

May 2012

Employee Advocate Program

Sometimes employees facing a pre-disciplinary hearing or a hearing before an informal grievance panel feel they need someone by their side to provide support or help present information clearly and concisely.

In such cases, employees can turn to the Employee Advocate Program for help. The Employee Advocate Program is administered by the Employees' Advisory Council, and is designed to provide assistance for classified employees to help them in the preparation for a pre-disciplinary hearing, informal grievance panel, or a hearing before the Personnel Board.

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

The Advocate program has the endorsement of the Appointing Authorities and the Personnel Board. Many directors have expressed appreciation for the efforts of Advocates for helping employees clearly present information on issues, whether it is during a meeting regarding a grievance or a disciplinary hearing.

I've seen numerous appeals where the Employee Advocates presented a strong case on the employee's behalf. I and other board members were impressed with their presentations and their ability to present their position in a professional manner.
Dan Andriso, Chairman, Pinellas County Personnel Board

However, in spite of the recognition and support of the Personnel Board, Appointing Authorities, and upper management, Advocates and those wanting to be Advocates frequently comment that support from front line supervisors appears to be lacking. Individuals have stated that supervisors have made negative comments to them about taking the time to serve as an Advocate, or that employees are not encouraged or feel scared to volunteer to become an Advocate.

The Advocates operate under a formal set of guidelines that set the parameters as to what requirements a person must meet to be an Advocate, the functions of Advocates, and how much work time may be allotted by management to work on advocate duties. All of the information about the Employee Advocate Program can be found at: www.pinellascounty.org/hr/eac/advocate.htm. Please support the County's Advocate Program. Among the benefits supervisors will realize by encouraging their employees to be Employee Advocates are:

- Advocates receive training in dispute resolution and can gain additional tools on helping resolve issues that could be applied to situations in their own office,
- Advocates get broad knowledge of operations in other departments, knowledge that may be beneficial to the Advocate's own work unit,
- Advocates are viewed as leaders who care about positive outcomes for the County,
- Advocates become more motivated.
- And, the supervisor is viewed as a progressive thinker who encourages their staff to continue learning, contributing and growing for the betterment of Pinellas County, a view that is shared by employees and higher management alike.