

Employee Advocate Program Procedures

11/16

Overview

- Employee Advocates are Pinellas County employees who are trained to assist fellow employees who are dealing with grievances or disciplinary actions.
- Advocates assist fellow employees over the phone, through email and/or in person.
- Advocates help employees with dispute resolution as needed, such as interpreting rules, clarifying procedures, identifying strategies, gathering information, conducting research, drafting a response, and attending hearings.
- Advocates may offer services during work time as available or on their personal time.
- Advocates receive no additional compensation for their efforts.

Responsibilities

- The Employees' Advisory Council (EAC) shall:
 - Establish and maintain a standing committee, the Employee Advocate Advisory Committee (EAAC), as oversight for the Employee Advocate Program
 - Provide oversight for the Employee Advocate Program in an advisory capacity to the Personnel Board and the Human Resources Department
- The Employee Advocate Advisory Committee (EAAC) shall:
 - Interview and qualify candidates for the Advocate Program
 - Advise the EAC on matters of concern
 - Coordinate Advocate information and efforts with Human Resources
- Human Resources staff shall:
 - Maintain a list of Advocates and assignments
 - Provide Advocate contact information to employees who request an Advocate
 - Assist with training and promotion as needed

Advocate Time

- **Time spent as an Advocate should not exceed 3 hours a week during County work time.**
- Participation must be approved by your supervisor.
- While serving as an Employee Advocate, you will be paid for time spent away from your job during normal working hours.
- It may be necessary for Advocates to perform voluntary services outside their normal work hours.

Advocate Qualifications

Minimum requirements to become an Employee Advocate:

- Knowledge, skills, and abilities to serve as an Advocate including a high degree of tact and diplomacy plus an ability to relate professionally in diverse situations and circumstances
- Full-time County employee with Pinellas County Government with a minimum of 5 years of service (may be waived based on experience)
- Classified employee (may be a supervisor but may not be an exempt employee)
- May not be a probationary status employee
- May not have an active disciplinary action or grievance in progress
- Must have approval/authorization of your supervisor

How to Become an Advocate

- Complete the [application](#).
- Interview with the EAC's Employee Advocate Advisory Committee
- Complete training and shadow with an experienced Employee Advocate

Continuing as an Advocate

Requirements:

- Continued approval of your supervisor
- You may not have an active grievance in progress
- Ensure that your participation does not interfere with your work load
- Become familiar with County rules and procedures, in particular those regarding grievances and disciplines
- Attend training as required
- Attend two Personnel Board appeals within 18 months of completing Advocate training. These could be cases where the grievant represents themselves, has an Advocate or is represented by counsel.

Please note that an Advocate may be removed from the program at any time without cause.

Requesting an Advocate

- Employee calls Employee Relations at 464-3506. Employee Relations staff provides the employee with your name along with two others. You will get an email that your name has been provided.
- The employee will decide which Advocate, if any, they will select.
- If you are the selected by the employee to be their Advocate, please notify Employee Relations at employee.relations@pinellascounty.org.
- You may assist more than one employee at a time if your workload permits.

What Does an Advocate Do?

- You are never required to assist an employee. This is a voluntary program. You can determine on a case-by-case basis whether to accept an employee's request for help.
- If you accept a case, first meet with an employee (by phone or in person) to listen and offer advice regarding a disciplinary action or grievance.
- Some situations will require only one or two phone conversations, while others may take more time.
- You need to understand what the issue is and what remedy the employee is seeking. Use the [Employee Background Form](#) (see page 4) to gather this information.
- You can help an employee understand their options. For example, if an employee is considering filing a grievance, you could provide copies of [Grievance Rule 7](#), [Grievance Policy 11](#), and the [Grievance Form](#). You would then walk the person through the process and the deadlines involved.
- One of your most important roles is to help an employee prepare to talk with management. You can help an employee gather their thoughts and information, and practice what they would like to say. You may speak for the employee with management or provide background support.

- You are expected to maintain a professional demeanor and to show respect for all participants involved.
- If you provide advice by email, bear in mind that all Pinellas County government emails are subject to the public records law.

What if I Need Help?

- Contact Lisa Arispe, Advocate Program Chair (464-4862 or [email](#)), or Employee Relations staff (464-3506 or [email](#)).
- Employees needing help often consult Employee Relations staff directly. Although Employee Relations staff can assist employees with understanding procedures, interpreting rules, reviewing guidelines, etc., they cannot accompany an employee to a disciplinary hearing.

Employee Background Form

Date: _____

Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Department: _____

Work Location: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Email: _____

Supervisor: _____

Supervisor Phone: _____

Brief description of the issue(s) you would like to discuss:

What remedy are you seeking?

Would you be interested in attempting to resolve this issue through informal mediation?

Yes No

Have you filed a grievance in the past? If so, please provide the details including the date(s), issue(s), and outcome(s).

Have you ever received a disciplinary action? If so, please provide the details including the date(s), issue(s), and outcome(s).

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