

OAK PARK TOWNSHIP  
Whistleblower Protection Policy

I. Purpose

Oak Park Township (Township) provides whistleblower protections in two important areas: confidentiality and the prevention of retaliation. The confidentiality of a whistleblower will be maintained to the extent allowable by law, however, an identity may have to be disclosed to conduct a thorough investigation, to comply with the law and to provide accused individuals their legal rights of defense. A whistleblower may also waive confidentiality in writing.

The Township will not retaliate against a whistleblower. This includes, but is not limited to, protection from retaliation in the form of an adverse employment action such as termination, compensation decreases, or poor work assignments and threats of physical harm. Any whistleblowers who believe they are being retaliated against must submit a written report to the Auditing Official within 60 days of gaining knowledge of the retaliatory action. The right of a whistleblower for protection against retaliation does not include immunity for any personal wrongdoing that is alleged and investigated.

II. Definitions

- a. **Whistleblower** means an employee, as defined in Section II of this policy, of the Township who:
  1. Reports an improper governmental action as defined under 50 ILCS 105/4.1 (hereinafter Section 4.1);
  2. Cooperates with an investigation by an Auditing Official related to a report of improper governmental action; or,
  3. Testifies in a proceeding or prosecution arising out of an improper governmental action.
- b. **Auditing Official** means any elected, appointed or employed individual, by whatever name, in the Township whose duties may include: receiving, registering and investigating complaints and information concerning misconduct, inefficiency and waste within the Township; investigating the performance of officers, employees, functions and programs; and, promoting economy, efficiency, effectiveness and integrity in the administration of the programs and operations of the Township.
  1. The Auditing Official shall be the Town Clerk, who also serves as the Township's Ethics Officer.
  2. If the Township does not designate an Auditing Official, the Auditing Official defaults to the State's Attorney of Cook County.

- c. **Employee** means anyone employed by the Township, whether in a permanent or temporary position, including full-time, part-time and intermittent workers. Employee also includes members of appointed boards or commissions, whether paid or unpaid. Employee also includes persons who have been terminated because of any report or complaint submitted under Section 4.1.
- d. **Improper governmental action** means any action by an employee of the Township; an appointed member of a board, commission or committee; or, an elected official of the Township that is undertaken in violation of a federal or state law or local ordinance; is an abuse of authority; violates the public's trust or expectation of their conduct; is of substantial and specific danger to the public's health or safety; or, is a gross waste of public funds. The action need not be within the scope of the employee's, elected official's, board member's, commission member's or committee member's official duties to be subject to a claim of "improper governmental action."
  - 1. Improper governmental action does not include the Township's personnel actions, including, but not limited to employee grievances, complaints, appointments, promotions, transfers, assignments, reassignments, reinstatements, restorations, reemployment, performance evaluations, reductions in pay, dismissals, suspensions, demotions, reprimands, or violations of collective bargaining agreements, except to the extent that the action amounts to retaliation.
- e. **Retaliate, retaliation or retaliatory action** means any adverse change in an employee's employment status or the terms and conditions of employment that results from an employee's protected activity under Section 4.1. Retaliatory action includes, but is not limited to, denial of adequate staff to perform duties; frequent staff changes; frequent and undesirable office changes; refusal to assign meaningful work; unsubstantiated letters of reprimand or unsatisfactory performance evaluations; demotion; reduction in pay; denial of promotion; transfer or reassignment; suspension or dismissal; or, other disciplinary action made because of an employee's protected activity under Section 4.1.

### III. Duties of an Auditing Official

Each Auditing Official shall establish written processes and procedures consistent with the terms of this policy and best practices for investigations for managing complaints filed under Section 4.1. Each Auditing Official shall investigate and dispose of reports of improper governmental action in accordance with these processes and procedures, and all other provisions of Section 4.1.

The Auditing Official must provide each employee a written summary or a complete copy of Section 4.1 upon commencement of employment and at least once each year

of employment. At the same time, the employee shall also receive a copy of the written processes and procedures for reporting improper governmental actions from the applicable Auditing Official.

Auditing Officials may reinstate, reimburse for lost wages or expenses incurred, promote or provide some other form of restitution.

In instances where an Auditing Official determines that restitution will not suffice, the Auditing Official may make their investigation findings available for the purposes of aiding in that employee's, or the employee's attorney's, effort to make the employee whole.

Auditing Officials are responsible for reading the full context of Section 4.1 and complying with all requirements.

If no Auditing Official is designated, the State's Attorney of Cook County will be the default Auditing Official.

#### IV. Duties of an Employee

All reports of illegal and dishonest activities will be promptly submitted to the Auditing Official who is responsible for investigating and coordinating corrective action.

If an employee has knowledge of, or a concern of, improper governmental action, the employee shall make a written report of the activity to the Auditing Official. The employee must exercise sound judgment to avoid baseless allegations. An employee who intentionally files a false report of wrongdoing will be subject to discipline up to and including termination.

The whistleblower is not responsible for investigating the activity or for determining fault or corrective measures; a designated Auditing Official is charged with these responsibilities.

#### V. Defend Trade Secrets Act Compliance:

"Immunity from Liability for Confidential Disclosure of a Trade Secret to the Government or in a Court Filing:

(1) Immunity—An individual shall not be held criminally or civilly liable under any federal or state trade secret law for the disclosure of a trade secret that—(A) is made—(i) in confidence to a federal, state or local government official, either directly or indirectly, or to an attorney; and, (ii) solely for the purpose of reporting or

investigating a suspected violation of law; or, (B) is made in a complaint or other document filed in a lawsuit or other proceeding, if such filing is made under seal.

(2) Use of Trade Secret Information in Anti-Retaliation Lawsuit—An individual who files a lawsuit for retaliation by an employer for reporting a suspected violation of law may disclose the trade secret to the attorney of the individual and use the trade secret information in the court proceeding, if the individual—(A) files any document containing the trade secret under seal; and, (B) does not disclose the trade secret, except pursuant to court order." (18 U.S.C. § 1833).

## VI. Employee Acknowledgment

Employees are required to sign a written acknowledgement that they have received, read, and understand this Policy, and to submit that acknowledgement to the Auditing Official or other designated official of the Township. The form that follows on page four of this policy will satisfy this requirement upon receipt.

**OAK PARK TOWNSHIP**

**Employee Acknowledgement of Whistleblower Protection Policy**

I confirm that I have received, read and understand the “Whistleblower Protection Policy” for employees of Oak Park Township.

I understand that as an employee, it is my responsibility to abide by this Policy. If I have questions about the Policy, I understand it is my responsibility to seek clarification from the proper supervisory department, the Auditing Official or the State’s Attorney of Cook County.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DRAFT