

STEPHENS COUNTY EMPLOYMENT HANDBOOK



INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Welcome to employment with Stephens County, Georgia. Stephens County recognizes that its employees are its most valuable resource. The County recognizes further that all employees, management and non-management alike, can be more productive in an environment in which expectations, working conditions, and rewards are clearly communicated.

This Employment Handbook has been prepared to provide a general description of County programs, policies, and procedures in effect as of the date of publication. It is not intended to address all possible applications of, or exceptions to, the general policies and procedures described. It is advisory in nature, and will act as a guide to the County's general practices and procedures in matters of employment.

While it is the County's goal to provide employees and supervisors with beneficial programs, policies, and procedures, all County programs, policies, and procedures are dependent on economic and political considerations and may be changed from time to time by the County at its discretion and without prior notice to employees. This manual creates no contractual obligations on the part of employees, supervisors, or the County. The County retains all rights to change, modify, revise, or alter policies, benefits, or other conditions of employment at any time and for any reason, and to hire, transfer, discipline, separate, and otherwise manage its employees as it feels appropriate.

Some of the information described in this Handbook is discussed in detail in official policy documents. Employees should refer to such official policy documents for specific information, since this Handbook is intended to only summarize those benefits. Please note that the terms of the written insurance policies are controlling documents.

Employees must sign the Acknowledgement Form contained within to acknowledge receipt of this Handbook, and must read the Employment Handbook upon hire and/or upon revision/updating of the Handbook. Employees should retain a copy of the Handbook, and refer back to it as needed during employment. If any employee should have a question concerning a policy, practice, benefit, or other aspect of employment, the employee should contact his/her supervisor, the Human Resources office, or other appropriate official for clarification.

Acknowledgement of Receipt

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners Employee Handbook (“Handbook”). I understand that I am responsible for reading and abiding by all policies and procedures in this Handbook, as well as all other policies and procedures of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners.

I also understand that the purpose of this Handbook is to inform me of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners’ policies and procedures, and that it is not a contract of employment. Nothing in this Handbook provides any entitlement to me or to any Stephens County Board of Commissioners employee, nor is it intended to create contractual obligations of any kind.

I understand that the Stephens County Board of Commissioners has the right to change any provision of this Handbook at any time and that I will be bound by any such changes. I expressly agree to the provisions in the Dispute Resolution section of the Handbook, in which I have agreed to use alternative dispute resolution, in lieu of litigation, as the sole means of resolving any dispute that may arise between the Stephens County Board of Commissioners and me, subject to the Stephens County Board of Commissioners’ right to seek injunctive relief. I agree to first seek to mediate any dispute with the Stephens County Board of Commissioners with a mediator from the American Arbitration Association or similar organization trained and experienced in employment disputes. If mediation is not successful, I agree to submit the dispute to arbitration. I understand that by agreeing to arbitration I waive any right I may have to sue or seek a jury trial. The decision of the arbitrator will be final and binding.

Employee Signature

Date

Full Name (please print)

Please sign and date one copy of this acknowledgement and return the form to Human Resources. Retain a second copy for your reference.

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STEPHENS COUNTY EMPLOYMENT HANDBOOK

SECTION A – EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

A-1 Personnel Policy Actions

Adoption of Personnel Policies – The Stephens County Personnel Policies and Procedures were established by a resolution adopted by the Board of Commissioners on March 5, 1996, superseding any previous rules, policies, or other issuances relevant to personnel administration.

Purpose of Personnel Policies – The purpose of these policies and procedures includes the following:

1. To establish uniform benefits and procedures;
2. To ensure equal employment opportunity; and
3. To comply with all mandatory state and federal laws related to employment.

Establishment of Personnel Policies – The personnel policies and procedures contained in this Handbook have been voluntarily established by the Board of Commissioners and Constitutional Officers of the County. They are intended to standardize the personnel practices in the various departments where standardization is possible, and to extend certain privileges to the employees of some departments headed by Constitutional officers.

In establishing these policies and procedures, the Constitutional Officers are not relinquishing their constitutional authority as appointing authorities, nor are they or the Board of Commissioners creating a property interest for employees in any County department that leads to the expectancy of continued employment at any time, in any position, pay grade, or pay step. The policies and procedures are considered good personnel practices and are consistent with the above-stated goals.

Personnel Policy Coverage – The personnel policies contained in this Handbook apply to all employees in the departments under the authority of the Board of Commissioners and to certain employees of Constitutional Officers who voluntarily agree to participate in the Stephens County Personnel Management System.

Participating Constitutional Officers will accept by signature the policies and procedures as desirable standard practice. Federal law recognizes that neither elected officials nor members of their personal staffs should be covered by rules or regulations which imply specific employment practices. Therefore, the elected officials will determine which positions in their departments are policy-making or personal staff and will exclude those positions from the Classification Plan. By including certain positions, the elected officials are not redefining the relationship between themselves and their employees as defined

by the Constitution of the State of Georgia; they are merely voluntarily extending the personnel policies and procedures to as many employees as possible.

Personnel Policy Administration – In general, department heads are responsible for administering the policies and procedures within this Handbook within their respective departments. The County Commissioners will provide administrative support to departments under Constitutional Officers, and will directly administer policies and procedures for departments under the Board of Commissioners. The County Commissioners will become directly involved in administering policies in all departments when budget and funding are concerned, and when discipline and hearings are involved.

It is the responsibility of each employee to cooperate with the policies and practices described in this Handbook. Any employee or applicant who believes that they have not been accorded treatment conforming to these policies is urged to discuss the matter with his/her supervisor or department head, or with the County management personnel.

Qualification of Personnel Policies – Under Article IX of the Constitution of the State of Georgia, the General Assembly may, by general law, authorize the establishment by county-governing authorities of civil service systems covering county employees. The General Assembly has passed such an act, but there is no intention of establishing a civil service system with the policies contained within this Handbook. Stephens County is an “at-will” employer, and reserves the rights, powers, privileges, responsibilities, duties, and circumstances unique to and associated with an “at-will” employer.

Printing and Distribution of Policies – The personnel policies and procedures contained in the Stephens County Employment Handbook will be printed and distributed to each County employee who is covered by these policies. Each department head will be responsible for reviewing policies and procedures with each covered employee in that department. Each covered employee will be required to acknowledge by signature that they have received and reviewed a copy of the policies and procedures. That signed acknowledgment will be maintained in the employee’s personnel file.

Policy Changes – The policies, procedures, and provisions of this Handbook have been developed at the discretion of the County Commissioners and Constitutional Officers and, except for its policy of employment-at-will, may be amended or cancelled at any time, at management’s sole discretion. These provisions supersede all existing policies and practices and may not be amended or added to without the express written approval of the County Commissioners and Constitutional Officers. These policies shall reflect, and be superseded by, any changes mandated by State and Federal legislation.

Stephens County benefit plans are defined in legal documents such as insurance contracts, official plan documents, and trust agreements. If questions should arise about the nature and/or extent of plan benefits, or if there is conflicting language, the formal language of the plan documents will govern, not the informal wording of this policy handbook. Plan documents are available for inspection in the human resource office.

All County programs, policies, and procedures are dependent on economic, political, and legal considerations and may be changed from time to time by the County at its discretion and without prior notice to employees. The County retains all of its rights to change, modify, revise, or alter policies, benefits, or other conditions of employment at any time and for any reason, and to hire, transfer, discipline, separate, and otherwise manage its employees as it feels appropriate.

A-2 Chain of Command (Channel of Communication)

For all matters to be presented before the County Commissioners from any employee, the following chain of command (or channel of communication) will be followed:

1. The employee will pass the matter/communication to be considered to his/her immediate supervisor;
2. The supervisor will pass the matter/communication to the department head;
3. The department head will pass the matter/communication to the County Administrator;
4. The County Administrator will pass the matter/communication to the Commissioners for their information and appropriate action.

However, no such matter for communication may be stopped by a supervisor, department head, or the County Administrator without the knowledge and consent of the employee. If any employee feels that this chain of command is not sufficient, they may send a copy of such matter/communication directly to the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

Exceptions to the normal chain of command may include complaints of sexual harassment, unlawful discrimination, or other unlawful acts by a supervisor, department head, or County Administrator; in such situation, the employee may communicate the complaint directly to the Board of Commissioners for appropriate action.

A-3 “At-Will” Nature of Employment

All employees of Stephens County Government are “at-will” employees. Employment with Stephens County is entered into on a voluntary basis, and all employees are employed for an indefinite time period. Either the employer or the employee is free to terminate the employment relationship at any time without notice, for any reason or for no reason at all.

Policies and guidelines set forth in this Employment Handbook are not intended to create a contract, nor are they to be construed to constitute contractual obligations of any kind or a contract of employment between the County and any of its employees. In no case should any provisions of this Handbook be interpreted as an act of conveying the expectation of continued employment to an employee or any other relaxation of the employment “at-will” doctrine of Stephens County.

A-4 Equal Employment Opportunity

It is the policy of Stephens County Government in accordance with the Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide equal employment opportunities to all applicants and employees of the County. Stephens County Government does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status, disability, political affiliation, or any other characteristic protected by law. All employment decisions by the County will be based on merit, qualifications, and abilities, and will be made in a fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory manner. This policy relates to all phases of employment, including recruitment, placement, transfer, promotion, demotion, termination, compensation, benefits, County-sponsored training, layoff, recall from layoff, participation in County-sponsored employee activities, and all other aspects of personnel administration.

The County does not and will not permit its employees to engage in unlawful discriminatory practices. Any County employee found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Any applicant or employee with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace is encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of the immediate supervisor or to appropriate County management personnel. A thorough investigation of the complaint will be conducted. If any employee is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, the employee should follow the grievance procedures described in this Handbook.

A-5 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance

Stephens County Government is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunity in employment for qualified persons with disabilities. The ADA required that individuals with disabilities be given the same employment opportunities and services available to people without disabilities. Qualified individuals with disabilities are entitled to equal pay and other forms of compensation (or changes in compensation).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) describes an individual with a disability as one who has either a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a person's ability to perform "life activities" such as eating, sleeping, walking, talking, hearing, breathing, learning, working, or taking care of oneself. A qualified individual is anyone who has the skills, experience, and education required for the job and can perform the job's essential functions, with or without reasonable accommodation.

It is Stephens County Government's policy that all employment actions be conducted on a non-discriminatory basis. All employment decisions are based on the merits of the situation in accordance with defined criteria, not the disability of the individual. This

policy governs all aspects of employment, including selection, job assignment, compensation, discipline, termination, and access to benefits and training.

If a person with a disability is unable to perform an essential function of the job because of the disability, the County will then consider whether there is reasonable accommodation that would enable the person to perform the job (such as restructuring the job, changing the work schedule, or acquiring/modifying equipment). Reasonable accommodation is available to all disabled employees, in cases where their disability affects the performance of job functions, unless doing so would result in an undue hardship.

Employees with life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, and AIDS, often wish to continue their normal pursuits, including work, to the extent allowed by their condition. The County supports these endeavors as long as employees are able to meet acceptable performance standards. As in the case of other disabilities, the County will make reasonable accommodations, in accordance with all legal requirements, to allow qualified employees with life-threatening illness to perform the essential functions of their jobs.

A-6 Harassment

Stephens County is committed to maintaining a work environment that is free of discrimination and unlawful harassment, including general harassment, sexual harassment, or harassment on the basis of an individual's race, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status, disability, political affiliation, or any other characteristic protected by law. In keeping with this commitment, the County will not tolerate harassment of employees by anyone, including any manager, supervisor, employee, co-worker, vendor, client, or customer of the County. The County condemns and prohibits any form of harassment by managers, supervisors, fellow employees, and outside contractors or vendors. Harassment may take many forms, as described below.

General Harassment – General harassment may include any conduct that creates a hostile work environment for an employee, whether verbal, physical, or visual. Comments, jokes, practical jokes, pictorial representations, or gestures that are negative or derisive of the categories mentioned above may constitute harassment. Any such conduct which interferes with an employee's ability to perform his/her job or which creates a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment will not be tolerated and will subject the employee displaying such conduct to disciplinary action.

Sexual Harassment – Sexual harassment may include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, promises of benefits in exchange for sexual favors, threats of reprisal for refusal to engage in social or sexual relations, sexually suggestive and offensive language, and other verbal and physical contact of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment occurs when submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of the individual's employment, submission to or rejection of such

conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting the individual, or such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. A sexually offensive environment can be created by behavior which includes sexually oriented jokes, kidding, or teasing; display of sexual objects or of nude or partially nude photographs; unwelcome touching, brushing, or "feeling" of a fellow employee; unwelcome flirtation, requests for dates, or requests for after-hours meetings; or any other conduct which makes an employee feel uncomfortable while at work.

Complaint Procedures – Any employee, who believes that they have been the victim of general harassment or sexual harassment, or who has knowledge of that kind of behavior, is urged to report such conduct immediately to his/her supervisor, any other member of management, or directly to the County Administrator. The County will initiate a prompt, thorough, and confidential investigation. All complaints or reports of harassment will be treated confidentially, and no employee will be penalized in any way for making a complaint of harassment or for reporting knowledge of harassment (unless investigation shows a report or complaint to be false and made with malicious intent). If an investigation confirms that harassment has occurred, the offender will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

A-6 (i) Reasonable Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires an employer with 15 or more employees to provide reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, unless it would cause undue hardship. A reasonable accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way a job is performed that enables a person with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities.

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits private employers, State and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities in job application procedures, hiring, firing, advancement, compensation, job training, and other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. The ADA covers employers with 15 or more employees, including State and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations

Retaliation Prohibited – Stephens County prohibits retaliation against any individual who reports discrimination or harassment or participates in an investigation of such reports. Retaliation against an individual for reporting harassment or discrimination or for participating in an investigation of a claim of harassment or discrimination is a serious violation of this policy and, like harassment or discrimination itself, will be subject to disciplinary action.

A-7 Immigration Law Compliance

Stephens County Government is committed to full compliance with federal immigration laws, and will hire only United States citizens and aliens who are authorized to work in the United States. These laws require that all individuals pass an employment verification procedure before they are permitted to work.

In compliance with the Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986, each new (and rehired) employee, as a condition of employment, must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 and present documentation establishing identity and employment eligibility. This proof of legal authority to work in the United States must be presented within no later than three (3) business days of the first day of employment. Failure to provide such identification as outlined on the Form I-9 will result in an immediate termination of employment.

Former employees who are rehired must also complete the form if they have not completed an I-9 with Stephens County within the past three years, or if their previous Form I-9 is no longer retained or valid.

A-8 Safety in the Workplace

Stephens County Government strives to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all employees. To do this, all employees have a responsibility to learn and practice safe methods of performing their jobs, and to report any potentially hazardous condition observed in the workplace.

Injury/Accident Reporting – All injuries and accidents must be reported to the immediate supervisor and/or department head, no matter how minor the injury may appear to be. This ensures prompt and appropriate medical treatment, allows for timely completion of required reports in accordance with law, and enables eligible employees to qualify for coverage as quickly as possible. If medical attention by a physician is needed, the employee must use one of the physicians specifically listed on the Worker’s Compensation Notice posted by the County on the official bulletin board (or other designated location). Failure to report an injury or to receive medical treatment will jeopardize payment of medical bills or other benefits under workers compensation insurance.

Safety Guidelines for all Employees – All employees should be trained in the correct way to perform their jobs. Any questions or suggestions about better or safer methods of performing tasks should be discussed with the supervisor or manager. Employees should always be conscious of the safety of others, as well as themselves. Employees should always observe the following guidelines:

- 1) Observe all safety practices and procedures relating to the work performed.
- 2) Only operate machinery assigned to them and for which they have received full training.
- 3) Use proper safety clothing, equipment, and personal protective gear whenever provided, assigned, or required, as designated for the work performed.
- 4) Use appropriate, safe methods to lift heavy objects, and use back braces, handcarts, or other devices to assist with lifting or moving activities.
- 5) Never endanger themselves or another individual through inappropriate actions or by taking unnecessary chances.

- 7) Be prepared for fire or other emergency situations – know what to do; what actions to take; where to go; and the location of exits, firefighting equipment, and alarm pulls within the work environment.
- 8) Notify supervisors or managers of any unsafe conditions, accidents, damaged, or malfunctioning vehicles or equipment, any employee who is performing his/her job in an unsafe manner, or any other type of hazardous situation.
- 9) Observe proper maintenance practices to keep work area, vehicles, tools, or other equipment in clean, safe, and operable condition.
- 10) In compliance with state law, no employee under the age of eighteen (18) is allowed to operate heavy motor-driven equipment.
- 11) No unauthorized personnel shall be on County property unless they are accompanied by an employee for the duration of the visit. Approved by the Board of Commissioners 12/11/2012.

A–9 Security in the Workplace

Stephens County Government cannot be responsible for any loss or damage to personal property or valuables of employees or others using the premises. However, it is the County's intent to take the necessary actions to safeguard employees while on the job, as well as to protect County property. Packages, handbags, briefcases, or other personal items brought onto or taken off of County property are subject to inspection by supervisors or other authorized personnel. All County property, including but not limited to desks, file cabinets, and vehicles, is subject to being searched and the contents held by County management at any time. Employees are encouraged to report to supervisors any suspicious individuals or happenings on or near County property.

Security Clearance – In certain employment areas, such as accounting, finance, public safety, or other areas where the public has a compelling interest in the security of property or life, applicants for employment, promotion, or transfer may be required to provide additional personal information that would not be needed in other areas of employment. Such applicants/employees may also be subject to additional background screening, which may include driver's history records, criminal history reports, credit reports, or other review. County employees may also be required to meet requirements to be bonded under a blanket policy at the County's expense, to satisfy the requirements of state and federal agencies.

SECTION B – BUSINESS ETHICS

B–1 Policy Overview

The proper operation of County Government requires that public officials and employees be independent, impartial, and responsible to the people; that government decisions and policy be made through proper channels of the government structure; that public office not be used for personal gain; and that the public have confidence in the integrity of its government.

County employees are in a unique category. Not only are they employed by the County – more importantly, they serve the citizens of Stephens County. Employees have an obligation not only to their supervisors, department heads, County Commissioners, and other elected officials – but also to the public. County employees are highly visible to the community, and must adhere to high moral and ethical standards in their work activities and personal conduct. Each employee has an obligation to conduct County business within guidelines that prevent actual or potential conflicts of interest.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general direction and clarification on issues involving acceptable standards of operation. While it is not possible to outline specific rules to govern each employee’s conduct in all aspects of the job, this section of the Handbook sets forth some common or frequent situations which may arise, and provides guidelines to assist employees in carrying out duties in a professional manner. Also, it is not the County’s intent to dictate the non-working time of County employees; however, when off-duty conduct has an impact on County operations or brings discredit on County Government, such conduct does legitimately become a concern and can result in disciplinary action against the employee concerned. Contact the County Administrator for specific information or questions about issues involving business ethics.

B-2 Conflicts of Interest

No employee may have ownership of greater than one percent (1%) in a company holding a contract with Stephens County Government or its affiliated agencies. No employee may acquire an interest in any contract at a time when they have reason to believe that such interest will be affected either by his/her own official actions or by the official actions of the County. No employee may hold investments in real property or business in the immediate vicinity of a County project that might appear to be speculative.

If any employee has a financial interest in a business or activity that they have reason to believe may be affected by his/her official actions or by the actions of the County, the employee must disclose the exact nature and value of the interest in writing to the appropriate persons. Any employee who has a financial interest as described above must disqualify himself/herself from participating in any official action directly affecting this interest.

B-3 Civic and Political Activities

Employees are encouraged to engage in outside community activities, including civic organizations and political activities. However, unless officially authorized by the County Commissioners or other elected officials, such activities should occur during non-working time.

Civic Activities – Employees should use good judgment to ensure their civic activities do not conflict with the interests of the County. When participating in civic activities, employees should not disclose information that is not available to the public, unless

disclosure of such information has been authorized. Further, employees' civic activities should not affect their ability to perform the essential functions of their jobs, and off-duty conduct of the employees should not have a negative impact on County operations or bring discredit on County Government.

Political Activities – No employee covered under these policies may engage in political activities at the work place or during business hours. No employee may make use of County time, County equipment, or other County assets to aid a political candidate, political party, or political cause; nor may any employee use his/her County position to persuade, coerce, or intimidate any person in the interest of a political candidate, party, or cause. All employees of Stephens County have a right to be free of any and all political persuasion or coercion in relationship to their employment, and should report any such job-related activity to the County Administrator.

B-4 Use of Influence

An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when an employee is in a position to influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for that employee or for a relative as a result of the County's business dealings. For the purposes of this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

No employee may use his/her position and influence in Stephens County Government to promote personal gain, or to benefit friends, relatives, or associates. Personal gain may result not only in cases where an employee or relative has a significant ownership in a firm with which the County does business, but also when an employee or relative receives any kickback, bribe, substantial gift, or special consideration as a result of any transaction or business dealings involving the County.

No "presumption of guilt" is created by the mere existence of a relationship with outside firms. However; if an employee has any influence on transactions involving purchases, contracts, or leases, it is imperative that they disclose to the County administrator (or other appropriate County representative) the existence of any actual or potential conflict of interest as soon as possible, so that safeguards can be established to protect all parties. All purchasing transactions should be conducted in accordance with the County's established purchasing policies and procedures.

B-5 Gifts, Gratuities, and Favors

No employee may request or receive a gift, gratuity, favor, or loan for himself/herself or another person if it tends to, or appears to, influence his/her opinion or judgments in the performance of official duties. No employee may accept any gift, gratuity, or loan from any organization, business concern, or individual with whom the employee has official relationships on business of Stephens County Government.

B-6 Confidential Information

During the course of employment, employees often learn confidential and restricted information regarding County operations, activities, or personnel; about business associates and their operations; about County citizens and their personal business; or other information acquired through their job. It is County policy that such information should not be discussed with any unauthorized person, either inside or outside the workplace.

Information regarding employee compensation and benefits is considered strictly confidential, and employees should not discuss such issues with other employees or individuals other than the immediate supervisor, manager, or County Administrator.

Employee medical information is also required to be treated confidentially. All employees are responsible for respecting and maintaining the confidentiality of employee medical information, and to take reasonable precautions to protect such information from inappropriate disclosure.

Further, no employee may make use of or reveal any confidential information acquired through employment with the County for private gain or for the private gain of any other persons or groups. Revealing confidential information may be considered grounds for dismissal.

B-7 Outside Employment or Business Activity

Outside employment by full-time employees of Stephens County Government is discouraged because it is likely to interfere with the employee's regular work with the County. No employee may engage in any paid employment or private business in addition to his/her employment with the County if the outside employment or private business may interfere with efficient performance of work with the County. No employee may use County equipment, materials, supplies, or property to engage in any outside business activity or employment. No employee may engage in outside business activity or employment which is performed during hours for which they are being compensated by the County, or which conflicts with or limits the County's demands on the individual with respect to the employee's availability for overtime work.

Further, outside business activity or employment is strictly prohibited whenever the outside activity conflicts with the business interest or other interests of the County, would reflect adversely on the County, or would raise the appearance, of, or potential for, a conflict of interest.

Any County employee must receive advance approval from the department head and/or the County Administrator or department head before accepting or engaging in any outside business activity or employment. If such activity should create a conflict of interest situation between the employee and the County, the employee will be expected to resign on of the positions, or termination of employment with the County may result.

B-8 Nepotism/Employment of Relatives

It is the policy of Stephens County Government to avoid hiring individuals who are relatives of (or who have personal relationships with) any County employee or official for positions that may involve or lead to conflicts of interest, complaints of favoritism, lack of objectivity, or morale/dissension problems in the workplace. For purposes of this policy:

- A “direct line of supervision” is defined as a situation in which the employee or official would be in a position to affect the terms and conditions of another’s employment, to include making decisions about work assignments, compensation, grievances, advancement, or performance evaluation.
- A “relative” is defined as a spouse, parent, son, daughter, brother/sister, grandparent, parent-in-law, step-parent, brother-/sister-in-law, step-brother/sister, stepchild, step-grandchild, or any person whose relationship to the employee is that of a dependent, or any two persons who have established a cohabitated relationship and share the same household. This policy is not limited to relatives, and applies to other relationships between employees in which actual or potential conflicts of interest in the workplace may exist.

No County employee, or elected/appointed County official, may serve in or be appointed to a position involving direct line supervision with a relative of the County employee or official. This policy applies to new employees, promotions, demotions, transfers, and reinstatements. Employment of relatives is not prohibited by the County as long as none of the related persons are employed in a supervisory role in which they might have an effect on a relative’s progress, performance, or welfare as an employee.

No employee will be penalized as a result of a departmental reorganization which places the employee in violation of this policy. However, if, by reason of marriage or cohabitation, County employees come to be in violation of this policy, one or the other must accept a job reassignment of equal or lesser pay, if available or must elect to resign their position within sixty (60) days of said marriage or cohabitation. If that decision is not made within sixty (60) days by the individuals involved, County management will initiate appropriate action. ***Exclusion*** – *This section does not apply to any situations which constitute a violation of this policy at the time of the policy’s adoption.*

B-9 Standards of Conduct

As a representative of Stephens County Government, each employee is expected to observe the highest standards of professional conduct and to act responsibly, both on duty and off duty. The County expects that each employee will respect, support, and comply with ethical standards and rules of conduct established by the County for its employees and officials.

All employees should comply with County policies, and with all rules and regulations of Federal, State, and local governments and of applicable regulatory agencies. Employees should show respect, courtesy, honesty, and integrity in all personal and professional interactions, and should act responsibly, in good faith, and with due care, without knowingly misrepresenting material facts.

Certain actions or forms of behavior are considered unacceptable in the workplace, and will not be tolerated. While it is not possible to list all of the actions considered unacceptable, the following are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination of employment:

- Theft, destruction, unauthorized use, or inappropriate removal or possession of property, including property of the County, other employees, customers, or others doing business with the County.
- Possession of dangerous or unauthorized materials (such as weapons, firearms, or explosives) in the workplace.
- Disorderly conduct or violence in the workplace, including fighting, threatening, abusing, or intimidating other individuals; using physical force against another individual except in self-defense; provoking a fight; causing a disturbance; engaging in horseplay or boisterous, disruptive activity; engaging in lewd, obscene, or otherwise inappropriate conduct.
- Use of obscene, profane, hostile, threatening, abusive, or disruptive language on County property.
- Insubordination; refusal or failure to follow instructions or perform duties as assigned; or other disrespectful conduct.
- Sexual or other unlawful harassment or discrimination.
- Reporting to work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of illegal drugs on County property; or unauthorized use of alcohol in the workplace, while on duty, or while operating County vehicles or equipment.
- Negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of property (such as County or customer property).
- Unauthorized use of County communication systems (such as computers, e-mail, Internet, telephones, voice mail, pagers, regular mail, etc.); unauthorized use of County equipment or vehicles (or of property of customers).
- Excessive absenteeism or tardiness; failure to notify employer of absence or tardiness in a timely manner; any absence without notice; or leaving a scheduled work shift without authorization.
- Dishonesty; falsification of County documents or records, including timekeeping records, personnel records, employment applications, or expense reports.
- Violation of County policies.
- Unsatisfactory performance or conduct; conduct or behavior that negatively reflects on the County.
- Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information.

- Mishandling of County funds; failure to follow County procedures governing reporting or use of funds.
- Any other action which the County reasonable believes presents a negative impact to or negative reflection on the County.

B-10 Cooperation in Internal Investigations

All County employees are expected to cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any internal investigation conducted by the County. Such cooperation may involve the use of a polygraph test. Failure to cooperate will be considered grounds for adverse disciplinary action, including dismissal.

B-11 Whistleblowing

- A. The County strives to conduct its business with the utmost integrity and in strict accordance with all applicable federal, state and local law. Accordingly, Employees are encouraged to bring to the attention of the County any improper actions of County officials and Employees. The County will not retaliate against any Employee who makes such a disclosure in good faith and in accordance with the procedures set forth in this policy. Improper actions are actions undertaken by an Employee of Stephens County in the performance of his or her duties which;
1. Are in violation of any federal, state or local law, or the Policies and Procedure of Stephens County;
 2. Constitute an abuse of authority;
 3. Create a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or (iv) grossly waste public funds. Improper actions do not include common personnel actions, such as the processing of grievances, decisions regarding hiring, promotions, firing, and other discipline, or alleged violations of employment contracts or policies or procedures set forth in the County's policy manual.
- B. Misconduct can often be corrected most expeditiously if handled internally. Accordingly, an Employee who has a good faith concern that improper action has occurred or is about to occur, must first raise that concern with the County. Specifically, the Employee must submit his or her concerns and related information ("complaint") in writing to the Department Head. In the event that the complaint concerns the Department Head, the complaint shall be submitted to the Department Head's Supervisor or the County Administrator. The identity of a reporting Employee will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible under

law, unless the reporting Employees provide written authorization for disclosure. The Employee may report under this policy through an attorney.

- C. The County shall; have ten (10) working days to address the complaint raised by the reporting Employee and provide the reporting Employee with a written response which identifies the alleged improper action at issue, describes the scope and findings of the investigation, states what, if any, action will be taken against the offending Employee(s) and explains why such action is appropriate. If the reporting Employee is not satisfied with the investigation and/or resolution of the complaint, the reporting employee may request reconsideration in writing with five (5) working days of receipt of the County's written response. Written request for reconsideration must be submitted to the County Administrator or designee and must identify the specific elements of the County's investigations or written response which the reporting Employee finds unsatisfactory. The County has three (3) working days to advise the reporting Employee in writing whether reconsideration will be granted. Any reconsideration will be limited to examination of the specific issues raised by the reporting party in his or her written request. The County will have five (5) working days from the date reconsideration is granted to complete its additional investigation and provide the Employee with a written response. If a reporting Employee is still dissatisfied with the County's investigation or response, the reporting Employee may disclose the complaint to an outside agency or organization for further review. Reporting Employees may disclose the complaint to outside agencies only after fully exhausting the reporting and reconsideration procedures set forth in this policy. All reporting Employees must strictly adhere to this policy. Employees who comply with the policy shall not be subject to disciplinary actions or retaliation.

- D. Deviation from the reporting and reconsideration policy is permitted only in those rare cases where the reporting Employee can show that persons or property will be damaged if the alleged improper conduct is not immediately addressed. Reporting Employees who, after exhausting the internal reporting and reconsideration procedures, may choose to continue to pursue their complaints and may consider external federal or state agencies. All County personnel are prohibited from taking any adverse employment action against any Employee who registers a complaint with a public body in accordance with this policy. If an Employee believes there has been retaliation for reporting improper actions in accordance with this policy, the Employee may seek redress as follows:

1. The Employee must provide written notice of the charge of retaliatory action to the County Administrator or designee within thirty (30) days of the date the alleged retaliatory action occurred.
2. The notice must describe the alleged retaliatory action and the allegedly involved and identify the relief requested.
3. The County Administrator or designee must respond to the charge in writing within thirty (30) days of its submission. The response must: identify the alleged retaliatory action and person involved; identify the requested; describe the investigation conducted; state and explain the disposition of the charge; and identify the relief, if any, that is being granted and explain why the relief is appropriate.
4. The charging party is entitled to a hearing if he or she so chooses. However, the hearing must be requested in writing within fifteen (15) days of delivery of the County's written response to the charge or, if the County fails to respond within the allotted thirty (30) day period, within fifteen (15) days of the last day upon which the County could have responded. The County Administrator will serve as the Hearing Officer and will provide final internal due process.

SECTION C – DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE

C-1 Drug-Free Workplace Policy

Employees who abuse drugs and alcohol are not only a danger to themselves, but to fellow employees and the community served. In addition, medical costs incurred by employees with drug or alcohol problems are much higher than those of other employees, and the decreased productivity of these individuals due to absenteeism and turnover can adversely affect the County's ability to perform necessary services for its citizens.

It is the policy of Stephens County that its workplace shall be drug-free, in compliance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-690, Title V, Subtitle D). All employees are notified, and sign statements acknowledging such notification that the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensing, possession, or use of controlled substance (defined in Schedules I through V of Section 202 of the Controlled Substances Act 21 U.S.C. 812, and further defined in Regulation 21 CFR 1308.15) is prohibited in the workplace. As a condition of employment, employees will:

1. Abide by the terms of this statement; and
2. Notify the County Administrator of any criminal drug statute conviction for a violation occurring in the workplace no later than five (5) days after such conviction.

Penalties for drug abuse violations occurring in the workplace will include:

1. Taking appropriate personnel action, up to and including termination; and
2. Requiring the employee to participate satisfactorily in an appropriate drug abuse assistance or rehabilitation program.

The County will provide a Drug-Free Awareness Program which is intended to inform employees about:

1. The dangers of drug abuse in the workplace;
2. The County's intent to maintain a drug-free workplace;
3. Any available drug counseling, rehabilitation, and employee assistance programs (the County is not required by law to pay for these services); and
4. The penalties that may be imposed upon employees for drug abuse violations occurring in the workplace.

Copies of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 are available from the Human Resources office.

Stephens County's policy concerning the use of illegal drugs and abuse of alcohol applies to all employees on Stephens County's payroll, and is intended to protect the health and safety of County employees and the public. All employees and managers are required to join the County in implementation of this policy.

No part of this policy, nor any of the procedures hereunder, is intended to affect the County's right to manage its workplace or to discipline its employees; nor is it a guarantee of employment, continued employment, or of any terms or conditions of employment. The County reserves the rights to interpret, change, modify, amend, or rescind this policy in whole or in part.

It is recognized that early treatment is the key to rehabilitation for substance abusers. Our policy is to assist employees with problems associated with abuse of drugs and alcohol, and to encourage rehabilitation. Employees are encouraged to voluntarily request help. No employee will have job security jeopardized by such a good faith request.

C-2 Drug-Free Workplace Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

1. Substance abuse is defined as:
 - a. Reporting to work or working with drugs present in the body or while affected by alcohol;
 - b. Chemical dependency on alcohol or other drugs where job performance or safety of employees is adversely affected; or
 - c. The use of illegal drugs.

2. The term “drugs present in the body” means that the level of a drug found in an employee’s blood, urine, or other body fluid exceeds those levels determined by the County and its testing laboratory as a cut-off level for a positive test.
3. The term “affected” is not limited to obvious impairment of physical or mental ability, such as slurred speech or difficulty in maintaining balance, but may be established by a professional opinion, a scientifically valid test, or by a layperson’s observation.
4. The term “illegal drugs” as used in this policy includes, but is not limited to, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, or similar drugs whose possession or use are prohibited under state or federal law in this country, as well as prescription drugs unless validly prescribed by the employee’s physician. So-called synthetic drugs, designer drugs, look-alike drugs, and similar substances are also considered illegal drugs for purposes of this policy, even if they are not specifically prohibited by state or federal law. This policy also applies to other substances which may be abused, whether available legally over-the-counter, such as cough syrup or drugs obtained with a valid prescription, or substances which were not intended for human consumption, such as glue.

C-3 Drug & Alcohol Testing of Applicants

Any offer of employment is contingent upon the applicant successfully completing the drug-screening test. No individual will be permitted to begin work until test results have been obtained. The County will not hire any applicant who: (1) refuses to submit to a drug test; (2) tests positive for use of illegal or unauthorized substances; and/or (3) tests positive for the presence of prescription drugs that could impair their physical, mental, emotional, or other faculties (such as barbiturates, amphetamines, opiates, etc.) unless the applicant has a current prescription and a valid medical reason for the use of such drugs.

An applicant who is rejected under this policy may be considered for future vacancies if the applicant can demonstrate that they no longer use any such substances (for example, the applicant may successfully complete a drug abuse treatment program and pass a more thorough drug test, conducted at the applicant’s expense).

C-4 Drug & Alcohol Testing of Commercial Drivers

Stephens County maintains a policy to comply with the Department of Transportation (DOT) requirements governing alcohol and drug testing of all drivers (and driver applicants) who operate a commercial vehicle in excess of 26,000 pounds. All County drivers who operate such a commercial vehicle, regardless of how often are subject to DOT alcohol and drug testing under this policy. All DOT-mandated tests are separate from and in addition to any drug tests which may be required by Stephens County in other instances.

C-5 Prohibited Activities

The following actions are prohibited for all employees:

1. The possession, use, transfer, manufacturer, or sale of alcohol, illegal drugs, or legal drugs without a valid prescription from a licensed medical or dental practitioner during working time, on County property, or while operating or riding in a County-provided vehicle, or any vehicle being used for County business, is prohibited. Obviously, this does not prevent County employees from possessing or transporting alcohol or illegal drugs as part of their job duties (such as a law enforcement officer who transports seized cocaine).
2. The possession or consumption of alcohol on County property or on County time, or while operating or riding in a County-provided vehicle, or any vehicle being used for County business, is prohibited.
3. Reporting for duty or working with drugs present in the body or while affected by alcohol will be handled through disciplinary procedures or referral for counseling or rehabilitation, as determined by management. This prohibition includes prescription drugs, unless the employee has a current legal prescription and a valid medical reason for using such prescription drug.

C-6 Notification Procedure for Authorized Use of Prescription Drugs

In order to assure that employees can safely perform their jobs, employees using prescription drugs according to a physician's instructions or using over-the-counter drugs for medicinal purposes should notify their supervisor or department head immediately upon reporting for work, in the event that such drugs could impair their physical, mental, emotional, or other faculties. Failure to do so may be considered a violation of this policy and is cause for disciplinary action.

C-7 Violations of Drug-Free Workplace Policy

Employees who violate these prohibitions are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, depending on considerations such as nature of the offense, employee's current job assignment, employee's record with the County, and possible adverse consequence to the County. Any circumstances indicating a violation of federal, state, or local laws may be reported to appropriate law enforcement officials, and the County will cooperate in any criminal prosecutions.

Special Provisions for Employees Operating County-Provided Vehicles, or Personal Vehicles on County Business – Substance abuse by employees who operate County-provided vehicles or their personal vehicles on County Business can create a very serious risk for both themselves and members of the public. The County believes employee behavior off-the-job can influence behavior on-the-job. Therefore, the following rules and disciplinary action will apply to those employees:

1. Employees who operate County-provided vehicles will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, for a conviction of driving that vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This provision applies regardless of whether the vehicle is being operated for personal or business use.

2. Employees who operate their personal vehicle on County business will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, for a conviction of driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs when the employee is operating that vehicle on County business. For purposes of this paragraph, “*operating on County business*” means that the employee would be entitled to reimbursement by the County for that specific trip.
3. Employees who operate a vehicle as an integral part of their job, such as County truck drivers, are subject to disciplinary action for a conviction for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, even if such offense occurred in the employee’s personal vehicle and not while on County business. The first such conviction subjects an employee to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The second such conviction in a twelve (12) month
4. Any employees covered under the above provisions must report to their supervisor any citation alleging that they were driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, regardless of whether they offense occurred in the employee’s personal vehicle, in a County–provided vehicle, or other vehicle, while on personal business or on County Business. Failure to report any such citation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. The report must be made within five (5) days of the citation, unless the employee is unable to make such report due to extenuating circumstances, in which case the notification must occur as soon as possible.

C–8 Searches

Normal search practices that are part of a general security program, such as locker inspections, are not affected by this policy and may be continued or implemented as provided by such program.

When there is reason to believe that a specific employee or group of employees may be in possession of substances which are prohibited under the County’s policy, the employee(s) may be required, as a condition of employment, to submit to a reasonable search of their clothing, personal lockers, desks, personal vehicles, purses, lunch boxes or other containers while on County property. Except in unusual circumstances, searches will not be conducted unless approved by the County Administrator.

C–9 Drug and Alcohol Testing of Employees – (REVISED 11/8/2016)

The County may require an employee to undergo a medical examination and/or a drug/alcohol screening test under the following circumstances:

1. Stephens County promotes and requires a drug–free work place among its employees. Employees on a regular basis shall be subject to pre–employment, reasonable suspicion, post–accident, random drug testing and return to duty and follow–up for evidence of the use of illegal drugs.

2. Random Drug Testing – Employees subject to random drug testing will include all employees and those whose jobs are classified as safety sensitive. The following positions are recognized as being safety sensitive, include but not limited to: All Law Enforcement, including Sheriff’s Deputies, Jailers, Probation Officers, Equipment Operators including drivers of motorized equipment, building & grounds maintenance, Code Enforcement Officers, Drug Court Officers, Senior Center Van Driver, E-911 Dispatchers, Volunteer Firefighters, and Bailiffs.

Accident or Incident – An employee will be tested if:

- a. The employee is involved in an accident or incident which caused or could have caused personal injury to that employee or any other person;
 - b. The injury was or could have been so serious as to result in lost time, the need for medical care by a physician, or serious property damage, and
 - c. Action or inaction by the employee contributed to the accident or injury.
3. Reasonable Suspicion or Evidence of Substance Abuse – The County may determine to test an employee on the basis of reasonable cause or suspicion that the employee may be a substance abuser or in violation of the County’s substance abuse policy.
 4. Other Instances – While it is not possible to list every factor which might lead to a decision to test, those listed below are representative of typical factors which may be considered:
 - a) Excessive absenteeism or tardiness
 - b) Unexplained significant deterioration in job performance
 - c) Significant change in personality (repeated abusive behavior, insolence, misconduct, insubordination)
 - d) Information from a credible source indicating possible substance abuse.
 - e) Unexplained absences from normal worksite
 - f) Patterns of work violations; unusual behavior which cannot be readily explained; changes in appearance or demeanor; excessive cravings for water or sweets
 - g) Reddened eyes or dilated pupils
 - h) Odor of alcohol or drugs
 - i) Slurred speech
 - j) Difficulty in motor coordination

C-10 Drug Testing Procedures

Except in unusual circumstances, before employees are requested to submit to a medical examination or drug/alcohol screening test, concurrence of the County Administer will be obtained.

1. A testing request form will be completed.

2. The employee will be met with in private by his/her department head and the County Administrator.
3. The employee will be asked to consent to any search, medical examination, and/or drug/alcohol screening test; will be asked to cooperate; and will be informed that submission to the search, examination, and/or screening test is a condition of employment. Failure to cooperate should result in immediate suspension without pay, and is grounds for termination of employment.
4. If the employee agrees to the examination and/or screening test, they will sign a release of liability form.
5. The department head, with concurrence of the County Administrator, will make the decision concerning whether the employee will remain on the job until results of the examination and/or drug screening test are received. This decision will be based on their sole judgment as to whether the employee poses any danger to fellow employees or to the public, and based on the following categories:
 - a) Employees tested for reasons associated with (a) safety-sensitive jobs such as drivers of County vehicles, (b) voluntary requests for assistance, or (c) referral by the County for counseling or rehabilitation, may remain on the job pending receipt of the results of a drug screening test.
 - b) Employees tested for reasons associated with (a) evidence of substance abuse, or (b) accident or injury, may remain on the job or may be suspended without pay pending receipt of the results of a drug screening test.
6. If an employee refuses to cooperate or to agree to the search, examination, and/or drug-screening test, the employee will be suspended without pay pending final decision regarding termination of employment.

C-11 Test Results and Subsequent Actions

The following procedures pertain to conducting of tests, handling of test results, and actions to be taken after tests.

1. Collection of Fluids - Procedures established by the County's designated testing laboratory and the County Administrator will be followed for collection of sample body fluids. In situations where drug screen tests are administered pursuant to state/federal regulations, any procedure specified therein will be followed.
2. Negative Test Results - Negative test results will be communicated confidentially to the employee by the appropriate member of management.
3. Adulterated or Unreadable Samples - Adulterated or unreadable samples that are clearly not authentic will be considered as evidence of an employee's failure to cooperate with County policy. The employee will be given an opportunity to provide an explanation. If a satisfactory explanation is not provided, the employee is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.
4. Positive Test Results - Positive test results may be confirmed by a second test of the original sample. The employee will be provided with the results of the test and given an opportunity to explain the result. If a satisfactory explanation is not provided, the employee will be disciplined and/or referred for appropriate counseling and rehabilitation, or employment will be terminated, as determined by the County. For

positive test results, the employee may be offered an additional confirmatory drug test on the original sample, at the employee's expense. Arrangements for the confirmatory test should be made with the County Administrator. A confirmatory test should be a second gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS) test performed on the original sample.

5. In the case of positive test results, if the employee agrees to referral for counseling or rehabilitation, they should be advised that this counseling represents the final chance for assistance. If the employee refuses referral for counseling or rehabilitation, they will be suspended pending final actions or termination.

Failure of an Employee to Cooperate – Employee compliance with the County's program is a condition of employment. Failure or refusal of any employee to fully cooperate and participate in the program, to sign any required document, or to submit to a drug/alcohol test will be grounds for termination of employment, unless a compelling, satisfactory reason is provided.

C-12 Counseling or Rehabilitation Procedures

Employees who continue employment while undergoing counseling or rehabilitation will be required to meet all established standards of conduct and job performance. Employees who have been referred for counseling or rehabilitation under this policy will be required to participate in and fully cooperate with their rehabilitation and with the recommendations of the program administrators. This may include the requirement for regular attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous or similar therapy sessions. Employee may be required to undergo drug/alcohol screening tests at any time during the course of the counseling or rehabilitation program, and thereafter for up to five (5) years. If the County determines that an employee has failed to cooperate with rehabilitation under the terms of the County's policy, the employee will be suspended without pay, pending further investigation and final decision on disciplinary action.

Time Off for Counseling/Rehabilitation – Work time lost will be paid according to eligibility for vacation leave.

Effect of a Positive Test After Referral – After an employee has been referred for counseling or rehabilitation under the County's substance abuse program, the employee must promise to remain drug-free and/or alcohol-free as a condition of continued employment. A subsequent positive test will result in termination of employment.

C-13 Notification of Convictions for Drug-Related Crimes and Sanctions

The Federal Drug-Free Workplace Act imposes special requirements upon the County and its employees at facilities where work is performed under one or more federal government grants. Any employee at such a facility who is convicted of any criminal drug offense committed on County property or while on County business must notify the County of the conviction within five (5) days of the conviction. Within ten (10) days of being so informed by the employee, the County will, as required by the above federal laws, notify each federal

government agency with which it holds an applicable grant and advise that the conviction has occurred. With thirty (30) days of being so informed by the employee, the County is required to take appropriate disciplinary action against the employee, up to and including termination.

SECTION D – HIRING AND CLASSIFICATION ISSUES

D-1 Job Postings

In general, notices of job openings are posted in a designated location, although the County reserves its discretionary right to not post a particular opening. Posting notices will typically include job title, department, location, job summary, essential duties, qualifications (required skills and abilities), and procedure to apply for the position. To be eligible to apply for a posted position, employees must have performed competently in their current position. Every reasonable effort will be made to attract qualified applicants for available jobs, to include posting announcements in public places as well as publishing announcements in local newspapers or other media as needed.

D-2 Application and Hiring Procedures

Applicants for positions with Stephens County will be subject to a variety of processes associated with the hiring process. These will include an accurate, thorough completion of the County's employment application form, with applicant's signature. Employment screening activities such as interviews, job skills testing, personality assessments, background investigations, character references, or other methods may be utilized to assist in determining an applicant's qualifications for the position.

Stephens County relies upon accuracy of information contained in the employment application, as well as accuracy of other data provided throughout the hiring process and employment. Any misrepresentations, falsifications, or material omissions in any of this information or data may result in the County's exclusion of the individual from further consideration for employment or, if the person has been hired, termination of employment.

All applicants for employment will be required to undergo a physical examination and drug screening test. These tests are paid for by Stephens County. Any offer of employment is contingent upon the applicant successfully completing both the physical exam and drug screening test. The County will not hire any applicant tentatively selected for employment who refuses to submit to a physical exam or drug test, or who tests positive for use of illegal or unauthorized substances (as described in Section C-3). No individual will be permitted to begin work until test results have been obtained.

Should any employee voluntarily leave employment with the County before the end of their probation period, the County reserves the right to deduct the expenses for the physical exam and drug screen test from the employee's final paycheck.

D-3 Appointments

The County recognizes two types of appointments that apply to both original appointments and promotions: Competitive appointments and noncompetitive appointments.

1. Competitive Appointments – Competitive appointments are the normal practice of the County. When a vacancy occurs, all applicants certified as eligible are considered for the position and, in general, the best qualified applicant will be employed.
2. Noncompetitive Appointments – It shall be the policy of the County to promote employees from positions in lower classes whenever possible. These noncompetitive promotions shall be consistent with fair employment practices. If no eligible applicants are available at such time as a vacancy occurs, or if a new position is created within an operating division, the County Commissioners or other elected official may make a temporary or emergency appointment of an individual to fill the position until such time as they become eligible for regular appointment or until a suitable, fully-qualified applicant becomes available. Noncompetitive appointments may also be made to fill temporary or part-time positions not covered by these policies and procedures.

D-4 Position Classification and Pay Plan

The Board of Commissioners of Stephens County has adopted an employee Position Classification and Pay Plan for all positions under the County's personnel system. The nature and content of such Plan will be at the discretion of the Board of Commissioners, and is subject to change or discontinuation at any time without prior notice to employees.

The **Position Classification** section has been developed so that positions which are substantially similar with respect to difficulty, level of responsibility, degree of supervision required and exercised and required training and experience will be allocated to the same grade. The **Pay Plan** provides a schedule of salary ranges for all positions, with the salary consistent with the functions outlined in the Pay Plan. In establishing such salary ranges, consideration is given to rates of pay for comparable services in other public and private employment, living costs, other benefits received by employees, the County's financial condition and policies, and other relevant facts. Upon adoption:

- The Pay Plan shall constitute the official compensation schedule for positions under the County's personnel system. Salary adjustments shall not be automatic, but shall be based on current cost of living, work performance, length of service, availability of funds, and other appropriate considerations.
- The County may revise the Position and Pay Plan, revise any job description, add new job descriptions, or eliminate job descriptions in order to reflect new or changed conditions of work requirements.

The Board of Commissioners may, at least once each year, request that the County Administrator and department heads review the Pay Plan and recommend necessary

changes. Consideration shall be given to such factors as rises in costs of living, the competitive wage situation in government and industry, and such other factors as may be considered relevant.

Entrance Salary – The entry salary of any employee will normally be at the minimum of the salary range for the position to which they are appointed. An employee may be hired at a salary above the minimum of the range, as authorized by the County, under the following circumstances:

- It is not possible to recruit qualified employees at the entry level;
- An employee is being considered for employment who possesses qualifications in excess of the minimum required for appointment to the position, and when those advanced qualifications will serve to make them a more valuable and productive employee, or
- Such other circumstances exist that, in the opinion of County management, warrant payment of a salary in excess of the minimum for the position.

Salary Adjustments – Salary adjustments may be made in the following situations:

- *Adoption of New Salary Scale* – When a new or different scale of salaries is made applicable to a class of positions, employees in position of that class at the effective date of the adjustment may be placed at the salary level of the new scale corresponding to the level the employee had reached under the former salary scale.
- *Reclassification of Employee* – Upon position reclassification, an employee’s salary will be adjusted to the pay grade assigned to the new position.
- *Demotion* – The salary of an employee who is demoted to a position in a lower classification will be reduced to the level of the new range which corresponds to the level attained by the employee in the previous class. The County Administrator or department head may request approval from the Board for an employee to retain the same salary after a demotion, provided the amount is not in excess of the maximum salary for positions in the new class.
- *Transfer* – The salary of an employee transferring to a new position may be placed at any level of the range applicable to the new position, provided it is not a higher level than the level at which they were paid at the time of the transfer.
- *Reappointment* – The salary of a reappointed employee may be placed at any level of the range applicable to the position to which they are reappointed, provided it is not a higher level than the level at which the employee was paid at the time or his/her termination.
- *Special Circumstances* – In special or unusual circumstances, the County Administrator or department head may request the Board to authorize adjustment of an employee’s salary up to one level higher than the employee could have earned under the provision of the “Salary Increases” section (below), subject to the availability of funds.

D-4 Position Classification and Pay Plan – Continued

Salary Increases – Salary increases may be made in the following situations:

- *Cost of Living Increases* – The County Commissioners may approve a percentage cost-of-living increase for each employee. Such increases would be effective on the first day of the County’s fiscal year and contingent on funds available to be budgeted for such increases.
- *Other Increases* – All other increases will be based upon quality and quantity of work and upon other performance measures. Due consideration will be given to length of service, will correspond with the salary range, and will be limited to employees holding regular status in the position which currently employed.
- *Limit on Increases* – No employee may have his/her salary increased to a point above the maximum of the salary range applicable to the employee’s position class.

Salary Reductions – All salary reductions shall correspond with the levels of the approved salary range, and no employee will have his/her salary reduced to a point below the minimum of the salary range applicable to the employee’s position class.

D-5 Job Descriptions

Job descriptions may be included in the County’s Position Classification and Pay Plan. Such job descriptions are descriptive and not restrictive. They are intended to indicate the general kinds of duties, responsibilities, and job requirements normally associated with the position, but are not intended to be exhaustive. The job descriptions include “minimum qualifications” (statements of the minimum background determined to be required as evidence of ability to properly perform the work”). Employees may be assigned other duties not included in the descriptions, and may also be required to work across departmental lines.

Each employee will be provided with a copy of his/her job description, and each department head and other supervisors will be provided with job descriptions for all positions under their supervision. An employee affected by a revision in a job description, and the employee’s immediate supervisor and department head, will be provided copies of the revised job description.

D-6 Employment Categories

It is Stephens County’s intent to clarify the categories and classifications of employment so employees may understand their employment status and eligibility for benefits.

FLSA Categories – Each position is designated as either **NON-EXEMPT** or **EXEMPT** from Federal and State wage and hour laws. These designations are determined based upon the position’s responsibilities and according to guidelines of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). A change in the **exempt** or **non-exempt** status of a position may only occur as a

result of changes in position responsibilities, and only upon written notification by County management. Employees in **non-exempt** positions are entitled to overtime pay under the specific provisions of Federal and State laws. Employees in **exempt** positions are excluded from specific provisions of Federal and State wage and hour laws.

Position Classifications – In addition to the above categories, each position in the County’s Position Classification and Pay Plan will be designated to one of the classes listed below:

Under the Affordable Care Act the IRS provides that a full time employee is reasonably expected at the time of hire to work an average of 30 or more hours per week on an annual basis.

- **Regular Full-Time** employees are those who:
 - a) Have completed the Probation period of employment;
 - b) Are regularly scheduled to work the County’s full-time schedule, usually a minimum of 40 hours per week; and,
 - c) Are not assigned to a Temporary status.

Regular full-time employees are eligible for the County’s benefit package, subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit program.

Under the Affordable Care Act the IRS provides that a part time employee is reasonably expected at the time of hire to work an average of less than 30 hours per week on an annual basis.

- **Regular Part-Time** employees are those who:
 - a) Have completed the Probation period of employment;
 - b) Are regularly scheduled to work less than 30 hours per week.
 - c) Are not assigned to a Temporary status.

A Regular, full time Employee who regularly works an average of thirty (30) hours or more per week will be considered full-time for purposes of eligibility for the County’s benefit package. While Regular part-time employees working less than thirty hours (30) per week receive all legally-managed benefits (such as workers’ compensation insurance and Social Security), they are ineligible for the County’s other benefit programs. Part-time employees will be expected to sign a contract agreement with the County.

- **Employees in the Probation Period** are those:
 - a) Who have not completed their Probation period of employment (usually six months in the position); and
 - b) Whose performance is being evaluated to determine whether further employment in a specific position or with the County is suitable.

Upon completion of the Probation period, and after a successful performance review and recommendation by the department head, this employee will typically attain regular status. Eligibility for benefits during the Probation period will generally depend on the full-time or part-time nature of the position, and will be subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit program.

- **Temporary** employees are those who:
 - a) Are hired for assignments of limited duration (usually no more than six months);
 - b) Are hired as interim replacements; or,
 - c) Are hired to temporarily supplement the work force or assist in completion of a specific project.

Employment beyond any initially stated period does not in any way imply a change in employment status. Temporary employees retain the temporary status unless and until notified of a change. While temporary employees receive all legally-mandated benefits (such as workers' compensation insurance and Social Security), they are ineligible for the County's other benefit programs.

D-7 Probation Period

An employee's first six (6) months of employment in a position of original appointment, promotion, or transfer to a position with different qualifications will generally be considered a "Probation" period. This probation period is for training, evaluation, and observation to obtain the most effective adjustment of the new or promoted employee and to monitor the employee's performance.

At no time during the probation period should the employee have expectation of continued employment. The County is an at-will employer. An employee may be discharged from their position at any time during the probation period with or without reason and without the right of appeal or hearing.

During the probation period, the department head will typically discuss the employee's performance at least once per month with the employee. At the end of the probation period, the department head will prepare a performance evaluation indicating satisfactory or unsatisfactory performance, and will recommend that employment be continued or terminated. The employee will be notified no later than the last day of the probation period whether their employment will be terminated or continued. Upon successful completion of the probation period, the employee will be considered capable of performing satisfactorily in that position and will be offered continued employment.

SECTION E – CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT STATUS

E-1 Transfers

A transfer is the movement of an employee from one position to another position with the same job classification, with the same salary range and a similar level of responsibility.

The County may initiate a transfer, or an employee may request a transfer. If a position is open at an equivalent pay grade, an employee may request transfer to that position. If the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for that job are not the same as for the present job, the employee will be tested and interviewed for the new position. The County may transfer an employee to any position, at any pay grade, if the employee meets the minimum qualifications of the new position and the salary is not changed.

E-2 Promotions

A promotion is the movement of an employee from one position to another position with a higher job classification, a higher salary range, and a higher level of responsibility. The County encourages the training, development, and promotion of its employees. As standard practice, every attempt will be made to fill promotional vacancies from within the County's work force, if qualified applicants are employed by the County and such action would not conflict with the County's anti-discrimination or fair employment practices. However, promotional vacancies may be filled with external applicants at the discretion of County management.

No employee may be promoted unless the employee has completed their probation period. To be considered for a promotion, an employee should submit application in response to a posted or published job vacancy notice. Promotion is contingent upon meeting the minimum qualifications of training and experience for the higher position. The employee will undergo interviewing and any testing required for the position. Department managers may also consider any applicants from outside the County's work force.

When an employee is promoted to a position in a higher pay grade, the employee's pay rate will increase in accordance with the County's Position Classification and Pay Plan; if no formal pay plan is currently in effect, the employee will be paid a salary determined appropriate by the County. The promoted employee will be required to serve a probation period in the new position.

E-3 Demotions

A demotion is the movement of an employee from one position to another position with a lower job classification, a lower salary range and a lesser degree of responsibility. A demotion may be made as a disciplinary action or on a voluntary or involuntary basis, provided the employee meets the qualifications for the position to which the employee is being demoted.

An employee serving an initial probation period may be demoted for any reason or without reason. An employee serving a promotional probation period may be demoted to their previous position for any reason or without reason.

A regular or probation period employee may request a demotion for personal or other reasons; such action will constitute a voluntary demotion.

In the event of an involuntary demotion or a disciplinary demotion of a regular employee, the employee has the right to appeal the action. The County Administrator will notify the employee in writing of the right to appeal as provided in this Handbook.

E-4 Resignation

A resignation is the voluntary separation of an employee from Stephens County through submittal of a notice that they wish to resign the position.

To resign in good standing, an employee should submit notice of resignation at least two (2) weeks in advance of the date of resignation (or 30 days in advance, for management personnel). This notice should be submitted in writing to the department head, and the department head will notify the County Commissioners of the resignation. Failure to comply with this guideline will be entered as such in the personnel records, and may negatively impact the employee's eligibility for re-employment. The County Administrator of County Commissioners may exempt an employee who has given less than required notice if, in their judgment, exceptional circumstances warrant such exemption. Also, under certain circumstances, the County Administrator or County Commissioners may choose not to accept an employee's resignation, and may instead choose to dismiss the employee.

E-5 Dismissal

A dismissal is a termination of employment for cause. An employee may be dismissed for committing any act contrary to County policies or for failure to demonstrate competent and consistent performance of duties. Although progressive discipline procedures will generally be followed, progressive discipline will not be applied for situations which justify immediate termination of employment. The County reserves the right to omit one or more progressive steps depending on the situation and the facts involved, and to exercise appropriate actions on a case-by-case basis. Employees who are dismissed, or terminated for just cause, are not eligible for rehire.

E-6 Job Abandonment

An employee who is absent from work for three (3) consecutive days without having received leave approval or without having called in to report the absence will be considered as having voluntarily abandoned/terminated their job without proper notice. Such a separation will be recorded as "not in good standing", and may affect the receipt of accrued benefits. The effective date of termination of an employee due to job abandonment will be the last day the employee worked.

E-7 Layoff or Reduction in Force

A layoff or reduction in force may be necessary when a position or group of positions must be closed due to circumstances beyond control of the employer or the employee. Typical reasons for layoff include lack of work, shortage of funds, organizational changes, material changes in duties, or other reasons not related to the employee's conduct and not reflecting dissatisfaction with the employee's service. The order in which employees are laid off will be determined by County needs

and priorities, and the department heads will file a written listing of employees to be laid off with the County Administrator prior to taking any action. The duties previously performed by a laid-off employee may be reassigned to other employees holding positions in appropriate classes.

Employees released due to a reduction in force will have no right to grieve their release. When a regular status employee is scheduled to be laid off, the employee may be offered a transfer to a job of equal or lower grade, if the job is available and the employee is qualified.

At the County's discretion, employees separated due to reduction-in-force may receive preference in rehiring if a position for which they are qualified should open within that year. Such employees will retain the right to consideration for reinstatement to their prior position or another position at the same level and for which they are qualified, if such a position becomes available, for a period of one (1) year from the separation date. Offers of re-employment of previously released employees will be based on past job performance and seniority. Refusal by a released employee to accept a position offered for reinstatement nullifies that employee's right to further consideration for employment.

E-8 Other Separations

Other actions resulting in termination of employment include the following:

Separation During Probation Period – At any time during a probation period, an employee may be separated from their position by the County, without notice, and without the right of appeal or hearing.

Retirement – An employee may voluntarily leave employment with the County when they have met the requirements governing retirement. Employees leaving due to retirement are typically considered to have separated employment in good standing.

Disability – An employee may be dismissed if they cannot perform the essential duties of the job with reasonable accommodation, and there is no available vacancy for which the employee is qualified and with duties, which the employee can perform with reasonable accommodation. Separation action will only be taken after all accrued leaves with pay have been extended, and will be always taken by the end of one year from the date the employee last reported for work.

Death – In the event of the death of an employee, separation will be considered effective as of the date of death. Compensation and benefits due as of that date will be paid to the designated beneficiary, except as otherwise required by law.

SECTION F – PERFORMANCE ISSUES AND GRIEVANCES

Unless specified, all timeframes listed in this section are intended to represent working days (not calendar days).

F-1 Performance Evaluations

Stephens County Government utilizes a performance appraisal system to evaluate performance of individual employees. The type of system utilized is at the discretion of the County, and is subject to change without prior notice.

Objective – The purpose of the employee performance evaluation is primarily to inform employees of how well they are performing their work and how they can improve work performance. The evaluation may also be used in determining merit raises or bonuses; as a basis for training, promotion, demotion, transfer, or dismissal; or other purposes described in these policies. In no case should employees view performance evaluations as a right of the employee, or as an obligation of the County; rather, they are a management tool to be used at the County’s discretion.

Wage increases are not automatic. Employees are hired at a rate that is competitive with what other employers would pay for similar skills. An employee may receive a wage increase based upon the tasks performed and the manner in which they perform these tasks. Budgetary considerations or marginal performance by an employee may result in little or no salary increase.

Period of Evaluation – It is the County’s policy to evaluate employee performance (except temporary workers) on a continuing basis, and more formally at periodic intervals. The first such evaluation may normally occur at the end of the employee’s probation period. Thereafter, at regular intervals (normally on an annual basis), the supervisor or department head will meet with each employee in a formal performance evaluation session. An evaluation may be conducted for an employee recommended for promotion or special salary increase if no evaluation has been conducted within the past three months.

The Evaluation Process – Written performance evaluation forms are usually completed with input by the immediate supervisor, department head, and County Administrator. After managerial approval, the written form is presented to the employee as part of a formal evaluation session. This session provides an opportunity for the supervisor and employee to discuss job tasks, comment on performance (both positively and negatively), identify and correct weaknesses, and recognize and encourage strengths. The session is also used to establish standards for the next review process, and discuss approaches for meeting goals. Employees are not eligible for a merit pay raise until the performance evaluation form has been completely processed. Completed forms are maintained in the employee personnel files. Employees are entitled to receive a copy of the performance evaluation upon request.

The employee is requested to sign the evaluation form. This signature verifies only that the evaluation has been discussed with the employee, and does not indicate the employee’s agreement or disagreement with the performance rating. If an employee refuses to acknowledge by signature their receipt of the evaluation form, a note by the

department head or County Administrator describing the refusal will be placed in the employee's personnel file.

If an employee disagrees with any statement in an evaluation, they may submit a written statement to the department head and/or County Administrator with ten (10) days following the evaluation. The written statement will become part of the employee's permanent file. This action does not constitute a grievance or appeal; it is merely an administrative procedure requiring no action or response by County management or any of its designees.

Confidentiality of Performance Evaluations – Evaluations are confidential, and will be made available only to the employee evaluated, the employee's supervisor, department head, the County Administrator, or other designee or the Board of Commissioners.

F-2 Disciplinary Actions

Stephens County Government seeks to resolve performance and conduct problems in the most positive and constructive manner possible. In order for the County to function effectively toward accomplishment of its objectives, it is essential that all employees conduct themselves in a manner that promotes attainment of these objectives. Accordingly, the County has established this policy to identify unacceptable behaviors, and appropriate measures to correct those behaviors, in order to provide employees with the opportunity to continue productive employment with the County. When situations arise which warrant disciplinary action, the guidelines described below will assist in ensuring fair and consistent treatment to all employees.

Progressive discipline is a process in which disciplinary action is taken in degrees of increasing severity. The County advocates progressive discipline when appropriate and applicable. Actions taken will depend on degree and circumstances of violations. Employees who fail to satisfactorily perform assigned duties or who violate established procedures will be disciplined.

The County recognizes five (5) degrees of progressive disciplinary actions, falling into two general categories:

1. **Reprimand** – A reprimand is a formal means of communicating a warning to the employee that a problem exists and must be corrected. It provides evidence that the County has observed a progressive sequence if a more severe form of discipline is applied after a subsequent violation. There are two degrees of formality: an oral and a written reprimand.
 - a. Oral – In an oral reprimand, the supervisor verbally explains to the employee that they are being reprimanded, and describes the problem and what must be done to correct the problem.
 - b. Written – In a written reprimand, the employee receives a written statement describing the problem, what must be done to correct the problem, and probably consequences of not correcting the problem.

2. Adverse Action – More serious than a reprimand, an adverse action is taken for any reason by the County or their designee that results in a suspension without pay, demotion, or dismissal.
 - a) Suspension Without Pay – An employee may be suspended without pay by the County. Suspension without pay will not typically exceed fifteen (15) days, unless the outcome is partially dependent on a court decision or law enforcement investigation (in which case the suspension is indefinite pending resolution). A regular employee suspended in accordance with the provisions of this policy will be provided with a written notice of suspension. A probation period employee may be suspended without pay or without reason.
 - b) Demotion – An employee may be demoted from one (1) pay grade to a lower pay grade for disciplinary reasons if a lower position is open and if the employee is qualified to perform the work at the lower position. A demotion includes a decrease in salary.
 - c) Dismissal – An employee may be dismissed for disciplinary reasons when all other alternatives have failed to solve the problem or, in the County’s judgment, dismissal is the only appropriate action.

Exceptions to Discipline Procedures – Occasions may occur when an employee must be immediately removed from the job. This may include a situation where it is likely the employee has committed a felony or other crime involving moral turpitude, or when the employee’s continued presence on the job might be dangerous for him or others or be unduly disruptive to operations. In such an instance, the employee should be immediately removed from the job by the department head or County Administrator, and the County Commissioners contacted for appropriate action.

Causes for Disciplinary Actions – As an “at-will” employer, Stephens County is not required to give causes of disciplinary action either in these policies nor at the time of an adverse personnel action, nor is the County required to dismiss only for any so-called “just cause”. However, County officials feel that effective communications can enhance the efficiency and morale of the organization.

The following list of possible causes for disciplinary actions is intended to represent general reasons that are universally accepted as causes in public sector employers. These reasons are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive. The County may discipline for any combination of reasons, for reasons not listed below, or for reasons not specified, at any time, as long as the employee’s constitutional protected liberty interests are not violated. These possible causes for disciplinary action include:

1. Chronic tardiness or absenteeism
2. Negligence or inefficiency in performing assigned duties
3. Inability or unfitness to perform assigned duties
4. Insubordination
5. Misconduct, or violation of County standards of conduct

6. Commission of a felony or a crime involving moral turpitude
7. Conduct reflecting discredit on the County of the department to which assigned
8. Failure to report to work without justifiable cause
9. Political activity which is prohibited by these policies
10. Violation of or refusal to comply with federal, state, or local laws or regulations
11. Violation of any other provision of these policies or any other justifiable reason for discipline

Although progressive discipline procedures will generally be followed, progressive discipline will not be applied for situations that justify immediate termination of employment. The County reserves the right to omit one or more progressive steps depending on the situation and the facts involved, and to exercise appropriate actions on a case-by-case basis.

F-3 Employee Response to Disciplinary Actions

Although not required by law to provide employees with reasons or causes for an adverse action, the County may, at its discretion, give the employee a notification of the proposed adverse action five (5) days prior to the effective date of the action. Such notification may contain the following:

1. The effective date of the proposed action.
2. The specific charges or reasons for the action.
3. A statement informing the employee that they may respond to a named official both orally and in writing with three (3) days of receiving the notice of proposed adverse action.
4. A warning that failure to respond to the named official will result in waiver of all further appeal rights.

The employee's response must be in person or in writing to the named official within three (3) working days of receiving the notice of proposed adverse action. Failure to respond to the notice within three (3) working days will result in a waiver of all appeals.

After considering the employee's response, the named official may give a written notice of their decision on action to be taken with two (2) days of the effective date of the proposed action. The notice will include a statement outlining any appeal options open to the employee. (The official may postpone the deadline for their response by a specific number of days to conduct further investigation. If the deadline for response is postponed, the effective date of the proposed action as contained in the notice of proposed action should be postponed by as many days.)

The employee response procedure is created to protect the employee from erroneous or arbitrary disciplinary action, as well as to afford the department an opportunity to re-evaluate its position on proposed disciplinary actions and to affirm or correct if necessary. The procedure does not require a full hearing prior to the disciplinary action; it requires only that the employee be given an opportunity to respond to the charges in writing.

F-4 Grievances and Appeals

The purpose of the employee grievance procedure is to provide an orderly process for hearing the grievable claims of employees. The object of the process is to reach a fair and equitable decision in a timely manner. The employee and supervisor should make an effort to resolve any grievance informally before initiating a formal grievance.

Definition – A grievance is defined as a claim initiated by an employee alleging that the County has:

1. Unfairly or unlawfully disciplined them in an adverse action which includes suspension without pay, demotion, or dismissal; or
2. Unlawfully discriminated against them in any other manner; or
3. Unlawfully deprived them of their liberty interest under the Constitution in a manner other than through an adverse action; or
4. Applied unlawful or unjust coercion or reprisal to the employee; or
5. Applied County or departmental policies to the employee in an arbitrary or capricious manner; or
6. Provided unsafe or unhealthy working conditions; or
7. Applied other unlawful or unjust practices that adversely affect the employee.

Non-Grievable Areas – The following issues are not grievable:

1. Issues which are pending or have been concluded by other administrative or judicial procedures;
2. Work assignments which do not result in a demotion or a salary reduction;
3. Budget allocations and expenditures, and organizational structure, including the persons or number of persons assigned to particular jobs or units, including a layoff which results from a reduction in force;
4. The content or rating of a performance appraisal, except when the employee can show that he or she has been adversely affected by the appraisal;
5. The selection of an individual by the County Administrator or Board of Commissioners to fill a position through appointment, promotion, or transfer, except when the employee can show that he or she has been adversely affected because of unlawful discrimination;
6. Any matter which is not within the jurisdiction or control of the Board of Commissioners;
7. Internal security practices established by the Board of Commissioners’
8. Decisions, policies, practices, resolution, or ordinances made or passed by the Board of Commissioners which are not job-related and do not contradict these policies.

Grievance Procedures – Employees must notify the County in a timely fashion of any grievance considered appropriate for handling under this policy. The grievance procedure is the exclusive remedy for employees to challenge adverse employment action. As used in this policy, the terms “timely fashion”, “reasonable time”, and “promptly” will mean within five (5) working days of the date of the action or event complained of, i.e., within five (5) business days of the adverse actions, discrimination, or other action complained of. For example, with regard to a notice of termination of employment, the grievance

must be filed within five (5) business days of the date on which the employee receives notice of the impending termination.

Employees shall not be penalized for proper use of the grievance procedure. However, it is not proper to abuse the procedure by submitting grievances in bad faith or solely for the purposes of delay or harassment, or by repeatedly submitting grievances that a reasonable person would judge to have no merit. Initiation of the grievance procedure by an employee does not limit the right of the County to proceed with any disciplinary action that is not in retaliation for the use of the grievance procedures.

Grievances are to be fully processed until the employee is satisfied, does not file a timely appeal, or exhausts the right of appeal. A decision becomes binding on all parties whenever any employee does not file a timely appeal or when a decision is made in the final step and the right of appeal no longer exists.

Employees who feel they have an appropriate grievance should proceed as follows:

1. Step One - Within five (5) business days of the action or event which causes the employee to file the grievance, the employee should bring the grievance to the attention of the division head if applicable or directly to the department head. The grievance must be presented in writing on a form which shall be available to all employees at the Commission office. If the grievance involves the division head, the grievance is submitted to the department head; if the grievance involves the department head, the aggrieved employee may present their grievance directly to the County Administrator.
2. Step Two - Within five (5) business days of the employee's receipt of notice of the decision of the division or department head (or County Administrator), the employee may appeal to the County Administrator; or initiate the grievance procedure if Step One was bypassed. The County Administrator may confer with the employee and any other members of management considered appropriate, investigate the issues, and communicate a written decision to all parties involved. The County Administrator may extend the time required to investigate and make a decision regarding the matter to a date certain not to exceed thirty (30) days from the date of appeal when deemed necessary to ensure a thorough investigation by notifying all parties in writing. If the employee making the grievance has as their direct supervisor the County Administrator, or in the event that the County Administrator's conduct or action is the subject of the grievance, the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners shall hear the grievance.
3. Step Three - Within five (5) business days of the employee's receipt of the County Administrator's decision, the employee may appeal an adverse decision from Step Two to the Appeal Board, consisting of the Board of Commissioners and two additional responsible individuals appointed. The Board of Commissioners shall appoint two (2) additional members for each appeal filed. If one or more commissioners abstain from service, the remaining commissioner(s) shall appoint one or more additional persons to complete the five (5) person panel. Such an appeal must be made in timely fashion using a written format provided for this purpose. The summary of the grievance and

decisions made in Steps One and Two will also be submitted. The Appeal Board will take the necessary steps to review and investigate the grievance and will issue a written final and binding decision within fifteen (15) working days. The Appeal Board may extend the time required to investigate and make a decision regarding the matter when deemed necessary to ensure a thorough investigation by notifying all parties in writing with fifteen (15) working days from when the appeal was submitted. The Appeal Board shall be authorized (but not required) to hold an evidentiary hearing on the grievance prior to issuing their decision.

Final decisions on grievances will not be precedent-setting or binding on future grievances unless they are officially stated as County policy. When appropriate, decisions will be retroactive to the date of the employee's original grievance.

Confidentiality – Information concerning any employee grievance is to be held in strict confidence. Employees, supervisors, and any members of management involved in grievance investigations are to discuss details only with those individuals who have a need to know or who are needed to supply necessary background information. The Appeals Board hearings shall be open to the public, unless the County and the employee mutually agree otherwise.

Compensation – Time spent by employees in grievance discussions with management during their normal working hours will be considered as time worked for pay purposes.

Employment Pending Procedure – Nothing contained herein shall in any way require the County to delay any disciplinary action, demotion, or termination pending final resolution of a grievance. The filing of a grievance or appeal shall not delay the effective date of an employee's demotion, termination, or other adverse action and the County shall have no obligation to place an employee who faces a grievance or appeal on leave (with or without pay). The County Administrator may, at his/her sole discretion, delay adverse action pending the grievance or may make such other interim provision as they deem appropriate.

SECTION G – ATTENDANCE AND PAYROLL ISSUES

G-1 Changes in Personal Information

Each employee is responsible for promptly notifying their department head of any changes in their personal data, including changes in name, address, telephone number, marital status, dependent data, emergency contacts, education accomplishments, or other information pertinent to their employment, benefits, or payroll actions.

G-2 Hours of Work, Overtime, & Compensatory Time

Hours of Work – Hours of work and shift assignments vary for each department, based on services provided by the department and staffing requirements to provide those services. Each department manager will establish employee work schedules in accordance with the needs of the County and of the employees concerned (subject to approval of the County

Commissioners). Employees are required to work the hours assigned. The actual work schedule is dependent on specific job functions, and operational needs may require deviations from the normal schedule. If an assigned schedule is changed, the change will be communicated to all affected employees.

Work Week – The minimum work week for full-time, covered employees will be forty (40) hours per week. Due to the difference in job requirements in various departments, the required work period may vary from job to job, and from department to department.

An employee's actual work week schedule will vary depending upon the position to which and employee is assigned. The normal work week is from Monday to Friday. For payroll purposes the work week begins Monday 12:00 a.m. and ends Sunday 11:59 p.m. Generally the office hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Department Heads may designate a different work schedule for positions within their Department in cooperation with the County Administrator. Every employee should make every effort to be at work on time and to complete their scheduled working hours.

Overtime – Overtime work may be necessary from time to time, depending on departmental workload. All overtime must be authorized in advance by the supervisor or department manager, and all efforts should be made by department heads to minimize overtime through efficient scheduling.

- **Non-Exempt (Hourly) Employees** – Overtime compensation is paid to non-exempt employees in accordance with Federal and State wage and hour restrictions. Overtime pay is based on actual hours worked – time off for holidays, sick leave, vacation, or other non-worked time will **not** be considered hours worked for purposes of calculating overtime payments. Actual hours of training time (approved in advance by the County Administrator) can be included in worked time for calculation of overtime.

Non-exempt employees whose work period is one week will be paid at the rate of one and one-half the normal rate for hours actually worked over forty (40) per week. Different work periods may apply to Public Safety departments, with employees paid overtime for hours worked above the designated number of hours in the work period. All overtime must be reported in the pay period in which it is worked.

- **Exempt (Salaried) Employees** – Exempt employees are not eligible for overtime, and will receive their normal salary, regardless of hours worked. It is expected however, that such employees will work a regular schedule of at least forty (40) hours per week.

Compensatory Time

1. **Exempt Employees** – Exempt employees are not eligible for compensatory time off.
2. **Non-Exempt Employees** – A non-exempt employee may be granted compensatory time off by a department head in lieu of overtime pay if:
 - (a) The employee agrees in writing, and

(b) The employee is granted compensatory time at one and one-half hour for each extra hour worked.

(c) Compensatory time accrued must be used within the next pay period following the pay period in which the compensatory time was accrued or the hours will be paid on the payroll check for the next period.

In all cases, the employee must report all worked time, and the supervisor/department head is responsible for accurately maintaining records of accrued time and use of compensatory time.

Flex Time – The Stephens County Board of Commissioners' may occasionally allow for flexible time schedule depending on the needs of the individual Department and the individual employee as it relates to meeting child care and other needs. Core hours are from 8am to 5pm and all employees should plan on working during these hours when possible. Flexible time will be avoided as much as possible, but may be required in the interest of effective and efficient operations. All flexible time schedules must be pre-approved by the County Administrator and the Department Head.

Telecommuting – The Stephens County Board of Commissioners also offers employees the opportunity to telecommute. Not all jobs are suitable for telecommuting. Telecommuting may be approved for a set schedule or specific period of time by the Department Head in coordination with the County Administrator if deemed necessary or appropriate.

G-3 Attendance & Tardiness

Attendance – The County is responsible for providing dependable services to the community. This places an obligation on all employees to be on the job and performing their duties every scheduled workday. When employees are absent, their workload falls behind schedule or other employees must assume heavier workloads. For this reason, perfect attendance is desired.

The County recognizes, however, that there are instances when absences are unavoidable. An absence is considered acceptable if it is reported promptly and if the reason for the absence is appropriate. An absence is considered unacceptable whenever proper notification of the absence is not given, or where the reason for the absence is, itself, unacceptable.

Following are procedures for proper notification of absence:

- If an employee will be unable to report to work as assigned, the employee must personally notify his/her supervisor immediately. This notice must be given as far in advance of the time assigned for reporting to work as possible.
- In circumstances where it is impossible for the employee to personally talk to the supervisor, the employee should (a) have someone else make the notification as soon

as possible, and (b) personally call and discuss the situation with the supervisor just as soon as circumstances permit.

- An employee absent due to illness should advise his/her supervisor on a daily basis of the employee's status and estimated date of return.

Tardiness – It is important to arrive to work on time, to promptly return from breaks, and to leave work on schedule. Tardiness is unacceptable and will be dealt with appropriately.

Frequent or excessive absences or tardiness for any reason cannot be tolerated, and may result in disciplinary action, which could result in termination of employment.

Attendance and Punctuality

It is important for you to report to work on time and to avoid unnecessary absences. The Stephens County Board of Commissioners recognizes that illness or other circumstances beyond your control may cause you to be absent from work from time to time. However, frequent absenteeism or tardiness may result in disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. Excessive absenteeism or frequent tardiness puts an unnecessary strain on your co-workers and can have a negative impact on the success of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners.

You are expected to report to work when scheduled. Whenever you know in advance that you are going to be absent, you should notify your immediate supervisor or the designated manager. If your absence is unexpected, you should attempt to reach your immediate supervisor as soon as possible, but in no event later than one hour before you are due at work. In the event your immediate supervisor is unavailable, you must speak with a manager. If you must leave a voicemail, you must provide a number where your supervisor may reach you if need be.

Please note that some, but not all, absences are compensated under the Stephens County Board of Commissioners' leave policies.

You are expected to be at your workstation at the beginning of each business day. If you are delayed, you must call your immediate supervisor to state the reason for the delay. As with absences, you must make every effort to speak directly with a manager. Regular delays in reporting to work will result in disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

G-4 Breaks

Breaks are designed to provide a periodic rest period for the employee during the work shift, independent of the longer meal breaks. A break schedule will be developed within each department, taking into consideration the department's operational and coverage needs. Breaks are contingent upon workload and coverage, and may not be provided in times of heavy workload or insufficient coverage at the discretion of the supervisor.

Breaks may not be “saved” or lumped together. If an employee misses a scheduled break, the break is considered lost.

The schedule of most full-time employees provides a meal break that is on the employee’s time and is not compensated by the County. Meal breaks should be taken on a staggered schedule in order to provide appropriate coverage. A meal break schedule will be developed within each department, subject to change based on the department’s workload and coverage.

G-5 Payroll Information

Paychecks – Paychecks are issued each pay period on a regularly scheduled basis. There are no advances in pay. The payroll office will deduct from employee earnings only those deductions required by law (such as withholding taxes or social security taxes) plus any employee-authorized contributions (such as premiums for insurance benefits or retirement contributions). Court-ordered deductions such as wage garnishments or child support payments will be deducted in accordance with the appropriate court order. Other voluntary deductions are prohibited.

The County takes all reasonable steps to ensure that employees are paid promptly on the scheduled payday, and that employees receive the correct amount of pay in each paycheck. In the unlikely event that an error in amount of pay should occur, the employee should promptly bring the discrepancy to the attention of his/her supervisor or manager for the error to be researched and corrected by the Human Resources/Payroll Department.

Time Cards/Time Sheets – Employees are required to maintain accurate time reporting, using equipment and/or forms provided by Stephens County in accordance with requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. When using a time clock to record hours worked, employees may not clock in ahead of the time they are expected to commence work, nor may they delay their clock-out time when work hours are completed.

Supervisors must ensure that time records are properly maintained and are accurate upon submission for payment. All wage and hour records are subject to audit by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Attendance/Time Tracking and Reporting –

Employees are required to maintain accurate time reporting records through the County ESS (Employee Self-Service Portal) to ensure that all employees are properly paid in accordance with requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

When using a time clock to record hours worked, employees may not clock in ahead of the time they are expected to commence work, nor may they delay their clock-out time when work hours are completed. It is expected that complete and accurate time (via the ESS–Employee Self-Service Portal) will be entered by 10:00 a.m. every Monday after the pay period ends. Although, some Supervisors/Department Heads may require that time

be turned in earlier. Failure to accurately report time through ESS may result in not receiving a Direct Deposit for the full amount in that pay period and the time shall be processed in a future pay period. An exception may be made if this is noticed during the payroll week and an excusable hardship has been determined. This will be on a case by case basis.

Additionally, it is the employees responsibility to carefully review each Direct Deposit to ensure that wages, overtime (if applicable), and deductions have been properly processed and paid or deducted.

Supervisors must ensure that time records are properly maintained and are accurate upon submission for payment. All wage and hour records are subject to audit by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Link to Stephens County Employee Self-Service Portal (ESS) – **Employees are provided with instructions and login information during the enrollment/onboarding process.**<https://broker.edmundsassoc.com/ESS/?municipalId=STEPGA#LOGIN> *Salary Deductions and Withholding Policy*

The Stephens County Board of Commissioners will withhold the following from your paycheck:

Taxes – Federal, state and local taxes, as required by law, as well as the required FICA (Social Security and Medicare) payments.

Insurance – Your contribution to health insurance or other insurance premiums for yourself and any eligible family members or to other contributory benefit programs.

Other Deductions – Other deductions which you authorize, including 401K and 457B Contributions, Garnishments, Credit Union Contributions, Medical, Dental, & Vision.

Direct Deposit Policy – Direct deposit is a service in which your payroll funds are sent electronically to the financial institution of your choice. The funds will be credited to your account on your scheduled payday. Since payroll direct deposit is considered a cash deposit by the bank, there will be no hold on your funds. This means that you can cash a check, write checks or make a withdrawal at your bank's automatic teller machine (ATM) on payday. We will continue to provide you with information on the amount of your net pay, along with any deductions and withholdings made from your pay. In addition, you will see the deposit amount and date of deposit reflected on your next bank statement.

To receive the many benefits of this service, you will need to sign an authorization for us to automatically credit your personal checking or savings account each payday. We will transmit your payroll information to First Citizens Bank of SC for processing. The information will then be transmitted to your bank or savings institution for credit to your account. Because virtually all financial institutions participate in the direct deposit

program, there should be no need to alter your current banking arrangement. You will receive your pay on your exact pay date, even if you're out of town. Payment information is strictly confidential. There is no cost for you to participate in the program.

G-6 Personnel Records

Stephens County maintains personnel files on each employee. These files include information such as the employee's job application, resume, training records, performance evaluations, documentation of personnel actions (e.g., salary changes, transfers, promotions, or terminations), benefit enrollment forms, and other employment-related records. Personnel files will not include records relating to investigation of a possible criminal offense, or of documents which are being developed or prepared for use in civil, criminal, or grievance procedures. A separate personnel file is maintained for physical examination records, insurance claim forms, or other records of employee illnesses and injuries; access to such files is restricted to protect the employee's medical information. All personnel records will be maintained in accordance with applicable legal requirements and regulatory guidelines.

Public Inspection – Personnel files are the property of Stephens County Government, and access to the information they contain is restricted. Generally, only management and supervisory personnel who have a legitimate reason to review information in a file are allowed to do so. However, information relating to employees and former employees may be available for public inspection at reasonable times and in accordance with Title 50, Chapter 18, Official Code of Georgia Annotated. Employees who wish to review their personnel file should contact the Personnel Office; with reasonable advance notice, employees may review their own personnel file in County offices and in the presence of an individual appointed by the County.

Confidentiality of Records – Any disclosure of personnel record information to unauthorized persons will require the written authorization of the employee. However, the County will have the right to disclose any such information in the course of an appeal of a disciplinary action initiated by the employee.

G-7 Requests for References

The Human Resources office is responsible for responding to any inquiries regarding personnel records, employment verification, or employment/credit references on present or previous employees. As a matter of policy, any response to requests for references must be limited to factual information that be substantiated by County records. Any County employee receiving such a request should forward the request to the Human Resources office for response.

SECTION H – EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

H-1 General Benefits Information

Eligible employees of Stephens County Government are provided a wide range of benefits. Eligibility for benefits is dependent upon a variety of factors, including employee classification. The *Hiring & Classification Issues* section of this Handbook contains a description of each category and the associated benefits eligibility. Some benefit programs require contributions from employees, and some are fully or partially paid by the County. A number of programs (such as Social Security, worker's compensation, and unemployment insurance) cover all employees in the manner prescribed by law.

Benefits represent a significant portion of each employee's overall compensation package. Employees are encouraged to become familiar with the benefit programs for which they are eligible, and take advantage of these valuable benefits. Contact the human resources office for additional information and answers to specific questions about benefits issues.

H-2 Holidays

For the purpose of establishing uniformity in administration of paid holidays, all County offices (except those which must remain open on a holiday because of work requirements) will be closed on the designated holidays described in this section.

Designated Holidays – The following days are designated as official paid holidays for eligible County employees:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Presidents Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday after Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day
- 2nd Day at Christmas

Holiday Schedule – The County will publish the approved holiday schedule at the beginning of each calendar year. Changes to the designated list of holidays may be made at the County's discretion. When a holiday falls on a Saturday, it will generally be observed on the preceding Friday. When a holiday falls on a Sunday, it will generally be observed on the following Monday.

Eligibility – All regular full-time employees of Stephens County will be eligible for holiday leave for the days listed above. Employees in their probation period are also eligible to receive holiday pay, but only if scheduled to work on the holiday. Holiday pay is calculated based on the employee's regular hourly rate as of the day of the holiday.

Compensation for Holidays:

- **Overtime** – Holiday hours do not count as hours worked for purpose of determining overtime.
- **Working on Holidays** – Some employees may be required to work on a designated holiday, due to work schedule or emergencies. Such an employee will receive an equivalent amount of time off at another time, as determined by the employee and department head; or the employee may be paid for the extra hours; or the employee may be credited with a day of vacation leave.
- **Sick Time in Conjunction with a Holiday** – No employee may use sick time the day before or the day after a holiday without a doctor’s notice.
- **Holidays While On Authorized/Unauthorized Leave** – An employee who is not on approved leave and fails to report on his or her scheduled work day before and after a holiday will not be paid for the holiday. Holidays that occur during approved vacation or sick leave will not be charged against the employee’s vacation or sick leave accruals.

H-3 Vacation Leave

General – Stephens County recognizes that employees need time away from work for rest and recreation and to manage personal business. The County provides paid Vacation Leave benefits to eligible employees, within the guidelines presented in this policy.

Eligibility – All regular full-time employees will be eligible to earn and accrue Vacation Leave benefits, according to the schedule listed below.

Table H.3 Vacation Leave Accruals

Longevity	40 Hour Work Week			42 Hour Work Week			48 Hour Work Week		
	Hrs/PP	Max/Hrs	Weeks	Hrs/PP	Max/Hrs	Weeks	Hrs/PP	Max/Hrs	Weeks
Up to 1 Year	1.539	40	1	1.616	42	1	1.846	48	1
1 to 5 Years	3.077	80	2	3.231	84	2	3.693	96	2
6 to 10 Years	4.616	120	3	4.847	126	3	5.539	144	3
11 to 20 Years	6.154	160	4	6.462	168	4	7.385	192	4
20 + Years	7.693	200	5	8.077	210	5	9.231	240	5

Calculation and Accrual of Vacation Leave

- Eligible employees will begin to accrue vacation benefits as of the day of employment in the eligible position. However, accrued benefits are not available to be used or paid until the employee completes the probation period.
- For the purpose of calculation vacation leave, those employees employed after the 1st day of the month, but before the 15th day of the month, will earn leave from the 1st of the month. Those employees employed after the 15th day of the month will not earn leave for that month.

- Exempt employees shall receive their full annual allotment of vacation accrual on January 1st each year. Non-exempt employees will accrue each pay period based on their respective rates in Table H.3 above.
- Vacation leave may not be taken until it is earned. Thus, no negative leave balance.
- Overtime is not included in computation of vacation leave accrual.
- If an employee takes extended leave without pay (more than two weeks), there is no accrual of vacation leave benefits during that time.
- If an employee is terminated and rehired, the date of last employment is used to compute vacation leave.

Status of Vacation Leave During Probation Period – Employees accrue, but may not take, vacation leave during the probation period. If the employee should separate from service during the probation period, or if the employee is not offered continued employment at the end of the probation period, they will not be paid for the leave accrued during the probation period.

Approval – Taking leave is a privilege that must be approved by the department head before the leave is taken, or within eight (8) hours after returning to work in the case of an emergency. Taking more than five (5) consecutive days of leave must be approved two (2) weeks in advance. Employees on vacation leave are subject to recall to duty in cases of emergency.

Payment of Vacation Benefits – Vacation benefits are paid at the employee’s base hourly rate of pay at the time of the vacation. The vacation pay rate does not include overtime or any special form of compensation such as shift differentials, incentives, commissions, or bonuses. Employees may not receive pay in lieu of taking vacation leave.

Maximum Allowable Accumulation – Stephens County’s policies are designed to encourage employees to use their vacation leave each year. Employees are urged to take advantage of their annual vacation benefits for rest, relaxation, and personal pursuits. With this goal in mind, the County has established a maximum accrual schedule utilizing the employee’s annual accrual rate of vacation leave (see Table H.3-1 in this section). In the event that an employee’s accrued vacation is **not used** by the end of the benefit year:

- Any unused amount not exceeding the maximum allowed accrual may be carried over to the next year.
- Any unused exceeding the maximum allowed accrual will be forfeited.
- In accordance with this policy, employees may coordinate the transfer of their vacation hours to other employees within the County in an amount not to exceed the maximum allow accrual.

Procedure to Request Vacation Leave Time – Requests for vacation leave should be submitted to the employee’s immediate supervisor or department head. Vacation leave time may be granted, with approval of the appropriate department head, based on issues including: the department’s staffing needs, the timeliness of request for leave time, and

the employee's seniority. In case of inclement weather, employees who cannot get to work will be allowed to use vacation leave time.

Payment of Vacation Leave at Termination of Employment – After completion of the probation period, eligible employees will be eligible for compensation of accrued but unused vacation leave upon termination of employment (in the case of death, accrued vacation will be paid to the employee's estate). Employees who have not completed their probation period will not be eligible to receive payment for unused vacation leave accruals.

The County Commissioners will have the discretion of granting exceptions to the vacation policy (such as allowing additional vacation leave time to a new employee upon hiring, allowing carryover of vacation leave in excess of the maximum allowed accrual, or other exceptions).

H-4 Sick Leave

Sick Leave is accumulated to be taken for legitimate illness or injury, or other medical-related situations such as physician appointments, medical examinations, or dental appointments. Sick leave is available for the employee's personal health care as well as for care of members of the employee's immediate family. Employees are encouraged to accumulate and maintain sufficient balances of sick leave time to be prepared for unexpected illness, emergencies, or other personal needs.

Eligibility – All regular full-time employees are eligible to earn Sick Leave benefits, with accrual beginning as of the date of employment in the eligible position. Employees are not allowed to take accrued sick leave during the first six (6) months of employment.

Rate of Leave Accrual – Eligible employees begin to accrue sick leave immediately upon employment in an eligible position. Employees working a normal full-time schedule of 40 hours per week accrue sick leave at the rate of 2 hours per pay period (or 52 hours annually). Employees working a non-standard schedule will accrue sick hours on a pro-rated basis according to their scheduled hours.

Maximum Accumulation – A maximum of 40 days (or 320 hours) of sick leave may be accumulated. Accrued Sick Leave benefits may be carried from year to year, up to the maximum. Any sick leave accumulated in excess of the 40-day (320 Hours) maximum will be forfeited.

Table H.4-1. Sick Leave Accruals

ANNUAL ACCRUAL	MAXIMUM ACCRUAL
2 Hours per Pay Period (52 Hours per year)	40 Days (320 Hours)

Reporting Sick Leave Absence

- To be eligible for sick pay, the employee must contact their immediate supervisor or department head directly, each day of their absence, as far in advance as possible, but no later than one (1) hour before their scheduled arrival time. If the employee is unable to make the call personally, a family member or a friend should contact the supervisor.
- If the supervisor or department head is not available, the Human Resources Department should be contacted.
- In addition, the employee must contact the immediate supervisor, department head, or Human Resources **on a daily basis** to discuss their medical status and anticipated date of return to work.
- An employee who fails to contact the supervisor, department head, or Human Resources may be considered as having voluntarily resigned.
- This policy must be followed unless an exception has been made for a particular absence, and a written memo to this effect has been sent to the Human Resources Department.

Approval of Sick Leave – Sick leave requires the approval of the immediate supervisor or department head.

Physicians Statement – A medical statement signed by a licensed physician may be required to substantiate Sick Leave for the following:

- Absences of three (3) or more consecutive work days;
- To support a request for sick leave during vacation leave;
- At any time when absence recurs frequently or habitually, or when it is suspected that an employee is abusing sick leave, provided the employee is forewarned.

Payment of Sick Leave Benefits – Sick Leave benefits are paid at the employee's base hourly rate of pay at the time of the absence. The Sick Leave pay rate does not include overtime or any special form of compensation such as shift differentials, incentives, or bonuses. Sick Leave compensation will not be advanced to any employee.

Status of Sick Leave at Termination of Employment – Accrued Sick Leave benefits are forfeited on termination of employment (or death). There will be no payment of any accumulated Sick Leave.

H-5 Funeral/Bereavement Leave

Up to five (5) days of funeral leave per occurrence may be available to eligible employees absent from work due to the death of an immediate family member:

Immediate family member and number of days – Employee may be eligible for up to five (5) days for the death of a spouse, parent, child, stepchild, or sibling. Employee may be eligible for up to two (2) days for the death of a grandparent or grandchild. Employee may be eligible for up to two (2) days for the death of a mother, father, sister, brother or

grandparent in-law. If approved, unused sick or vacation time may be used if more time is needed.

Eligibility – Regular full time employees are eligible to receive up to five (5) working days of funeral leave benefits per occurrence depending on classification of immediate family member.

Procedure to request funeral leave – To request time off due to the death of an immediate family member, the eligible employee should immediately notify his/her supervisor who will forward it to the County Administrator for approval. Approval of funeral leave will normally be granted, unless there are unusual business needs or staffing requirements. Employees may, with supervisory approval, use available vacation leave for additional time off as necessary.

Payment of funeral leave benefits – Funeral leave benefits are paid at the employee’s base hourly rate of pay at the time of the absence. The funeral leave pay rate does not include overtime or any special form of compensation such as incentives, bonuses, or shift differentials. Funeral leave compensation will not be advanced to any employee. Funeral leave benefits are available only at the time of a death in the family, and are not restricted to only once during a calendar year; and may never accrue, carry over to another year, or be payable at termination of employment.

Immediate Family Member – “Immediate family” includes the employee’s spouse, parent, child, stepchild, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or similar member of spouse’s immediate family or other relative who lives in the employee’s household. Special consideration may be given to a relative who is domiciled in the employee’s household or any other person whose association with the employee was similar to any of the above relationships.

Volunteer Paid Time off (VPTO) – The Stephens County Board of Commissioners’ will provide sixteen (16) hours a year of Volunteer Paid Time Off. The employee must get prior approval from their Supervisor/Department Head and must select a local organization such as a food bank, Dress for Success affiliate, Humane Shelter, Library, Hope Center, Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross, etc. Prior approval of the organization selected is required.

H-6 Group Insurance Plans

Stephens County offers a variety of options for medical, life, or other insurance coverage for eligible employees after thirty (30) days of employment. Types of insurance plans available and various options within each plan may vary from year to year. The County typically pays for all (or the majority of) the employee’s insurance premiums in a given plan and employees may have the option of purchasing additional individual or family coverage at discounted group rates.

H-6(i) Disability

Short-term Disability Plan – A short-term disability plan is provided for eligible employees through a third party at the cost of the Employee. Please refer to the STD (Short Term Disability) Summary Plan Description for an explanation of the plan benefits and limitations.

Long-term Disability Plan – It is the vision of the Board of Commissioners to provide a no cost Long Term Disability plan to eligible employees of Stephens County.

Insurance Programs – Insurance programs available to eligible employees may include: Health Insurance, Dental Insurance, Life Insurance, Vision Insurance, Short-Term Disability Insurance, and/or Long-Term Disability Insurance. Information regarding insurance options and enrollment procedures is provided to new employees during the initial hire period. Eligible employees must complete appropriate enrollment forms within the designated time frame.

Annual enrollment sessions are typically conducted at a designated time each year, and employees may elect to change coverage only at that time (unless an employee should experience a qualifying life status event or family status change, as defined by plan documents during the plan year; in which case the employee may only change enrollment within thirty (30) days of the qualifying event). Any employee who wishes to enter a plan after their new-hire enrollment period, or who wishes to upgrade any coverage, may be required to show evidence of insurability, which must be approved by the insurance carrier.

Insurance Benefits During Unpaid Leave of Absence – A participating employee who is placed on unpaid leave of absence status is required to pay for both the employee's share and the County's share of his/her insurance premiums, or coverage will be terminated. The employee should make advance arrangements to pay premiums directly to the County, to avoid loss of important benefits.

Continuation of Insurance Benefits – Groups insurance benefits will terminate when an employee terminates employment. However, the Federal Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) gives employees and their qualified dependents the opportunity to continue medical insurance coverage under the County's health plan when a "qualifying event" would normally result in the loss of eligibility. Typical qualifying events include resignation, termination or employment, death of an employee, change in eligibility status, leave of absence, divorce or legal separation, or a dependent child no longer meeting eligibility requirements. Under COBRA, the employee or dependent pays the full cost of coverage at the County's group rates, plus an administration fee. Employees should notify the Human Resources office of any change in personal status which might affect their benefits. The County will provide a written notice describing rights granted under COBRA when the employee becomes eligible for coverage under the

County's health plan. Contact the human resources office for questions or additional information about COBRA or any other benefits issues.

H-7 Worker's Compensation Insurance

Stephens County operates under Georgia Workers' Compensation Law. An employee who is temporarily disabled because of an injury or illness sustained directly in the performance of his or her work may be covered by the provisions of the State Workers' Compensation Act. Rules and regulations of the Act will govern all workers' compensation issues. Workers must report all accidents immediately to the employer by personally advising the employer.

Employee safety at work is important, and safety standards and procedures should be followed at all times. In the event of a compensable injury, Workers' Compensation provides payment of medical and rehabilitation expenses within the limits of the law. In some cases the County will also pay part of wages lost due to the work-related injury. The amount of benefits payable and duration of payment depend on the nature of injury or illness. In general, however, all eligible medical expenses incurred in connection with a work-related injury or illness is paid in full and appropriate salary payments are provided in accordance with workers' compensation laws.

Reporting an Accident or Injury – Any employee who is injured on the job must immediately report such injury to the immediate supervisor and/or department head, regardless of how minor the injury may appear to be. This ensures prompt and appropriate medical treatment, allows for timely completion of required reports in accordance with law, and enables an eligible employee to qualify for coverage as quickly as possible. The worker may lose the right to receive compensation if an accident is not reported with thirty (30) days. Work injuries and occupation diseases should be reported in writing whenever possible. The County will supply free of charge, upon request, a form for reporting accidents; and will also furnish, free of charge information about workers' compensation.

Use of Designated Physicians – A worker injured on the job must select a doctor from the Panel of Physicians, which is posted in each department. If an employee chooses to visit a physician who is not on the Panel of Physicians, the employee will be liable for any medical expenses incurred. The Panel Physician may arrange for appropriate consultations, referrals, and other specialized services as the nature of the injury requires. If the employee is dissatisfied with the physician selected, he or she may make one (1) change without permission of the employer/insurer, self-insurer claims office, or the State Board of Workers' Compensation.

Post-Accident Drug Testing for Accidents or Injuries – All employees involved in work-related accidents or injuries are subject to post-accident drug screening testing (as described in Section C – Drug Free Workplace).

SECTION H – EMPLOYEE BENEFITS – Continued

Return to Work – All employees who have lost time due to work-related injury or illness must obtain a doctor’s statement for the time missed and a “release statement” to return to work. Doctor’s notes that specify “Light Duty” restrictions must be adhered to by both the employee and the supervisor. Employees who are in a non-pay status due to an injury will not accrue vacation or sick leave, and are not eligible for holiday pay.

Off-Duty Activities – Neither the County nor its worker’s compensation insurance carrier will be liable for payment of worker’s compensation benefits for injuries that occur during an employee’s voluntary participation in any off-duty recreational, social, or athletic activity sponsored by the County.

H-8 Training and Development

Stephens County Government promotes training and development of its employees for the purpose of improving the quality of services provided to the community and to assist employees in preparing themselves for advancement. To that end, the County may:

- 1) Determine appropriate standards for training programs;
- 2) Schedule programs that meet such standards as prescribed by law;
- 3) Ensure that training programs are carried out as approved;
- 4) Prepare certificates or other forms of recognition for persons who satisfactorily complete approved courses and programs;
- 5) Develop and utilize techniques for increasing employee efficiency;
- 6) Develop supervisory and management training and other types of training programs common to all departments;
- 7) Make available information concerning job requirements and training opportunities;
- 8) Maintain records of approved training programs and courses, and records of employees who successfully complete such programs and courses.

The County will advise employees of training programs or opportunities pertinent to their functions as such programs become available. All training must be approved in advance.

H-9 Tuition & Travel Reimbursement Program

At the discretion of the County Administrator or his/her designee, the County may agree to grant time off and to pay registration, tuition, and travel costs for employees to attend approved educational programs that directly relate to their jobs and for which a direct benefit can be derived by the County.

Should any employee voluntarily leave employment with the County within one (1) year of the training, the County reserves the right to deduct the expenses for the physical exam and drug screen test from the employee’s final paycheck. This right extends to two years for state mandated certification and/or licenses relating to positions in public safety.

Travel and Meal Reimbursement

Stephens County will bear the cost of all reasonable and authorized expenses incurred by employees or County officials while traveling on official County business. All travel at the expense of the County must be approved by the department manager and/or County Administrator prior to the time such expenses are incurred.

Travel Requisitions and Approval – Employees should complete appropriate forms and follow established procedures to request and receive approval for travel *prior* to incurring any expenses. Requests should include all available information concerning purpose, location, dates, and costs of the event, and should be submitted as far in advance as possible. Departmental needs and budgetary constraints will be considered to determine if the requested travel event is appropriate.

Reimbursable Expenses – Employees are expected to show good judgment and proper regard for economy in the matter of travel expense. Typical expenses that may be reimbursed by the County include transportation, lodging, meals, telephone, parking, and registration fees. Other expenses require specific consideration and approval. The County may establish limitations for reimbursement of certain expenses, and employees should review current reimbursement guidelines prior to incurring travel expenses.

Submittal of Expense Reports – After completion of travel, the employee must complete the County's designated travel expense report form and submit with original receipts to the department head for approval. Any travel funds advanced to the employee must be reflected on the expense report. Expense reports are considered due on the first working day after completion of travel. If an employee should fail to return a completed expense report, any amount disbursed as a travel advance will be considered income to the employee and will be reported to the Internal Revenue Service as such.

Employees will be reimbursed for reasonable and actual expenses for meals, not including alcohol, incurred during business related travel. The Stephens County Board of Commissioners will generally reimburse travelers for three meals a day. All original receipts must be included with the employee's travel and expense report. Any employee expense report received without the receipts will be returned to the employee. Employee expense reports submitted with receipts missing will be forwarded to the next level manager for approval. Reasonable expenses are outlined below and are subject to Finance Department review:

- Breakfast: 100%
- Lunch: 100%
- Dinner: 100%

Travel is based on the Internal Revenue Service yearly rates and is subject to change.

Beginning on January 1, 2024, the standard mileage rates for the use of personal owned vehicles are as follows: 67 cents per mile driven for business use. This rate shall be updated annually to reflect the current amount per the IRS.

These rates apply to electric and hybrid–electric automobiles, as well as gasoline and diesel–powered vehicles. The standard mileage rate for business use is based on an annual study of the fixed and variable costs of operating an automobile including but not limited to insurance cost, fuel cost, oil cost, tires, and cost of other maintenance. If mileage reimbursement is claimed, then gasoline purchased shall not be claimed in accordance with this policy and the employee shall understand that the mileage reimbursement constitutes coverage for the gasoline costs.

It is important that if fuel or other costs or purchased with a County credit card, then this expense shall not be included on the submitted expense report. Also note, that under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, taxpayers cannot claim a miscellaneous itemized deduction for unreimbursed employee travel expenses.

Non-reimbursable expenses include – Reimbursable Expenses – Employees are expected to show good judgment and proper regard for economy in the matter of travel expense. Typical expenses that may be reimbursed by the County include transportation, lodging, meals, telephone, parking, and registration fees. Other expenses require specific consideration and approval. The County may establish limitations for reimbursement of certain expenses, and employees should review current reimbursement guidelines prior to incurring travel expenses. Examples of Non-Reimbursable expenses: Entertainment, alcoholic beverages games, health clubs, failure to cancel transportation, hotel reservations, traffic and/or parking violations, spouse or family member expenses, laundry expenses.

H-10 Retirement Program

The County offers eligible employees the opportunity to participate in the County's Retirement/Deferred Compensation Plan after completion of six (6) months of employment, and after reaching twenty and one-half (20 ½) years of age. Employees will be notified when they meet the eligibility requirements, and will receive information regarding retirement plan features, options, and procedures.

H-11 Carry-Home Vehicles

Stephens County may provide certain employees with a County vehicle as part of the employee's compensation and benefits package. In such cases where the employee is allowed to use the vehicle for personal use, the value of the personal use is considered a taxable benefit and must be reported to the IRS.

The employee is required to report to the County the portion of the annual lease value of the vehicle that is used for personal reasons as described under IRS rules. The portion of the annual lease value that is of a personal usage will be reported on the employee's W2

form to the IRS. In addition, since the County provides operation and maintenance of the vehicle, the employee must maintain a record of mileage related to the personal usage, which must be reported by the County as income at per-mile rate (currently 5.5 cents per mile). The benefit gained by the employee for personal use of a County vehicle during the each calendar year must be reported on the employee's W-2 form for that calendar year.

H-12 Return to Work Policy – work related injuries or illness

Stephens County is committed to returning injured employees to work, within safe and healthy medical practices, as soon as practical. As soon as possible after the injury, and when the employee is medically able to return to work, a written medical release from the designated medical service provider must be received by the county personnel department. If the medical release specifies that the employee may return to work, the employee will be returned to work immediately or as soon as practical. The medical release should be on a county approved physician's report form.

Stephens County reserves the right to require any treating physician to review the employee's job description, including a description of essential duties, and express an opinion as to whether the employee may safely perform the essential job duties, before putting the employee back to work with or without temporary modifications or more permanent accommodations.

It is the policy of Stephens County to provide and establish a *Return to Work Policy* for employees with work-related injuries and illnesses who are unable, temporarily and/or permanently, to return to their permanent job duties.

POLICY:

Because Stephens County recognizes that their employees are a valued and limited resource, this program is designed to:

- Assist the recovery process by providing a focus and a goal for return of the injured employee.
- Benefit employees by allowing them to return to full wages as soon as possible.
- Benefit employer by reducing workers' compensation costs.

PROCESS:

Stephens County will seek *return to work opportunities* as quickly as medically possible through the use of transitional employment for all employees who are temporarily disabled due to an on-the-job injury. Transitional employment opportunities will be considered in all departments, not just the department in which the injured employee was working.

Transitional employment assignments are intended to assist workers who are returning to work after a temporary disability that resulted from a work-related injury. All transitional employment duties must be productive. Duties must never be demeaning or appear worthless in any way.

Stephens County, through their reasonable accommodation program, will make efforts to retain employees who are permanently disabled.

SECTION I – LEAVES OF ABSENCE

I-1 Types of Leave

Stephens County recognizes several types of leave that are available to employees. The nature of the leave determines whether a leave will be paid or unpaid. Leave options include:

Vacation Leave (*discussed in Employee Benefits Section*)

Sick Leave (*discussed in Employee Benefits Section*)

Funeral Leave (*discussed in Employee Benefits Section*)

Military Leave

Civil Leave

Family & Medical Leave

Leave of Absence without Pay

Educational Leave

I-2 General Guidelines Governing Leave

Employee Responsibilities During Leave – Any employee applying for leave under a specific leave provision must comply with the following:

Must follow appropriate procedures to request a leave and to return from a leave;

Must communicate regularly with the supervisor/manager regarding the status of their leave;

Must submit any required documentation related to their return to work;

Must maintain required payments for any insurance benefits to be continued during the leave.

Benefits During Leave – A leave of absence prevents a break in service, but no benefits (such as sick leave, vacation leave, or holidays) will accrue during a leave of absence (except for Military Leave). Benefits such as medical insurance and retirement contributions will be suspended after thirty (30) days *unless* the employee chooses to pay the required contribution. Eligibility for these benefits will be reinstated if the employee returns to work during or at the end of the approved leave period.

Duplicate Use of Benefits – Employees are not allowed to use two (2) different types of paid leave benefits for the same day off. For example, if a holiday occurs while an employee is on vacation leave, the employee cannot receive both vacation leave pay and holiday pay for the day in question (in this example, the employee would receive holiday pay for the holiday, and his/her vacation leave benefits would not be reduced by the number of holiday hours occurring during the vacation). This rule applies to all types of leaves or benefits.

Anniversary Date – In calculating accrual of benefits, accrual begins on the day of original appointment to an eligible position. If an employee takes a leave of absence, the

anniversary date will be adjusted by as many calendar weeks as the employee is absent on leave of absence.

I-3 Military Leave

Military Leave will be granted to eligible employees (excluding temporary employees) in accordance with Federal and State laws governing such leave.

Eligibility – Any regular employee who leaves County service to join the military forces of the United States during time of war or other national emergency, or is inducted by Selective Service, may, upon written request, prior to induction into the military, be placed on Military leave without pay, such leave to extend through a date ninety (90) days after which such service terminates.

Employees who are members of the National Guard or a Reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States and who are ordered to military duty or to military training may request and be granted Military Leave for the amount of time required to meet military obligations.

Procedure to Request Military Leave – Employees should submit a written request for Military Leave as soon in advance as is reasonably practical. The request should include the reason for Leave, requested date to commence Leave, and date Leave will end (or estimated return date, if length of Military Leave cannot be determined). Employees who are ordered by appropriate military authority to serve during an emergency and who provide the required documentation will be granted leave without pay for the duration of their obligated military duty.

Military Training or Reserve Duty – Any regular employee who is a member of the National Guard or an organized military reserve of the United States will be allowed leave of absence with pay, not to exceed eighteen (18) calendar days (or in compliance with State law) during any calendar year to attend training camps, upon presentation of orders concerning such training. Such leave will not be charged to vacation leave.

Compensation During Military Leave – Military Leave is an unpaid leave of absence. However, employees on Military Leave may choose to use available Vacation Leave during the absence.

Benefits During Unpaid Military Leave – During unpaid Military Leave, the County continues to provide health insurance benefits for the full term of the Military Leave, subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of applicable benefit plans. However, benefit accruals such as Vacation Leave, Sick Leave, or Holiday benefits are suspended, and will resume upon return to active employment. Employees who return to work at the end of a Military Leave are considered continuously employed for purposes of determining benefits based on length of service.

Return from Military Leave – The employee is entitled to return to the vacated position or a comparable position, provided the employee makes application to the County within ninety (90) days of date of discharge under honorable conditions, and is physically and mentally capable of performing the essential functions of the position with or without reasonable accommodation. Failure to apply for reinstatement within the allotted time period constitutes waiver of these rights.

The returning employee is entitled to any increases in salary (including cost-of-living increases) or any advancement in grade which would normally be accorded to the incumbent of the position, with exception of any increases or advancement in grade which would normally be dependent on meritorious performance of position duties.

In the event a position vacated by a person entering the military service as stated above no longer exists at the time he or she qualifies to return to work, the person will be entitled to be re-employed in another position of the same status, class, and pay, provided such re-employment does not necessitate the laying off of another employee.

I-4 Civil Leave

Stephens Government encourages employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities, such as Jury Duty, Court Appearances, or Voting. Regular employees may be eligible for leave time with pay or without pay to perform required civic duties.

Jury Duty – Upon receiving a summons to serve on jury duty, the employee should present a copy of the Jury Summons to his/her supervisor as soon as possible. When the jury is not meeting, the employee must report for work. The employee also is required to report to work before and/or after the daily tour of jury duty, as time and circumstances warrant. Employees will be paid their regular wages while serving jury duty, LESS any jury duty compensation paid by the court; employees will be required to submit to payroll a copy of the check stub received as payment for jury duty. In all cases, the employee must continually keep his/her supervisor informed of the employee's status.

Voting – Stephens County encourages employees to exercise their individual right to vote by participating in elections. Most employees should be able to vote either before or after their regular work schedule. Employees who are unable to vote in election during their non-working hours will be allowed up to two (2) hours of time off without pay. Time off for voting should be taken at the beginning or end of the regular workday, or as an extension of the employee's lunch/meal break. In addition, no employee will be given or refused employment, suspended, or discharged because of his/her vote or failure to vote in any election.

Court Appearances – County employees who are subpoenaed or ordered to appear in court as a witness, or to testify in an official capacity on behalf of Federal, State, or local government, may be granted leave with pay for such period as required by the court. However, this policy does *not* apply to litigation unrelated to the employee's position with

the County. Any absence from work by an employee to appear in any capacity in private litigation not associated with his/her position with the County should be charged to Vacation Leave, or taken off without pay (with supervisory approval).

I-5 Family & Medical Leave

Under the provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), an employee may be granted up to twelve (12) weeks of family and/or medical leave during any twelve (12) month period. This leave is not intended to replace other authorized leaves.

To be eligible for Family & Medical Leave under FMLA, an employee must be employed for at least twelve (12) months and have worked at least 1,250 hours during the twelve-month period immediately preceding commencement of the leave. After satisfying this criteria, an employee may take up to twelve (12) weeks of Family & Medical Leave per year as long as they work at least 1,250 hours in a rolling twelve (12) month period (a rolling twelve-month period is defined as a twelve-month period measured backwards from the date an employee uses any Family & Medical Leave). Family & Medical Leave may be taken intermittently in increments of two (2) hours.

Leave is allowable under FMLA for the following events:

- 1) The birth, adoption, or foster care of a child (entitlement to leave for birth of a child, placement of a child for adoption, or foster care expires at the end of the twelve-month period that began on the date of birth/placement of the child);
- 2) Care for an employee's child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition; or,
- 3) The serious health condition of an employee where the employee is unable to perform the essential function of his/her position.

Family Leave may be paid or unpaid. Leave is paid when an employee uses Sick or Vacation Leave for a condition that qualifies for this type of leave. For example, an employee can use Sick and/or Vacation Leave for birth of a child, and the time taken will be counted toward the twelve (12) weeks per year of Family & Medical Leave. Once an employee exhausts available paid leave, any additional leave taken for family purposes will be without pay. During periods of unpaid leave, no Sick or Vacation Leave benefits will accrue, nor will holiday pay provisions apply. The employee is required to pay his/her contribution for insurance premiums while on Family & Medical Leave without pay.

Part-time employees are eligible for a pro-rata amount of Family & Medical Leave, since this leave is based on a standard forty (40) hour workweek. The amount available for a part-time employee is calculated individually based on the amount of time worked during the year.

Spouses who are both employed by the County are entitled to a combined total of twelve (12) weeks of Family & Medical Leave within the twelve (12) weeks of Family & Medical

Leave within the twelve (12) month period to care for a new child or sick parent. Each spouse may be entitled to additional FMLA leave for other FMLA qualifying reason (for example, if each spouse took six (6) weeks of leave to care for a newborn child, each could later use an additional six (6) weeks due to his/her own serious health condition or to care for a child with a serious health condition).

Procedures to request Family & Medical leave are as follows:

1. An employee must request Family & Medical Leave at least thirty (30) days before leave is to begin when the leave is foreseeable (such as an expected birth, placement of a child for adoption or foster care, or planned medical treatment of the employee or family member).
2. If thirty (30) days notice to request leave is not feasible due to medical emergency or change in circumstances, leave must be requested as soon as possible.
3. An employee must submit written request for leave by completing the designated form to request Family & Medical Leave. In emergency situations where written notification is not possible, verbal notice will be accepted, to be followed by written request.
4. The written leave request must be signed by the employee's immediate supervisor and department manager, and then approved by the County Administrator.
5. If the leave is due to the employee's own serious health condition or to care for a family member, the employee must obtain medical certification from a physician. This certification must be submitted with the written leave request within two (2) business days of submitting the leave request, and must contain the following information:
 - a. Name of the health care physician;
 - b. The physician's type of medical practice or specialty;
 - c. Medical facts that support the certification;
 - d. Explanation of how the condition qualifies as a serious health condition under the Family & Medical Leave provision;
 - e. Date the serious condition began; and
 - f. Duration of serious health condition and estimate of length of incapacitation.
6. The County may contact the physician to clarify any information given in the medical certification, but may not request information beyond that described above.
7. The County will notify the employee within two (2) business days regarding approval of leave or requirement for additional information.
8. If there is any doubt as to validity of original certification, the County may require the employee to submit to 2nd certification by another physician (at County expense). The County may designate the physician, but not a physician regularly employed by the County. In the event of differing opinions given by the employee's physician and the County's physician, the County may require medical certification from a 3rd physician

(again at County expense). The 3rd physician must be jointly approved by the employee and the County, and this 3rd opinion will be final and binding.

9. The County may request re-certification every thirty (30) days for serious illness, or when the employee is under supervision of a health care provider.
10. The County may require an employee on Family & Medical Leave to report periodically on his/her status and intent to return to work.
11. Failure of an employee to return to work on the agreed-upon date may result in termination of employment.

Procedures for an employee to return to work under Family & Medical Leave are as follows:

1. The employee may be required to obtain and present certification from the health care provider confirming that the employee is able to resume working.
2. The employee will be returned to the former position or to a position of equal status, pay, and other terms and conditions of employment.
3. Exceptions to restoration to an equivalent position when an employee returns are:
The employee is no longer able to perform essential functions of the job.
The employee is considered a "key employee" where denial of job restoration is necessary to prevent substantial and grievous economic injury to the operation of the County.

Contact the Human Resources office for more detailed information on the Family & Medical Leave Act.

I-6 Leave of Absence without Pay

A personal leave of absence without pay may be granted to regular full-time employees who have at least six (6) months of continuous service for situations that, in Management's view, require such a leave. A regular full-time employee may be granted a Leave of Absence without Pay for up to twelve (12) months in accordance with terms of the respective type of leave, under the following conditions:

1. The employee must submit written request for Leave of Absence without Pay to the immediate supervisor or department head, as early as possible before commencement of proposed leave.
2. Leave without Pay may only be granted after the employee's accrued vacation leave has been exhausted.
3. The Leave must be for a justifiable reason.
4. The supervisor and department head will make recommendation regarding the request, and will forward the request for Leave without Pay to the County Administrator. The County Administrator will forward the request along with a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

5. Approval will be at the discretion of the Board of Commissioners. The leave must not cause undue hardship on the County, and must not impair the proper functioning of the County or its programs or services. Approval may be granted based on the circumstances surrounding the request, including the reasons for leave, the requested duration, anticipated workload during the requested leave time, and staffing considerations.
6. If approved, a Leave of Absence Without pay may not exceed twelve (12) months, unless extended by the Board of Commissioners. Failure to report for duty promptly at the end of the leave may be cause for termination of employment.
7. Benefit accruals such as Vacation Leave, Sick Leave, or Holidays will be suspended during a Leave of Absence without Pay.
8. Employees are responsible for paying the payroll deduction of applicable insurance premiums for the first 30 days while on Leave Without pay. After 30 days the employee will be required to pay the full cost of the premium of each payroll deduction (this includes both the employee's share and the county's share of benefits).
9. While on Leave of Absence from Stephens County, no employee will be allowed to accept other employment. If an employee on a Leave of Absence accepts employment with another employer, the Leave of Absence is cancelled and employment with Stephens County will be terminated (except for employees working for a government agency during Military Leave).
10. If necessary for effective operation of Stephens County Government, an employee granted leave without pay may be required to return to work before expiration of their leave. An employee who does not return at the required time is considered to have resigned and may be terminated.
11. When the leave of absence expires, every effort will be made to reinstate the employee to the position, pay grade, and benefit status held at the time leave was granted. If such position has been filled, the employee may be offered an available comparable position for which the employee is qualified. If no such comparable position is available, the employee will be given preference in the event of an appropriate opening.

I-7 Educational Leave of Absence

An Educational Leave of Absence without Pay may be granted to regular full-time employees in accordance with the provisions set forth for Leave of Absence without Pay. The request must be submitted in writing to the supervisor or department head, and forwarded to the County Administrator. The County Administrator will forward the request along with a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners for approval. (Refer to the "Leave of Absence without Pay" section above for details).

An employee returning from approved Educational Leave of Absence will be entitled to all rights and benefits they might have received had their service not been interrupted. Also the returning employee may be appointed or promoted to a higher level position at the discretion of the department head, provided the employee meets the qualifications of the new position.

SECTION J – OTHER EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

J-1 Dress Code

Dress Code and Public Image Policy

As an employee of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners, we expect you to present a clean and professional appearance when you represent us, whether you are in or outside of the office. You are, therefore, required to dress in appropriate business attire and to behave in a professional, businesslike manner. It is essential that you act in a professional manner and extend the highest courtesy at all times to co-workers, visitors, customers, vendors and clients.

The current Stephens County Board of Commissioners dress code is business casual. Please keep in mind that the Stephens County Board of Commissioners is a professional business office, where clients and others often visit. Generally, clean, neat clothing is acceptable. As always, please use common sense in your choice of business attire.

Employees who are not dressed appropriately according to the guidelines set forth in the policies may be required to leave work to change into the appropriate attire. Employees will be required to use their own leave time while they are away from work to change clothes. It is at the sole discretion of the Department Head.

Casual Fridays

Unless otherwise directed by the County Administrator, employees may wear casual attire on Fridays. This policy does not apply to employees who are required to wear designated uniforms, unless the County Administrator authorizes otherwise for “Special Occasions.” Acceptable attire for casual Fridays include: jeans, khaki pants, sneakers, County logo sweatshirts or collared shirts, non-graphic and non-offensive tee shirts, shirts, dresses, skirts, mid-calf dress Capri’s (not form fitting) and office-appropriate sandals. All clothing worn on Fridays must fit well, be clean, and properly pressed.

Inappropriate Dress

The following clothing items are **not** appropriate at any time: shorts, halters, tank tops, mini dresses, spaghetti strap tops, leggings of any kind, jeans/khaki’s with holes, cargo pants, overalls, jogging suits, low neckline front or back, sheer clothing, clothing that is too tight or too short, flip flops and slippers, crocks of any kind or clothing/hats that have inappropriate words, pictures, scenes, etc., that would be disruptive to the work environment.

All decisions about whether an employee is appropriately dressed for work shall be made by the Department Head in its sole discretion. Employees who are not dressed appropriately may be required to leave work to change into the appropriate attire. Employees will be required to use their own leave time while they are away from work to change clothes.

It is the intent of this policy to comply with applicable state, local and federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of color, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity), national origin, disability, age, genetic information and any other status protected under such laws.

Uniforms – Stephens County Government will furnish uniforms for those employees in positions requiring uniforms. Non-uniform type clothing will not be furnished unless specifically authorized by the Board of Commissioners. Employees are expected to maintain uniforms in a neat, clean manner. Upon termination of employment, each employee is expected to return all County-provided uniforms to their supervisor.

J-2 Use, Misuse, and Monitoring of County Property & Work Areas

Overview – Stephens County provides work areas, desks, computers, vehicles, equipment, tools, supplies, and other County property for use by employees in association with their employment with the County. These items are property of the County, and employees are entrusted with use of this County property in order to perform their jobs. The County retains the right to inspect or monitor such property as a matter of routine. Under no circumstances should County property be utilized for the personal use of any employee, nor may County property be used in an inappropriate or illicit manner. The misuse, abuse, or misappropriation of County equipment, supplies, or funds can lead to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

No Right to Privacy – Employees should not expect privacy with respect to their use of County property. The County can make no assurances about privacy or security of any office, desk, file cabinet, locker, computer, or other County facility, and discourages storage of valuables, perishables, or other personal items. Employees should keep any personal records or personal business at home. No items of an inappropriate or illicit nature may be contained in or on County property.

Care of Property – All employees are expected to follow operating instructions and safety guidelines, perform required maintenance, and exercise care in using equipment. Supervisors can provide guidance about each employee's responsibility to care for and maintain equipment used on the job. Employees should notify supervisors if any equipment or tools appear to be damaged, defective, or in need of repair.

Property Inspections – Since work areas, desks, computers, telephones, vehicles, equipment, tools, supplies, and other property provided for use by employees in their jobs are County property; they are subject to monitoring and inspection by County

management at any time. The County reserves the right to open and inspect any vehicles or items of any kind on County property, and the contents of same, at any time, with or without reason, notice, or consent. Employees on County property, and the contents of any item carried by employees on County property, may be subject to search.

Workplace Monitoring – Workplace monitoring may be conducted by the County to ensure quality control, employee safety, security, and customer satisfaction. Employees who regularly communicate with customers may have their telephone conversations monitored or recorded. Telephone monitoring is used to identify and correct performance problems through targeted training. The County may conduct video surveillance of non-private workplace areas. Video monitoring is used to identify safety concerns, maintain quality control, detect theft and misconduct, and discourage or prevent acts of harassment or violence. However, the County is sensitive to the legitimate privacy rights of employees, and every effort will be made to ensure that workplace monitoring is done in an ethical and respectful manner.

Monitoring of Communication Systems – Computers and communications systems furnished for the use of employees are County property and, as such, may be monitored. The County reserves the right to access and search all directories, indices, diskettes, files, databases, faxes, e-mail, messages, voice mail messages, or other electronic transmissions contained in or used in conjunction with County systems, including the County's computer, voice mail, e-mail, telephone, or other communication systems, with no prior notice. This right applies both during an employee's employment with the County and after cessation of employment for any reason, including whether the cessation is voluntary or involuntary, for any reason or no reason, or by death or disability.

Business Telephone Use – Employees are expected to maintain a professional, courteous demeanor in telephone communications, and to incorporate proper telephone etiquette and customer service skills into all telephone conversations. To maintain consistency and effectiveness in County operations, employees should always use County-approved greetings when answering telephone calls.

Personal Telephone Use – Personal telephone calls during work time must be kept to a minimum. It is understood that certain personal calls are necessary; however, personal calls should be local and should be brief, as they disrupt normal work process. In the event it becomes necessary for an employee to make a personal long-distance call during the workday, the employee should take an uncompensated break and the call may not be charged to the County.

Mail Systems – The use of County-paid postage for personal correspondence is not permitted. This includes stamps, machine-applied postage, downloaded postage, shipping/ mailing services, delivery services, or any other type of mail system funded by the County.

Use of County Vehicles for Personal Use – Employees who are “on-call” or otherwise authorized to take an assigned County vehicle to/from their residences may, with permission from their department head, use their County vehicle for incidental personal purposes, but should refrain from extended personal use. *It is absolutely prohibited for any employee to allow an unauthorized non-employee to operate a County vehicle.*

Return of County Equipment –Each employee is responsible for all County property issued to the employee, in the employee’s possession, or in the employee’s control. Such items may include vehicles, radios, equipment, tools, keys, pagers, cell phones, software, manuals, files, written materials, County funds or checks, credit cards, or other items. Employees must return all County property immediately upon request or upon termination of employment (on or before the last day of employment), and to provide Stephens County with a signed, written statement certifying that all County property has been returned. Employees may not retain any copies of such property. The County may withhold final paychecks or take other action as appropriate to recover or protect property not returned upon request.

J-3 Internet Policy

Stephens County Government provides internet service as a tool to assist authorized employees in performing their work efficiently. This tool, and the work product it contains, is the property of Stephens County and should be used for business purposes only. Employees who do not require access to the internet as part of their official duties may not access the Internet using County equipment under any circumstances.

De Minimis Use – The County will allow “de minimis” personal use of the internet, meaning that a limited amount of personal communications, while not sanctioned, is not prohibited by this policy. Generally, de minimis personal use includes such uses as adding a personal comment to an official e-mail, sending a short personal note to a colleague, or other personal interactions that are a routine part of day-to-day business interaction. Reasonable judgment should be applied to individual circumstances. The County retains sole discretion to determine what use is considered de minimis and to discipline for all other use.

Personal Internet Accounts – No personal Internet accounts (paid for by the employee) may be accessed using County equipment during regular work hours at any time.

Inappropriate Use – Use of the internet is a privilege, not a right, and inappropriate use will result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

1. “Inappropriate Use” is defined as a violation of the intended use or purpose of the Internet authorization, such as use of recreation games or chain letters, attempts to gain unauthorized access, harassment, threats, racial slurs or epithets directed to any racial group, advocacy of the supremacy of any racial group, or any other actions that are disruptive to the Internet or Internet users.

2. Inappropriate use includes obscene activities or violations of generally accepted social standards for the use of a publicly owned and operated communication system. Obscene activities include, but are not limited to, the receipt, storage, or distribution of profanity or other offensive language and sexually explicit materials, including nudity and other graphic or textual depictions of sexually explicit activities.
3. Inappropriate use also includes illegal activities, or any violations of Federal, State, or local law.
4. Inappropriate use also applies to copyright violations. Most information on the Internet is copyrighted, or protected under the law. It is illegal to reproduce or distribute copyrighted information regardless of the source. Violation of copyright laws can also involve heavy fines.

No Right To Privacy – An employee’s rights while accessing the Internet by use of County property do not include the right to privacy. The County reserves the right to monitor in any way the activities of employees while accessing the Internet. All Internet activity is subject to login and monitoring to provide a chronological history of events and to maintain audit trails of usage. The County may automatically monitor Internet activity via software.

Authorization – County management will determine which employees will require authorization for Internet access in association with their job. Each Internet account will be issued to one authorized user only. Each user is responsible for all activity in the assigned account, and for maintaining confidentiality of the password.

Precautionary Measures – Individual users must be aware of, and at all times attempt to prevent, potential County liability in their use of the Internet. All outgoing messages which do not reflect the official position of the County must include the following disclaimer. “The opinions expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent those of the Stephens County Government.” Internet users are advised not to use the Internet for any purpose that would reflect negatively on the County or its employees.

Employees may find some information on the Internet offensive or otherwise objectionable. Individuals should be aware that the County has no control over and, therefore, cannot be responsible for the content of information available on the Internet.

Files are not to be downloaded from the Internet without express consent by the department head. All files expressly approved for downloading must first be scanned by virus detection software. Resources of any kind that require a fee must not be accessed or downloaded without prior approval of the department head. Resources that are not used for a clear County purpose may not be accessed or downloaded. Websites or other electronic communication databases may not be created or implemented without prior approval of the department head and review by the County Administrator.

Violations of County policy regarding Internet use may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

J-4 E-mail Policy

The County uses electronic communications as a tool to facilitate communications, promote increased efficiency, and reduce costs. Any form of an e-mail system installed on County equipment is for County business purposes only. Employees are accountable for their use of electronic communications just as they are for other conduct and communications in the workplace.

The County reserves the right to monitor e-mail messages in any way. The County may enter the e-mail system to review, copy, or delete any messages, to disclose such messages to others, and to use the messages to support disciplinary or other action.

Employees should not assume that messages are confidential, even if a password is used. For private communications, employees should not use the e-mail system. All e-mail messages are considered to be public records, and the public has a right to examine public records. E-mail should not be used as a communication tool if one is concerned about public disclosure or internal disclosure. The County will view the appropriateness of any communication on the basis of how it would have been perceived and dealt with had it been conducted by telephone, in person, or in writing.

Employees should know the source of e-mail before attempting to open messages. Computer viruses are commonly spread by embedding the virus within e-mail attachments. Virus scanning software is installed on personal computers with e-mail capabilities. Each employee is responsible to ensure that virus-scanning software has been installed on his/her computer, and is operative.

The following represent prohibited actions:

1. Use of e-mail should be reserved for official County business and not for personal use.
2. Racism, sexism, and other inappropriate behavior are not tolerated by Stephens County, including in the e-mail environment.
3. Confidential and sensitive issues should not be communicated via e-mail.
4. E-mail is not to be used to create, send, or copy any offensive, harassing, or disruptive message.
5. E-mail is not to be used to send, receive, or download copyrighted materials, financial information, or similar materials without prior authorization.
6. Communications that would be inappropriate under other County policies are equally unacceptable if delivered via electronic communication, including harassing or discriminatory comments, breaches of confidentiality, and insubordinate statements.
7. E-mail is not to be used to solicit for commercial ventures, religious or political causes, outside organizations, or other non-job-related solicitations.

8. Employees are not authorized to retrieve or read any e-mail messages that are not sent to them.

J-5 County Drivers

All employees who are required to drive a Stephens County vehicle in the performance of their jobs, or who drive a personal vehicle while conducting County business, must adhere to the County driving policy as described in this Handbook. Any employee who violates any of the requirements described herein will lost his/her right to operate a County vehicle, and will be subject to possible termination for failure to meet the minimum requirements of his/her job.

Requirements for All Drivers – Any employee who operates a vehicle while acting within the scope of his/her duties as a County employee must meet the following requirements:

1. Must meet all current State of Georgia driver's licensing requirements including, but not limited to, having a valid and current Driver's License and/or Commercial Driver's License, if applicable.
2. Must immediately report any change in the status of the Driver's License to their supervisor.
3. Must immediately report any accident or incident (a) involving a County vehicle, or (b) occurring when the employee is operating a personal vehicle while conducting County business.
4. Must immediately report all traffic citations received from any source for any driving offense.
5. Must maintain a driving record as described below:
 - a. No major violations in the last three (3) years, which includes but is not limited to eluding a police officer, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, reckless driving, license suspension and/or revocation, vehicular homicide, or leaving the scene of an accident.
 - b. No more than two (2) speeding violations in the last three (3) years.
 - c. No more than one (1) at-fault accident in the last three (3) years.
 - d. No more than two (2) accidents in the last three (3) years.
 - e. No convictions of a drug-related offense of any kind.
 - f. No felony convictions involving a vehicle.
6. Must submit to a drug and alcohol screening immediately following any accident while operating a County vehicle.

Process to Approve Drivers – An individual may be designated to drive a County vehicle, or to drive a personal vehicle while acting within the scope of his/her duties, through employment, transfer, promotion, or volunteer work. The appropriate department head must verify that the employee possesses a valid, current State of Georgia driver's license with endorsements appropriate for the vehicle(s) to be driven. The department head may also request a driver's history report. After evaluating the driving background of the proposed driver, the department head will submit a recommendation regarding approval

to the County Administrator. If both the department head and the County Administrator approve the submission, the employee will be eligible to drive County vehicles or to drive personal vehicles while acting in the scope of their duties. If the proposed driver has not met the criteria, the department head must take action to ensure the rejected applicant does not drive any vehicles while acting within the scope of his/her duties.

Stephens County will periodically check the driving record of each employee required to drive a vehicle to verify that the employee is in compliance with County policy. In addition, any supervisory personnel who become aware of an employee who has violated any of the requirements listed above must immediately report the violation to the County Administrator. Supervisors who intentionally withhold information of violations will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including possible termination.

Driver Responsibilities – All individuals who operate a vehicle while acting within the scope of their duties as a County employee are responsible for the following:

1. Knowing and obeying all traffic laws of the State of Georgia and/or the jurisdiction in which the vehicle is being operated.
2. Obtaining and/or maintaining a current and valid State of Georgia Driver's License.
3. Operating County vehicles in a safe manner at all times.
4. Wearing safety belts when the vehicle is being driven, and ensuring that all passengers are wearing safety belts when the vehicle is being driven. Vehicles include all pickup trucks effective July 1, 2010.
5. The use of seatbelts is required on all mobile equipment that is equipped with seatbelts and a rollover protection device.
6. Using County vehicle only for the purpose of conducting Stephens County business, except as authorized by appropriate County officials, and as otherwise allowed by IRS regulations regarding *de minimis* use, and with prior approval (such as a stop for a personal errand between a business delivery and the employee's home, or an on-call employee commuting to/from residence); or if personal use of a County vehicle is established as a condition of the employee's compensation agreement. Non-County employees are not allowed to operate the County vehicle.
7. Immediately reporting any change in the status of their driver's license.
8. Immediately reporting traffic citations received from any source for any violation.
9. Immediately reporting any accident involving a County vehicle, or occurring during the course of County business, to appropriate personnel.
10. Conducting pre-trip safety inspections:
 - a. Examine assigned vehicle using vehicle guidelines; ensure vehicle is in safe operating condition;
 - b. Keep vehicle interior and exterior clean and neat;
 - c. Report any damage or operating problem immediately; and report anything out of ordinary to supervisor.
11. Never pick up hitchhikers. Only County-affiliated passengers are allowed in the vehicle.

12. Leaving County vehicles on site at assigned County facilities (unless waived by supervisor). Transportation to/from site is the responsibility of the employee.
13. Not driving County vehicles outside the State of Georgia without prior approval of the employee's immediate supervisor.
14. Ensuring no alterations to the County vehicles are made (i.e., additional audio equipment, disabling of alarm systems, bumper stickers, cutting seatbelts, etc.).

Every employee in charge of any vehicle owned by the County must exercise care in the operation of that vehicle and avoid accidents; disregard of this obligation will be grounds for discharge.

Driving a County vehicle while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled or illegal substance will result in immediate termination. If an employee is cited for driving while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled or illegal substance while on other than County business, the employee must take a defensive driving test with thirty (30) calendar days of the citation. Evidence of registration and completion of the defensive driving class must be provided to the employee's supervisor. In the event that the employee's driver's license is suspended, the employee will not be allowed to drive the assigned County vehicle, will result in inability to perform the assigned job. At its discretion, the County may elect to provide work which does not require driving until the driver's license is reinstated or final disposition is obtained. A second offense will result in employee dismissal.

Incurring an avoidable vehicle accident in any twelve (12) month period will result in a written reprimand. A second avoidable accident in this period will result in a written reprimand and the requirement that the employee complete an approved driver training course at the employee's expense. Refusal to take this course, or to complete the course, will result in termination of employment. A third preventable accident will result in termination of employment.

Failure to report an accident involving a County vehicle, failure to report a change in driver's license status, or failure to report a traffic citation may result in immediate revocation of the employee's approval to drive a County vehicle, and may result in suspension without pay pending a review of the employee's motor vehicle record and driving qualifications. If at that time the employee is not qualified for approval to drive a County vehicle, and the employee's position is such that driving is a required duty, the employee may be dismissed.

J-6 Security Clearances

In certain employment areas, such as accounting, finance, public safety, or other areas where the public has a compelling interest in the security of property or life, all applicants for employment, promotion, or transfer may be required to provide additional personal information that would not be needed in other areas of employment. Such applicants/employees may also be subject to additional background screening, which may

include driver's history reports, criminal history reports, credit reports, or other review. County employees may also be required to meet the requirements to be bonded under a blanket policy at the County's expense, to satisfy the requirements of state and federal agencies.

J-7 Smoke Free Workplace Policy

Stephens County is dedicated to providing a healthy, safe, and comfortable environment for all employees and visitors. In keeping with this goal, smoking and/or the use of electronic cigarettes of any kind is not permitted throughout County facilities. This includes, but is not limited to, smoking of cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and vapes. This policy applies to all employees, visitors, contractors, and customers.

Prohibited Areas – In addition, employees are prohibited from smoking while performing their job duties, regardless of whether they work indoors or outdoors. In all cases, smoking is prohibited in enclosed buildings, any area in which a fire hazard exists, and in any area in which smoking is prohibited by state or federal law.

Permitted Areas – County management will identify designated smoking areas with “Smoking Permitted” signs. Such locations may only occur outside buildings, and away from any public entrances to ensure that secondhand smoke does not enter the enclosed area through entrances, windows, ventilation systems, or any other means.

Employees are expected to exercise common courtesy with regard to the County's Smoke Free Workplace Policy, and to respect the needs and sensitivities of co-workers. Smokers have a special obligation to keep smoking areas litter-free, and are not to abuse break of work rules.

Assistance for Smokers – Stephens County promotes employee health, and urges smokers to contact the Lung Association, the County Health Department, local medical center, or other resources for information about smoking cessation programs.

J-8 Solicitation Policy

Stephens County prohibits the solicitation, distribution and posting of materials on or at County property by any employee or non-employee, except as may be permitted by this policy. To avoid disruption of County operations, the following rules apply to solicitation or distribution of literature on County property:

1. Non-Employees – Persons not employed by the County may not solicit or distribute literature on County property at any time, for any purpose.
2. Employees – County employees may not solicit or distribute literature for any purpose during working time or in working areas. Working time includes the working time of both the employee doing the soliciting/distributing and the employee to whom the soliciting/distributing is being directed. Working time includes all time when an

employee's duties require that they be engaged in work tasks, but does not include meal breaks or scheduled breaks. Working areas include all areas of County property.

The sole exceptions to this policy are charitable and community activities supported by County management and County-sponsored programs related to County services.

J-9 Inclement Weather and Emergency Situations

In the event of inclement weather the following will apply:

The County Administrator and any one Commissioner will make the decision to open County offices late or not to open the offices because of inclement weather. If the Administrator is not available, the County Finance Director or Public Works Director will assist in the decision to open County offices late or not to open.

If the individuals set forth above determines to open late, employees who report for work at the specified time will not be required to take leave or leave without pay. If the employee does not feel comfortable or safe in their effort to go to or from work they do not have to report, however, they will either have to take a leave or leave without pay for the day.

If the decision is made to close for the day as a result of weather or weather related shutdowns, employees will not be required to report, will not be charged leave and will be compensated for the day.

When inclement weather makes roads hazardous, employees should find a safe means of transportation to work. However, employees are not required to take unreasonable risks.

*Note: Does not include staff specifically requested to report or who have been designated in advance as essential in dealing with such emergencies.

J-10 Posting of Management Information

The County maintains a centralized bulletin board or other central location for posting/conveying official County information from management to employees, such as notices from Federal or State agencies, safety information, legal notices, benefit information, job announcements, or information of special interest. Employees are responsible for reading all information posted. No personal announcements may be posted in this location.

J-11 Housekeeping

Each employee is responsible for assisting to uphold a level of professionalism in the workplace, and is requested to assist in maintaining work areas. Employees' desks, offices, and immediate work areas should be kept neat and free from clutter. Employees are asked to assist in keeping common areas (such as lobbies, conference rooms, break

rooms, supply rooms, etc.) clean and orderly. Any food or beverage containers should be removed from desks at the end of each workday, and accidental spills should be cleaned immediately.

Kitchen/break room facilities are provided as a benefit and convenience to all employees. Each employee is responsible for cleaning any dishware, silverware, or other items used. All employees who use kitchen or break room areas are expected to help with cleaning of coffee machines, countertops, refrigerators, microwaves, or other facilities. Out of respect of our co-workers, offensive smelling foods or strong odors while cooking shall not be tolerated. Any food stored in kitchen cabinets or refrigerator must be in an appropriate covered container, and food must be removed or discarded within a reasonable period of time. Employees should be aware that food or personal items left in the kitchens for any length of time may be thrown away (including containers).

J-12 Social Media Policy

A. Purpose and Intent.

The purpose and intent of this policy is to establish guidelines for employees who engage in social media activity as defined herein. This policy is not intended to prohibit any employee's personal expression in general or through social media activity in particular; however, because such activity can adversely affect the efficiency and effectiveness of Stephens County operations, as well as undermine public trust and confidence, a certain amount of regulation is necessary and appropriated. This policy therefore attempts to strike a reasonable balance between the employees' interest in engaging in social media activity and the County's interest in preventing unnecessary disruption to or interference with its operations and relationship to the public it serves.

B. Definitions.

1. For purposes of this policy, the term "social media" is defined as the online technologies through which employees and other individuals engage in "social media activity" as defined below. In most cases, the term refers to internet-based websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Tumblr, and Blogger. Online social technologies covered by this policy also include, but are not limited to, such applications as web logs/blogs, video logs/vlogs, message boards, podcasts, and wikis.
2. For purposes of this policy, the term, "social media activity" is defined as the act of sharing information or otherwise communicating through social media, including, but not limited to, the posting, uploading, reviewing, downloading, and/or forwarding of text, audio recordings, video recordings, photographs/images, symbols, or hyperlinks.

C. Scope of Policy.

1. This policy applies to all employees of the County without regard to whether their social media activity is conducted in or outside the workplace, while on or off-duty, or anonymously or through the use of pseudonyms.
2. This policy applies to all employees of the County without regard to job title, position or rank; however, with the approval of the County Administrator, the Sheriff's Department and any other department or affiliated agency of the County having special or unique concerns pertaining to its employee's social media activity may adopt and implement more restrictive SOP's or other internal rules narrowly designed to address such concerns.

D. Prohibitions on Social Media Activity.

1. All employees of the County should remain mindful that, as public servants, they are generally held to higher standards than the general public with regard to their on-duty and off-duty conduct, professionalism, and ethics. As a result, certain social media activity that may be tolerated or even acceptable in the private sector may nevertheless constitute a violation of this policy.
2. Each employee of the County who engages in social media activity must take personal responsibility for ensuring that such activity is consistent with all policies of the County, including, but not limited to, those pertaining to making false or misleading statements, promoting or endorsing violence or illegal activity, promoting or endorsing the abuse of alcohol or drugs, disparaging individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or other characteristics protected by law, or otherwise engaging in conduct unbecoming an employee of the County, bringing discredit to the County, or interfering with or detrimental to the mission or function of the County.
3. Employees must refrain from engaging in any social media activity which disqualifies them from performing, or in any way reasonably calls into question their ability to objectively perform, any essential function of their jobs. Examples of such functions include, but are not limited to, testifying, making hiring or promotion decisions or recommendations, conducting performance evaluations, and determining eligibility for County programs.
4. While any employee, at his/her discretion, may engage in social media activity with any other employee(s) consistent with the prohibitions, limitations and restrictions, and guidelines of this policy, no employee may be required or otherwise compelled to engage in such activity with another employee.
5. No employee, whether for purposes of engaging in social media activity or otherwise, may disclose or otherwise reveal any privileged or confidential information of the County, any other current or former employee of the County, or any applicant for employment with the County.

E. Limitations and Restrictions on Social Media Activity.

1. Employees are strongly discouraged from disclosing or otherwise revealing their status as employees of the County through social media and, except as otherwise authorized in advance by the County Administrator, are strictly prohibited from directly or indirectly representing themselves to be speaking on behalf of the County. Similarly, in the absence of prior approval, employees' social media activity should not reveal or depict the County's adopted logos, seals, symbols, uniforms, patches, badges, or similar items identified with the County.
2. Except as otherwise authorized in advance by the County Administrator, if an employee's status as an employee of the County is disclosed, revealed, or otherwise made apparent in connection with his/her social media activity, his/her social activity must include a prominently displayed disclaimer to the effect that the activity reflects only the employee's personal views or opinions and not those of the County; provided, however that no disclaimer will shield an employee from the imposition of appropriate corrective and/or disciplinary action for social media activity which otherwise violates this policy. Employees should recognize that social media activity is generally more likely to violate this policy and other policies of the County if their status as County employees is disclosed or revealed in connection therewith.
3. Except as otherwise authorized in advance by the County Administrator, no employee may utilize County computers or equipment for purposes of engaging in social media activity.
4. Except as otherwise authorized in advance by the County Administrator, no employee, whether for purpose of engaging in social media activity or otherwise, may post or upload any information, audio recordings, video recordings, photographs/images, etc. from County computers or equipment.
5. To preserve the continuity of the County's message, ensure accuracy, and avoid unnecessary confusion in the community, except as otherwise authorized in advance by the County Administrator, employees should refrain from engaging in any social media activity that purports or serves to announce or explain the details of County programs, projects, activities, initiatives, or events.
6. Exceptions to the above-stated limitations and restrictions may be authorized by the County Administrator; provided, however, that any request for such an exception represents a promise by the employee that, if approved, the disclosure of information, photographs, audio, video, etc. via social media activity will be fully consistent with the letter and spirit of this and all other policies of the County, any internal SOP's or rules adopted by his/her department director, as well as any laws pertaining to copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, patents, and privacy and reputational rights.
7. The County reserves the right to require any employee to remove immediately any posted or uploaded text, audio recordings, video recordings, photographs/images, etc. (even if previously approved) if such posted material constitutes a violation of this policy or other County policies.

F. Application to Other Policies.

All personnel policies of the County relating to employee conduct apply equally to conduct that occurs through social media. This includes, but is not limited to, policies relating to discrimination, harassment, retaliation, workplace violence, conflicts of interest, and political activity. Any conflicts or inconsistencies between this policy and any one or more other policies shall be resolved by the County Administrator.

G. Duty to Report.

All employees have an ongoing duty to report any violations of this policy by any other employee. The County considers this duty to report to be a critical component of its efforts to enforce this policy, and thereby ensure the safety, well-being, morale, and efficiency of its employees, preserve its reputation and goodwill in the community, and avoid or minimize unnecessary disruptions to or interference with its operations and service to the public.

H. No Expectation of Privacy in Social Media Activity.

1. County employees should be aware that social media activity is not secure or private, even if active steps are taken to restrict access. Once information has been posted or exchanged via social media, it is generally trackable, traceable, and accessible indefinitely. For this reason, and consistent with the County's current Internet & Email policy, employees should have no expectation of privacy in any social media activity conducted in the workplace and /or on-duty or in any social media activity which otherwise directly or indirectly relates to or affects the County, any of its departments, or its employees.
2. The County reserves the right to inspect or monitor any social media activity engaged in by its employees using County-owned computers or other electronic equipment or devices. In addition, employees may be required to provide access to any social media websites or other applications in which they participate upon a determination by the County that there is reasonable suspicion to believe that such access will reveal evidence of a violation of this policy or any other County policy.

I. Corrective and/or Disciplinary Action; Other Potential Consequences.

1. Employees engaging in social media activity in violation of this policy will be held accountable, and corrective and/or disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, may be taken in accordance with the County's disciplinary policies procedures.
2. If an employee is sued in part due to his/her social media activity under circumstances where the County would ordinarily provide a defense and/or indemnify the employee, the County reserves the right to withhold or withdraw such defense or indemnification in the event any such activity is found to violate this policy or any other policy of the County.

J. Interpretation and Application.

1. Nothing in this policy is intended to or will be applied in a matter that violates any employee's constitutional rights, including rights to freedom of speech, expression, and association, or federal or state rights to engage in any statutorily-protected activity.
2. Any employee unsure about the application of this policy to any particular social media activity should seek guidance from the County Administrator before engaging in such activity.
3. This policy is intended for internal use of the County only and should not be construed as establishing a higher duty or standard of care for purposes of any third party civil claims against the County and/or its employees. A violation of this policy by an employee provides only a basis for corrective and/or disciplinary action against such employee by the County.