

Changes to the Anti-Harassment Policy

Summary

- Updated the Anti-Harassment Policy per current federal guidance and legal standards governing workplace harassment.
- The Office of Human Rights Board approved the revised policy language on September 9, 2025.
- The Appointing Authorities reviewed the updated policy on July 1, 2026.
- The Unified Personnel Board reviewed the updated policy on August 6, 2026.

Background

The Office of Human Rights (OHR) is responsible for enforcing the County's civil and human rights protections through the investigation of complaints involving discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. OHR also administers the County's Wage Theft Ordinance and Recovery Program and is responsible for administering and enforcing the County's Anti-Harassment Policy.

The Anti-Harassment Policy applies to all County departments, and all employees receive standard training on the policy provided by OHR. OHR is responsible for investigating alleged violations of the policy.

The Pinellas County Anti-Harassment Policy was updated to more closely align with current federal guidance and legal standards governing workplace harassment while reinforcing the County's commitment to maintaining a workplace free from harassment and discrimination.

Updates

The revisions are outlined in the attached redline document.



EMPLOYEE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Pinellas County Unified Personnel System Anti-Harassment Policy

4. General:

The Pinellas County Unified Personnel System is comprised of employees under the Board of County Commissioners, Constitutional officers, with the exception of the Sheriff, and various other Appointing Authorities. For purposes of this policy, "Pinellas County" refers to all Appointing Authorities under the Unified Personnel System.

~~It is the policy of Pinellas County to maintain a work environment free from verbal or physical conduct that unreasonably harasses, disturbs, or interferes with an employee's work performance or that creates an intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment based on one's race, color, national origin, religion, gender (including gender identity or gender expression and sexual harassment), sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy, age, political affiliation, military status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local law.~~

It is the policy of Pinellas County to maintain a work environment free of discrimination, harassment, or abusive conduct based on race, color, religion, age, genetic information, pregnancy, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), national origin, disability, military status, marital status, political affiliation, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law. Discrimination, harassment, and abusive conduct (verbal or nonverbal abuse that is threatening, insulting, or humiliating, such as nicknames, or other derogatory comments) will not be tolerated.

To ensure a comfortable work environment, this policy prohibits discrimination, harassment, and abusive conduct that impacts the workplace, no matter where or in what medium or forum it occurs. Any discrimination, harassment, and offensive, unwelcome, or abusive conduct, including conduct of a sexual nature, by anyone (including but not limited to, employees, members of the public, or suppliers/vendors) is prohibited.

Examples of prohibited conduct include, but are not limited to:

- ~~(1) unwanted physical contact or offensive conduct of a sexual nature, including flirtations, advances, or propositions;~~
- ~~(2) verbal harassment about an individual's gender or sexual interest, sexual innuendos, and offensive jokes or descriptions of personal sexual conduct;~~
- ~~(3) demeaning, degrading, or insulting comments about a person's physical appearance or any characteristic enumerated above;~~
- ~~(4) displaying photos or other media which are demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or sexually suggestive; and~~
- ~~(5) demeaning, insulting, sexually suggestive, or otherwise offensive written, recorded, or electronically transmitted messages.~~

- Discrimination based on a protected characteristic (refusing to hire or imposing discipline on an individual, adversely affecting an individual's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, or otherwise limiting an individual's employment status or opportunities because of the individual's protected characteristic).
- Unwelcome or unwanted advances, requests, demands for favors (sexual advances, flirting, hugging, cornering, kissing, touching/brushing up against, requests for dates or sexual favors regardless of whether the employee's job is or could be impacted), or any other unwelcome or intimidating conduct.
- Offensive or inappropriate comments containing slurs, negative stereotypes, sexual comments, or any other offensive comments oriented toward a protected category, or other characteristic (jokes, whistling, inappropriate comments about body or appearance, or comments related to protected characteristic), in any medium).
- Offensive conduct or visual displays (leering, gestures, emojis (including GIFs), pranks, or displaying objects, pictures, cartoons, or any items that are obscene, sexually suggestive, or oriented toward a protected category or other characteristic).

Respectful, non-coercive interactions are not considered abusive or harassing if welcomed by both parties. Employees who violate this policy are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.

Further, the following can be as serious (or even more serious) than the conduct itself and is also prohibited:

- Ignoring/not reporting discrimination, abusive conduct, or harassment, or treating it as a joke;
- Being dishonest, interfering with, or refusing to cooperate during an investigation of an alleged violation of this policy; and/or
- Retaliation, harassment, discrimination, or intimidation against anyone who resists, opposes, or complains of conduct prohibited by this policy, or against anyone who participates in an investigation of such conduct.

Abusive conduct or harassment can be virtually impossible to detect unless the offensive conduct is reported to the correct employee.

2. Reporting:

- An employee who believes they are subjected to conduct prohibited by this policy must report such conduct as soon as possible to the Director of the Office of Human Rights (OHR) at (727) 464-4880. OHR will notify the, the Chief Human Resources Officer at HRexecoffices@pinellas.gov, or supervisors or managers identified by their Appointing Authority to accept such reports and appropriate Board Chair or Vice Chair if necessary (though no discipline shall be imposed for failure to do so).
- If a any supervisor or, manager, or Appointing Authority becomes aware that harassment or discrimination prohibited conduct is occurring, either from personal observations or as a result of an employee coming forward, or receives a report of prohibited conduct, the supervisor or manager they must immediately report it

to OHR, or, if an employee of OHR is the subject of the complaint, Human Resources.

- Employees also remain free to report alleged illegal harassment or discrimination to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the Florida Commission on Human Relations.

Employees who bring a complaint under this policy will be treated courteously, and complaints will not be used against them or have an adverse effect on their employment. Complaints are handled as swiftly as practical and in accordance with the complaint process for Investigating Complaints of Discrimination and Harassment pursuant to the Anti-Harassment Policy.

Pinellas County Anti-Harassment Policy

3. Investigation and Discipline:

- a. Allegations shall be treated seriously, and investigated promptly by OHR.
- b. Employees not satisfied with how their complaint is resolved **also** remain free to report such activity to the appropriate agency, including but not limited to, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or Florida Commission on Human Relations.

This policy will be appropriately posted by Human Resources in an accessible format on the Pinellas County website. Employees may request a copy of this policy from Human Resources or OHR.

Pinellas County Office of Human Rights Process for Investigating Complaints of Discrimination and Harassment pursuant to the Anti-Harassment Policy for All Employees Under the Unified Personnel System

1. Investigation and Discipline

- a. Allegations will be treated seriously and investigated promptly by OHR.
- b. Upon request or receipt of a report of a complaint, and if OHR has the authority to, and the employee wishes to, OHR will conduct an internal investigation. The employee will need to submit a signed formal complaint for review. After the complaint is signed by the employee, the OHR Director will review the complaint. If the complaint, on its face, alleges a violation of this policy, then OHR will promptly begin an investigation within five days. OHR will send a copy of the complaint to the Appointing Authority (or the Department Director) who supervises the parties involved in the complaint and to the County Attorney or its designee. The Appointing Authority (or the Department Director) will be asked to submit a written response to the complaint within three calendar weeks.
- c. Once OHR commences an investigation under this policy, they will work with the Appointing Authority or Department Director to assure **that** the complainant and alleged **harasser** violate interact only to the extent that business necessity dictates if complete separation of the parties during the pendency of any investigation proves impractical. However, no adverse action will be taken against a complaining employee **in order** to accomplish this separation.
- d. In the event an Appointing Authority who reports to a Board has been accused of

harassment, OHR ~~shall~~ will consult with the Chair of said Board to determine how best to accomplish separation during the pendency of the investigation.

- e. ~~Allegations against a Commissioner, Constitutional Officer, or anyone in OHR shall be forwarded by OHR to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or Florida Commission on Human Relations for investigation.~~
- e. To ensure fairness to all parties, an investigation will be conducted in a ~~confidential~~ manner as confidential as possible, ~~and include~~ including the taking of oral and written statements from all parties involved and any witnesses. Any alleged ~~harasser~~ violation will be provided the opportunity to respond to allegations of harassment.
- f. Investigations conducted under this policy are separate and distinct from other ongoing investigations. OHR will only investigate the allegations as formalized in the signed complaint, unless amended to include additional allegations.
- g. The OHR Investigator will request documents, interview witnesses, and obtain any other information that would be pertinent to the issue of whether the employee was discriminated against or harassed in violation of the Anti-Harassment Policy.
- h. At the conclusion of the investigation, the OHR Investigator will submit a written investigative report to the OHR Director. OHR will issue a finding of Cause or No Cause for violation(s) of this policy based upon the findings submitted in the investigative report. The investigation will be closed upon issuance of the final finding. A copy of the findings will be issued to the parties. All findings are final, and determinations cannot be appealed.
- i. The OHR Director will share the investigative report with the Appointing Authority (or the Appointing Authority's governing board) and the Department Director (if applicable), who supervises the parties involved in the complaint, the Chief Human Resources Officer, the County Attorney's office, and the employee who initiated the complaint. Upon receiving the investigative report and the final determination, the Appointing Authority (or the Appointing Authority's governing board) must take prompt corrective action when necessary to remedy prohibited conduct and prevent it from occurring in the future.
- j. It is the intention of OHR to complete the investigation within 60 days of the date that the employee signs an internal charge, or within 60 days of the date that the supervisor or manager requests the investigation. However, each investigation is fact and legal specific and may exceed the intended time frame. If OHR does not complete the investigation within 60 days, OHR will notify the parties.
- k. Violations of this policy may result in discipline up to and including termination, at the sole discretion of the Appointing Authority (or the Appointing Authority's governing board). All disciplinary actions against the violator are at the discretion of the Appointing Authority.
- l. In the event the alleged violator is no longer employed by the County, OHR will discontinue the investigation and issue an official termination notice.

2. Cooperation with an Investigation and Prohibition Against Retaliation

- a. Any refusal by an employee to participate in an investigation initiated under this policy by the designated County official, after being advised that statements made and evidence gathered as a result are not admissible in a criminal proceeding, ~~shall~~ will be considered a violation of ~~this policy and Unified Personnel System Rule 6. There shall be no retaliation for participating in an investigation of alleged harassment.~~
- ~~h. Violations of this policy may result in discipline up to and including termination.~~
- b. Employees, Witnesses, and Management are informed that retaliation against a person for reporting/opposing alleged discrimination or harassment in the workplace, or for cooperating as a witness, is prohibited. Retaliatory conduct is a violation of the Anti-Harassment Policy.

3. EEOC and FCHR

- a. Employees remain free to report such allegations of discrimination or harassment to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or the Florida Commission on Human Relations (FCHR).
- b. Allegations against a Commissioner, Appointing Authority, Constitutional Officer can report such conduct to the Director of the Office of Human Rights (OHR) at (727) 464-4880, or the Chief Human Resources Officer at HRexecoffices@pinellas.gov. The Director of the Office of Human Rights or the Chief Human Resources Officer must notify the County Attorney's Office of any such complaints. All complaints will be forwarded to the EEOC or FCHR for investigation.

For reasonable accommodation requests relating to this investigative process, please contact:

Director of the Office of Human Rights
Office of Human Rights
400 S. Fort Harrison Ave., 5th Floor
Clearwater, FL 33756
Hours: Monday – Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
Email: accommodations@pinellas.gov
PH: (727) 464-4880
FAX: (727) 464-4157
TDD: (727) 464-4062

We ask that these requests be made at least three (3) business days in advance.