

**United States District Court  
Northern District of Illinois**

**Social Media and Social Networking Policy**

**1.1 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.

**2.1 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, WeChat, WhatsApp, Tumblr, YouTube, blogs, Snapchat, Instagram, and personal websites.

People may 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 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 enable the user to limit who will have access to displayed information. The user does not necessarily have the ability, however, to prevent those with access to the displayed information from posting that information on their own sites. Facebook users may, for example, give a friend access to their Facebook page, and that friend may then make the displayed information available to others who may not have direct access to the initial users’ pages. Social media users should therefore assume that others will have access to information displayed however briefly via social media.

**3.1 Principles**

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

**3.1.1 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.

### **3.1.2 Speak for yourself, not the Court.**

On social networking sites, many individuals list their occupations and/or places of employment. Considering the sensitive nature of our work, Court employees are prohibited from identifying themselves with the Court or their judge on social networking sites, except that judicial employees, with the permission of the Court or judge, may state their association with the Court or judge on professional networking sites like LinkedIn. An indication that you work for the Court may bring unwanted attention or even harassment to you, the Court, or your judge. Anything posted on our site can also be attributed to your judicial employer. You are a representative of the Court and should conduct yourself in a way to avoid bringing embarrassment upon yourself and the Court. Court employees should abide by a simple rule: if you are not speaking to someone directly or over a secure land line, you must assume that anything you say or write is available for public consumption.

#### **3.1.2.1 Confidentiality**

Make sure to abide by all of the Court’s confidentiality and disclosure provisions. 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 over the phone, the same applies to social media. Furthermore, Court employees should refrain from discussing any of the Court’s internal processes and procedures, whether they are of a non-confidential or confidential nature. Former employees should also observe the same restrictions on disclosure of confidential information that apply to current judicial employees.

#### **3.1.2.2 Remember the Code.**

Any public postings are governed by the Judiciary’s [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. As such, Court employees are restricted from engaging in partisan political activity and fund-raising activities via social media that could compromise judicial independence and integrity. Court employees who work within Judicial Chambers must refrain from all political activity. Information on blogs or other social media should comply with the Court’s confidentiality and any other relevant Court policies. 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 his or her employment. Please keep these policies and procedures in mind as you participate on social media sites. 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 outlet such as Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter, etc.

Remember that you are a representative of the Court and should conduct yourself in a way to avoid bringing embarrassment upon yourself and the Court.

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.

### **3.1.2.3 Observe Security Protocol.**

Court employees must also take care to avoid doing things that would compromise the security of the courthouse and employees. To maintain security, do not post pictures of the courthouse, inside or outside; do not post pictures of Court events, and do not post pictures of the Court's judicial officers. Be careful when disclosing your place of employment: Social media sites are notoriously unsecure environments. 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 your judicial officer including her location at any given time, her family information, or her residence.

### **3.1.2.4 Do Not Forget your Day Job.**

You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job commitments. Checking social media throughout the day can prevent you from fulfilling your job obligations.

## **4.1 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:

### **4.1.1 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.

#### **4.1.2 Identification as a Federal Court Employee**

Court employees may identify themselves as employees of the federal courts generally on social networking sites, but, subject to the following exception for professional networking sites, may not specify the court or judge for which they work. 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”). Court employees, however, may not identify the specific judicial officer for whom they directly work for or court. Court employees must not discuss their job responsibilities for the Court on the Internet without the express permission of their supervisor.

#### **4.1.3 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 networking (e.g., blogs, Facebook, Twitter) is not permitted.

#### **4.1.4 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 that users, when they sign up, agree 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.

#### **4.1.5 Photographs**

Court employees may not post any photographs that may compromise court security or the security of individual officers or employees or that may compromise the integrity of the court or that of 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 (interior and exterior), or judicial officers without those individuals’ prior express permission.

#### **4.1.6 Disclosure of Confidential Information**

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

#### **4.1.7 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

#### **4.1.7 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.

In accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#), Court employees who are judges' personal staff and court executives must refrain from all political activities. These Court employees may not participate in any social media that relates to any political issue, political activity or politician, whether partisan or nonpartisan.

#### **5.1 Violations of Policy**

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

#### **6.1 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' own 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.