

304. Institutional Neutrality and Political Activities of System Personnel

1. Application of Rule

This rule and any guidelines which may be promulgated hereunder apply to all administrative officers, faculty, staff or other employees of The University of Alabama, The University of Alabama at Birmingham (“UAB”), The University of Alabama in Huntsville, or the UAB Health System (collectively, The University of Alabama System (“System”)).

2. Institutional Neutrality

The Board of Trustees (“Board”) is committed to the First Amendment rights of free speech and free expression for all members of the System community. The Board may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression in a viewpoint-neutral manner to ensure those rights are protected and that expression does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the System.

To further safeguard those rights, the System itself must remain neutral on political and social issues unless the issue directly affects any aspects of the System’s core operations. Taking institutional positions on an issue or making statements about it risks alienating members of the System community and destroying the intellectually independent environment upon which the System thrives. It is for the Board to decide what issues directly affect aspects of the System’s core operations, so members of the System community exercising their First Amendment rights should make clear they do not speak on behalf of the System, its universities, hospitals, or any administrative unit within the System.

Consistent with its commitment to institutional neutrality, the Board hereby reaffirms its historic position that the System shall neither endorse nor support any candidate for nomination or election to any public office of the State of Alabama or any other political entity.

3. Use of System Resources for Political Activity

The Board shall continue to require that all System employees comply with state law regarding the use of any System resources, time, or property for or on behalf of any political candidate, campaign, or organization or for any contribution or solicitation of any contribution to a political campaign or organization. Nothing in this Rule, however, is intended to discourage the impartial use of University facilities as a public forum.

3. Political Activities of System Personnel

System employees do not surrender their civil and political rights and responsibilities by virtue of their employment. Indeed, the Board encourages System employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities as private citizens. The Board recognizes, however, that it is often

difficult for the public to distinguish between the public and private activities of System employees, particularly when those employees occupy senior administrative positions within the institution. For that reason and because the System is a public institution, the Board wishes to guard against those actions that are illegal and improper as well as those that may create the appearance of impropriety.

It is incumbent upon System employees to make clear in any political activity whatsoever that they are acting in a private and individual capacity and that their activities have neither System sponsorship nor support. It is also incumbent upon System employees to avoid any private actions of a collective nature that may lend or appear to lend the support of the System to political activity. Because of their prominent identification with the institution, the major administrative officers of the System have a particularly heavy obligation to ensure that their activities are not misinterpreted or misunderstood.

System employees interacting with public officials and representatives of either the federal, state, county, or municipal government should take due care to observe and comply with applicable requirements of ethics and other laws that may govern such interactions.

4. Procedures for System Employees Who Seek or Hold Public Office

- a. No System employee may seek or hold public office and remain in the employ of the University if such activities could or would result in a conflict of interest or interfere with the employee's carrying out his or her responsibilities.
- b. System employees who intend to seek election or re-election to public office at the state, county, or municipal level must first obtain written approval from their supervisor, the president of the applicable institution, and the Chancellor or his/her designee. In cases where the workload of the employee is the primary concern, Leaves of Absence during periods of running for office or serving in public office may be considered.
- c. System employees elected to or holding public office at the state, county, or municipal level must have a written Management Plan to assist in avoiding any conflict of interest or conflict of commitment. Such a plan should speak directly to any potential or perceived conflicts, including management of time, resources, and property. A written plan must be agreed to by the employee, his/her supervisor, the president, and the Chancellor or his/her designee.
- d. Copies of approvals pursuant to paragraph (b) and plans pursuant to paragraph (c) must be sent to the Chancellor or his/her designee to be maintained in a central location. A copy should also be maintained in the HR records of the employee.

4. Report to the Chancellor

If there exists a reasonable question whether a potential activity of a System employee is consistent with the policy of the Board on political activities of System personnel, the employee shall report the proposed activity to the Chancellor for approval through appropriate channels.

(Adopted August 23, 1978 as Rule 320; renumbered December 5, 1997; amended June 7, 2019 and September 5, 2024.)