is a client.

Employees should use discretion when posting information online regarding their work schedule (overtime, working on their RDO, coming home late, etc.) This is important to ensuring employee safety as well as confidentiality of DCFS staffing practices. Any posts about an employee's schedule should not include specific dates, times, or tasks that were completed (e.g., I was out until 11 pm placing children in Palmdale.) This includes sharing County forms including DCFS 158 forms and timesheets. Employees should refrain from sharing details of other employee's work schedules on social media.

If you are unsure as to whether or not it is appropriate to share any images, information or content on social media that pertains to your employment with DCFS, please consult with office management for further instruction.

Employees may not use social media during working hours or on equipment provided by the Department unless such use is work-related and authorized by a supervisor. Employees should not use their County-issued email address to register on social networks, blogs or other websites for personal use.

Employees can be legally liable for what they post online and should use good judgment to carefully consider the appropriateness of each posting.

The Department reserves the right to monitor employee use of any social media, and to take appropriate disciplinary action with respect to inappropriate postings.

## **COMPLIANCE**

### **Use of Good Judgment**

Employees should use good judgment when posting online. Despite privacy policies, employees cannot always be certain who will view, share or archive the information that is posted. Employees are responsible for what they post online and should carefully consider the appropriateness of each posting. Employees are expected to use good judgment and exercise personal responsibility when posting to any social media website.

### **Online Misconduct**

Any online conduct, whether the employee is on-duty or off-duty, that negatively impacts the employee's job performance or conduct; the job performance or conduct of coworkers; adversely affects customers, colleagues, volunteers, or other associates of the department; or the legitimate business interests of the department may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **Retaliation is Prohibited**

The Department prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting a possible violation of this social media policy or cooperating in any investigation with respect to a potential social media violation. Any employee who retaliates against any employee for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in any investigation will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge from County service.

## **AUTHORITY**

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Policy Manual No. 6.030, County Website Advertising and Hotlink Policy, dated 07/16/1996

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Policy Manual No. 6.101, Use of County Information Technology (IT) Resources, dated 07/13/2004

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Policy Manual No. 6.104, Electronic Communications, dated 07/13/2004

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Policy Manual No. 6.105, Internet Usage Policy, dated 07/13/2004

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Policy Manual No. 6.100, Information Technology and Security Policy, dated 07/13/2004