

United States District Court Northern District of Illinois



Social Media and Social Networking Policy

District Court
Pretrial Services Office
Probation Office

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1. Authority

This Social Media and Social Networking Policy applies to all judiciary employees of the Northern District of Illinois, including interns, externs, and other volunteer court employees. This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#) and the [Information Technology Policy](#).

This policy governs the use of all social media. The absence of an explicit reference to a specific site does not limit the extent of the application of this policy.

2. Use of Social Media

Social media and networking internet sites (“social media”) allow people to connect and interact with others over the internet. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, TikTok, WhatsApp, Tumblr, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, and personal websites.

People use social media to maintain relationships with others or to pursue professional opportunities such as networking, marketing, or soliciting business ideas. The danger of social media, however, is that a large number of people, including litigants, defendants/persons under supervision, and potentially harmful individuals, may have access to, or be able to obtain access to, information displayed on such sites or make available that information later for public consumption. Certain social media platforms enable the user to limit who has access to displayed information, other platforms do not. Social media users should assume that others may have access to any information displayed even after deleted.

3. Principles

Please keep the following general policies and procedures in mind as you participate on social media sites:

a. Think Before you Post

Internet postings—whether they are text, photos, videos, or audio—remain accessible long after

the user forgets about them. Nothing is “private” on the internet despite people’s best efforts to keep things private. Do not post anything on the internet that you would not want to read on the front page of the newspaper.

b. Be Aware of What’s There

Some social networking sites allow others to post messages and photos to your “page” – content that you may not even be aware of. If you participate in social networking, check

regularly to make sure the content, whether posted by you or others, meets these guidelines.

c. Confidentiality

Court employees handle confidential and sensitive information, and the restrictions that court employees normally observe in the performance of their day-to-day duties also apply to their use of social media. Just as court employees are prohibited from disclosing sensitive, non-public information to the media and general public—in person or by e-mail, phone, or mail—the same applies to social media. Former employees should also observe the same restrictions on disclosure of confidential information that apply to current judicial employees.

d. Remember the Code

Public postings are governed by the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#). Be respectful to the court, its employees, and the parties before it. Court employees are expected to avoid impropriety and conduct themselves in a manner that does not detract from the dignity and independence of the judicial system. This restriction also applies to comments posted on blogs or other social media sites. An employee who maintains a blog should remove all references to that person's employment. If there is something you would not communicate via e-mail or in person because it would be a violation of court policy, you should not communicate it to anyone via a social media.

The general restriction on use or disclosure of confidential information does not prevent, nor should it discourage, an employee or former employee from reporting or disclosing misconduct, including sexual or other forms of harassment, by a judge, supervisor, or other person.

e. Observe Security Protocol

Court employees must also take care to avoid doing things that would compromise the security of the courthouse, its offices, and employees. To maintain security, do not post pictures of the inside or outside of the courthouse, its offices, court events, or judicial officers. Be careful when disclosing your place of employment because social media sites are notoriously unsecure. Knowledge of your place of employment could place employees in situations where pressure could be applied on them to corrupt the integrity of the judicial process. Do not post personal information about a judicial officer, including a judge's family information, residence, or location at any given time.

f. Do Not Forget your Day Job

Your online activities should not interfere with your work commitments. Checking social media throughout the day can prevent you from fulfilling your job obligations.

4. Rules

The Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees applies to all online activities, including an employee's use of social media. Court employees also must comply with the following rules and procedures when participating on social media sites:

a. Disclosure of Information

Court employees may not disclose any confidential, sensitive, or non-public information obtained during their employment. Court employees should also refrain from discussing any of the court's internal processes and procedures, whether they are of a confidential or non-confidential nature.

Court employees may not disclose any information or post any content regarding pending or other court-related matters, including comments regarding parties or attorneys who appear before the Court.

b. Identification as a Federal Court Employee

Court employees may identify themselves on social networking sites as employees of the federal courts in general terms, but may not list the specific court or judge, subject to the following exception: When identifying their employer on professional networking website, such as LinkedIn, court employees may include a job title (e.g., "federal law clerk") and the specific court (e.g., "District Court for the Northern District of Illinois"), but may not directly identify the judicial officer for whom they work. Court employees must not discuss their job responsibilities for the Court on the internet without the express permission of their supervisor. An indication that you work for the court may bring unwanted attention or even harassment to you, the court, or your judge.

c. Restriction on Internet Use

Court employees must abide by the restrictions on personal use of the public internet set forth in the Information Technology Policy. For Court employees who are permitted to access social networking sites, these activities should not interfere with their work commitments.

Use of a court email address for social media is not permitted.

d. Copyright, Fair Use and Financial Disclosure Laws

Court employees must comply with all copyright, fair use, and financial disclosure laws. Many social networking sites require users to abide by a terms-of-service document. Court employees are responsible for reading, knowing, and complying with the terms of service of the sites they use.

e. Photographs

Court employees may not post any photographs that may compromise court security, the security of individual officers or employees, or the integrity of the court or judicial officers. Court employees are strictly prohibited from displaying graphics, scanned documents or data, diagrams, videos, photographs, or other types of content depicting: chambers of judicial officers, courtrooms, courthouses or federal buildings and offices (interior and exterior), or judicial officers without those individuals' express permission.

f. Disclosure of Confidential Information

Court employees are prohibited from posting confidential information about a judge or a court, including a judge's location at a certain time. For example, court employees should not disclose where a judge is on vacation or if the judge is traveling to a particular city for a work engagement.

g. Use of Court Seal or Logo

Court employees may not use the United States District Court seal or logos in any manner. Similarly, employees may not reference their position with the Court where that reference would suggest that the employee is seeking special attention.

h. Partisan Political Activity

In accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#), court employees must refrain from partisan political activity. Court employees should not indicate a political allegiance on social networking sites and should not express views for or against a policy that is of current political debate (including "liking" a Facebook post). Court employees may not participate in any social media that relates to any political issue, political activity or politician, whether partisan or nonpartisan.

5. Violations of Policy

Court employees should inform their supervisors if they become aware of any violations of the Social Media and Social Networking Policy.

6. Enforcement

The Court reserves the right to monitor its employees' use of social media by monitoring its employees' internet activities as set forth in the [Information Technology Policy](#).

The Court further reserves the right to visit and monitor social media sites to ensure that employees are not violating the court's Social Media and Social Networking Policy via court or any other computers, including employees' personal computers. These policies and

procedures do not supersede other existing policies. Failure to adhere to these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action, which may include termination.

For the Court:



Hon. Rebecca R. Pallmeyer
Chief Judge

Dated this 10th day of July 2023

Amended Plan Approved by the full Court on June 29, 2023