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Employee Advocates Serve a Critical Role



Ad-vo-cate:
a person who pleads
for or on behalf
of another;
intercessor.

Some employees facing disciplinary meetings or initiating grievances want someone by their side to provide support or help present their viewpoint clearly and concisely. They can turn to the Employee Advocate Program for help.

Administered by the Employees' Advisory Council (EAC), the Employee Advocate Program helps classified employees resolve disputes. The goal of the program is to find a resolution acceptable to both parties. Advocates volunteer their time (up to a maximum of 3 hours per week during County work time) to help an employee prepare for a pre-disciplinary hearing, informal grievance or Personnel Board appeal hearing. The Advocate communicates with the employee in person, by phone, or by email to listen and offer advice. Depending on the need, an Advocate may:

- Gather information
- Identify strategies
- Clarify procedures
- Explain rules such as interpreting the Personnel Rules
- Accompany an employee to a hearing
- Speak on behalf of the employee

The most important task is to help an employee speak with management by assisting them with collecting their thoughts and information and practicing what they want to say. An Advocate helps take the emotion out of the situation and focuses on the facts. Some situations may require only one or two phone conversations, while others may take more time, which could include non-work hours which are not compensated.

The Advocate Program has the endorsement of the Appointing Authorities and the Personnel Board. Many directors have expressed appreciation to Advocates for helping employees clearly present information to resolve a dispute.

Human Resources encourages all supervisors to support the County's Advocate Program which can serve an important role in dispute resolution and can help employees develop valuable skills. Allowing your staff to serve as an Advocate is a way to help them continue to learn, contribute and grow for the betterment of Pinellas County. Some of the potential benefits are:

- Advocates can sharpen their expertise in communication, time management and public speaking.
- Advocates can gain tools to help resolve issues that could be applied to situations in their own office.
- Advocates get broad knowledge of operations in other departments, which may be beneficial to the Advocate's own work unit.

Minimum requirements for Advocates include:

- Full-time employee
- Classified service (may be a supervisor, but may not be an exempt employee)
- Five or more years of service (may be waived based on experience)
- No active disciplinary action or grievance in progress
- High degree of tact and diplomacy
- Ability to relate professionally in diverse situations
- Supervisor approval

To learn more about Advocate requirements and responsibilities, please visit the website at www.pinellascounty.org/hr/advocate.