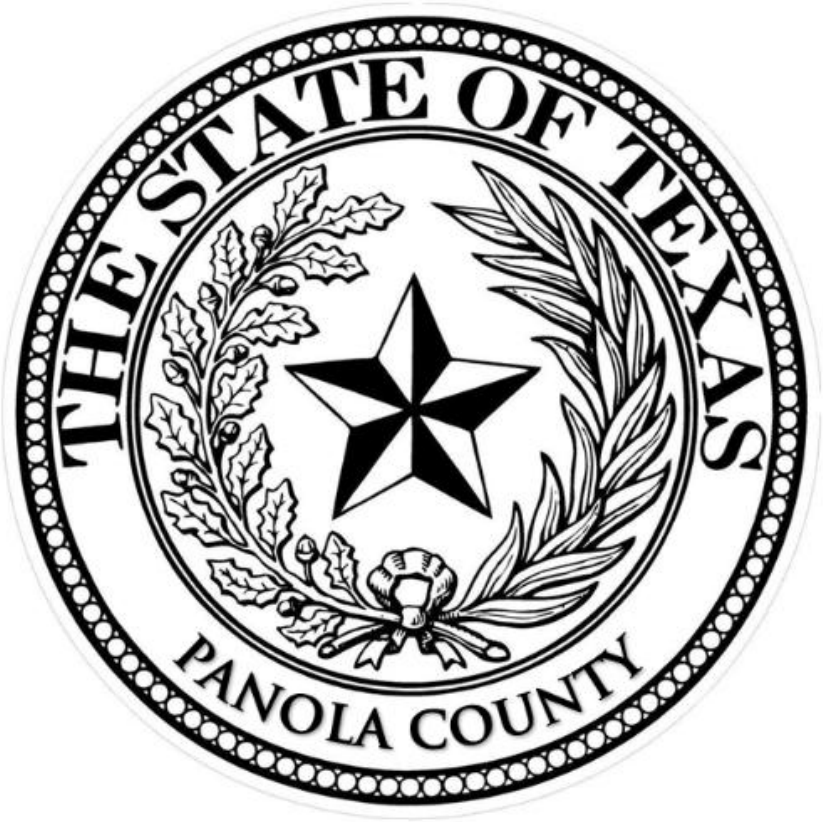
PANOLA COUNTY



PERSONNEL MANUAL
(EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POLICY NUMBER AND NAME	DATE MODIFIED/EFF
COMMISSIONERS COURT ORDER	10/20/2026
EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGMENT	10/20/2026
ELECTED OFFICIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT	10/20/2026
INTRO TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT	10/20/2026
INTRO TO HANDBOOK	10/20/2026
1.0 EMPLOYMENT AND POLICIES	
1.01 APPLICATION OF PERSONNEL POLICIES	10/20/2026
1.02 EMPLOYMENT AT WILL	10/20/2026
1.03 EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATION	10/20/2026
1.04 NOTICE OF VACANCIES AND APPLICATIONS	10/20/2026
1.05 EMPLOYMENT TESTING	10/20/2026
1.06 VERIFICATION OF WORK ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFICATIONS	10/20/2026
1.07 ORIENTATION	10/20/2026
1.08 NEW HIRE PAPERWORK	10/20/2026
1.09 EXIT PAPERWORK	10/20/2026
1.10 RETURN OF PROPERTY	10/20/2026
1.11 EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATIONS	10/20/2026
1.12 PERSONNEL RECORDS	10/20/2026
1.13 HIPAA	10/20/2026
1.14 EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY	10/20/2026
1.15 AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADAAA)	10/20/2026
1.16 PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT (PWFA)	10/20/2026
1.17 POST-RETIREMENT EMPLOYMENT	10/20/2026
2.0 EMPOYEE ETHICS, CONDUCT & RESPONSIBILITY	
2.01 WORK STANDARDS	10/20/2026
2.02 ATTENDANCE & TIMELINESS	10/20/2026
2.03 APPEARANCE & ATTITUDE	10/20/2026
2.04 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST	10/20/2026
2.05 NEPOTISIM	10/20/2026
2.06 GIFTS, GRATUITIES & HONORARIUMS	10/20/2026
2.07 UNLAWFUL WORKPLACE DISCRIMNATION & HARRASSMANT	10/20/2026
2.08 CRIMINAL CONDUCT	10/20/2026
2.09 COMMUNICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA	10/20/2026
2.10 POLITICAL ACTIVITY	10/20/2026
2.11 LICENSES & CERTIFICATIONS	10/20/2026
2.12 TOBACCO & VAPE FREE WORKPLACE	10/20/2026
2.13 DATING IN THE WORKPLACE	10/20/2026
3.0 COUNTY PROPERTY & EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY	
3.01 EQUIPMENT & PROPERTY	10/20/2026
3.02 SEARCHES & INSPECTIONS	10/20/2026

3.03 COUNTY NOTARY BONDS & FEES	10/20/2026
4.0 SAFETY & HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES	
4.01 DRUGS & ALCOHOL	10/20/2026
4.02 INJURY REPORTING AND WORKPLACE SAFETY	10/20/2026
4.03 WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS AND ADMINISTRATION	10/20/2026
4.04 WORKPLACE VIOLENCE	10/20/2026
4.05 WEATHER CLOSINGS & EMERGENCIES	10/20/2026
4.06 CONFIDENTIALITY	10/20/2026
5.0 EMPLOYEE PAYROLL	
5.01 FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT (FLSA) SAFE HARBOR	10/20/2026
5.02 COMPENSATION AND PAY ADMINISTRATION	10/20/2026
5.03 PAYROLL SCHEDULE & PAYMENT METHODS	10/20/2026
5.04 PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS	10/20/2026
5.05 REPORTING HOURS WORKED	10/20/2026
5.06 WORK PERIODS; OVERTIME & COMPENSATORY TIME	10/20/2026
5.07 AFTER HOURS WORK AND CALL OUT	10/20/2026
5.08 PROMOTIONS, LATERAL JOB CHANGES & DEMOTIONS	10/20/2026
6.0 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS	
6.01 HEALTH, DENTAL, VISION & LIFE INSURANCE	10/20/2026
6.02 SOCIAL SECURITY	10/20/2026
6.03 PENSION	10/20/2026
6.04 UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION	10/20/2026
6.05 RETIREES & SURVIVING SPOUSES	10/20/2026
7.0 LEAVE TIME ACCRUALS & LEAVE BENEFITS	
7.01 LEAVE TIME APPROVALS	10/20/2026
7.02 HOLIDAYS	10/20/2026
7.03 VACATION LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.04 SICK LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.05 WORK PERFORMED DURING APPROVED LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.06 BREAK TIMES AND NURSING MOTHERS	10/20/2026
7.07 BEREAVEMENT LEAVE OR FUNERAL LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.08 EMERGENCY CLOSURE LEAVE AND COMPENSATION	10/20/2026
7.09 MILITARY LEAVE, JURY DUTY & CIVIL LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.10 FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE	10/20/2026
7.11 LEAVE OF ABSENCE	10/20/2026
7.12 ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE	10/20/2026
8.0 DISCIPLINE / GRIEVANCE / SEPARATION	
8.01 DISCIPLINE & AT WILL EMPLOYMENT	10/20/2026
8.02 DISPUTE RESOLUTION & GRIEVANCES	10/20/2026
8.03 SEPARATION FROM EMPLOYMENT	10/20/2026
8.04 INSURANCE CONTINUATION AFTER SEPARATION	10/20/2026
9.0 TRAVEL AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT	
9.01 TRAVEL POLICY	10/20/2026
9.02 EDUCATION & TRAINING	10/20/2026
9.03 EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT	10/20/2026

9.04 REQUEST FOR CONFERENCE OR TRAINING ATTENDANCE	10/20/2026
9.05 PER DIEM FOR MEALS AND INCIDENTALS	10/20/2026
9.06 TRAVEL, LODGING AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT	10/20/2026
9.07 TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT REQUIREMENTS	10/20/2026
9.08 COMMUTE TIME TO & FROM CONFERENCE	10/20/2026
APPENDIX A: FORMS FOR ALL PERSONNEL	
FORM TR-01 CONFERENCE/TRAVEL REQUEST	10/20/2026
FORM TR-02 PER DIEM ADVANCE REQUEST	10/20/2026
FORM TR-03 TRAVEL EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT FORM	10/20/2026
FORM TR-04 JUSTIFICATION FOR AIR TRAVEL	10/20/2026
CREDIT CARD USE POLICY & CERTIFICATION	10/20/2026
CREDIT CARD CHARGE REPORT	10/20/2026
RETIREE & SURVIVING SPOUSE MEDICAL SELECTION FORM	10/20/2026
APPENDIX B: FORMS & INFORMATION FOR SUPERVISORS	
JOB APPLICATION TEMPLATE	10/20/2026
JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE	10/20/2026
JOB DESCRIPTION CHECKLIST	10/20/2026
EXEMPT EMPLOYEE CATEGORIES & FACT SHEET	10/20/2026
SWORN AFFIDAVIT FOR RETIREE REHIRE	10/20/2026

PANOLA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT ORDER

WHEREAS the Panola County Commissioners Court desires to provide the employees of Panola County with a uniform format for dealing with various employment related issues; and

WHEREAS the Panola County Commissioners Court wishes to adequately communicate to the employees the policies and procedures of the County:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Panola County Commissioners Court hereby approves and adopts the PANOLA COUNTY PERSONNEL MANUAL

ADOPTED THIS _____ DAY OF _____, 20____

_____
County Judge

_____ _____
Commissioner Pct 1 Commissioner Pct 2

_____ _____
Commissioner Pct 3 Commissioner Pct 4

Witnessed and Attested By:

_____
County Clerk

EMPLOYEE
ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND RECEIPT OF PANOLA COUNTY PERSONNEL MANUAL

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Panola County Personnel Manual. I understand that it is my responsibility to read, understand, and comply with the policies contained in the manual and any applicable departmental supplements. If I have questions regarding any policy, I will consult my Supervisor or Department Head.

I understand that the Personnel Manual is intended as a guide and does not create a contract of employment or alter the at-will employment relationship. Panola County or I may terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause or notice, so long as there is no unlawful reason.

I understand that Panola County may revise, amend, or discontinue policies, procedures, or benefits described in the manual at any time.

I agree to maintain and update the manual and any supplements provided during my employment.

Employees who fail or refuse to sign this acknowledgment within five (5) working days of receipt may be subject to termination of employment.

_____ _____

Signature of Employee Date Signed

_____

Printed Name of Employee

RETURN SIGNED ORIGINAL TO COUNTY TREASURER WITHIN 5 DAYS OF RECEIPT

ELECTED OFFICIAL
ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND RECEIPT OF PANOLA COUNTY PERSONNEL MANNUAL

I, the undersigned, acknowledge receipt of the Panola County Personnel Manual.

I understand that, as an elected official, certain provisions of the Personnel Manual may not apply to me personally or in my official capacity. However, I acknowledge that the Personnel Manual contains policies and procedures applicable to county employees and departmental operations that may relate to my duties, including the supervision, management, or oversight of county personnel.

My receipt of the Personnel Manual does not constitute an agreement to be personally bound by provisions that are not otherwise applicable by law, county policy, or the nature of my office. Rather, this acknowledgment confirms that I have been provided access to the Personnel Manual and understand its role in establishing county-wide personnel practices and expectations.

I further acknowledge that departments under the supervision or authority of elected officials may maintain separate or supplemental personnel policies or procedures. I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that any such departmental policies or procedures for departments I oversee are consistent with the Panola County Personnel Manual and comply with applicable federal and state laws, regulations, and county-wide policies.

My signature below confirms only that I have received the Panola County Personnel Manual and understand its purpose and general applicability within county government.

_____ _____

Signature of Elected Official Date Signed

_____

Printed Name of Elected Official

RETURN SIGNED ORIGINAL TO TREASURER WITHIN 5 DAYS OF RECEIPT

INTRODUCTION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

The basic structure of Panola County government and the functions it performs are prescribed by the State of Texas. The County itself, as well as many of its offices, are created by the Texas Constitution and state law.

COMMISSIONERS COURT

The Commissioners Court is the governing body of the County and possesses the authority and responsibilities necessary to affect all areas of County operations. It is composed of five elected officials: the County Judge, who is elected countywide, and four County Commissioners, each elected from a different geographical area (precinct) within the County.

As a body, the Commissioners Court serves as the chief policymaking and administrative authority of County government. Among its many responsibilities, the Court:

- Sets the tax rate
- Adopts the annual budget
- Approves new programs or modifies existing programs
- Adopts regulations and policies
- Approves and manages County facilities

The Court carries out these and other duties during regular and special sessions. Decisions of the Court require a majority vote.

INDEPENDENT ELECTED OFFICIALS

While the Commissioners Court has broad authority over County operations, state law grants certain powers and responsibilities to other elected officials. These officials are directly accountable to the voters for performing the duties assigned to their offices.

In these areas, although the Commissioners Court may influence operations through the budget process, each elected official retains administrative and operational authority over their respective office or department.

APPOINTED OFFICES

State law also mandates certain offices whose directors are appointed by elected officials. It also authorizes the Commissioners Court to establish departments and appoint personnel to lead them. One example of a state mandated appointed official is the County Auditor, who is appointed by the District Judge.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Sheriff and Constables are elected officials responsible for investigating crimes and arresting lawbreakers. The District Attorney, who is also independently elected, is responsible for prosecuting criminal offenses.

Judicial proceedings are overseen by independently elected judges. If convicted, offenders may be supervised by appointed probation officers or sentenced to the County Jail, which is operated by the Sheriff's Office.

COORDINATION AND OPERATION

The combination of independent and shared authority among elected and appointed officials requires cooperation and coordination throughout County government. Effective County operations depend upon collaboration among departments, officials, and employees.

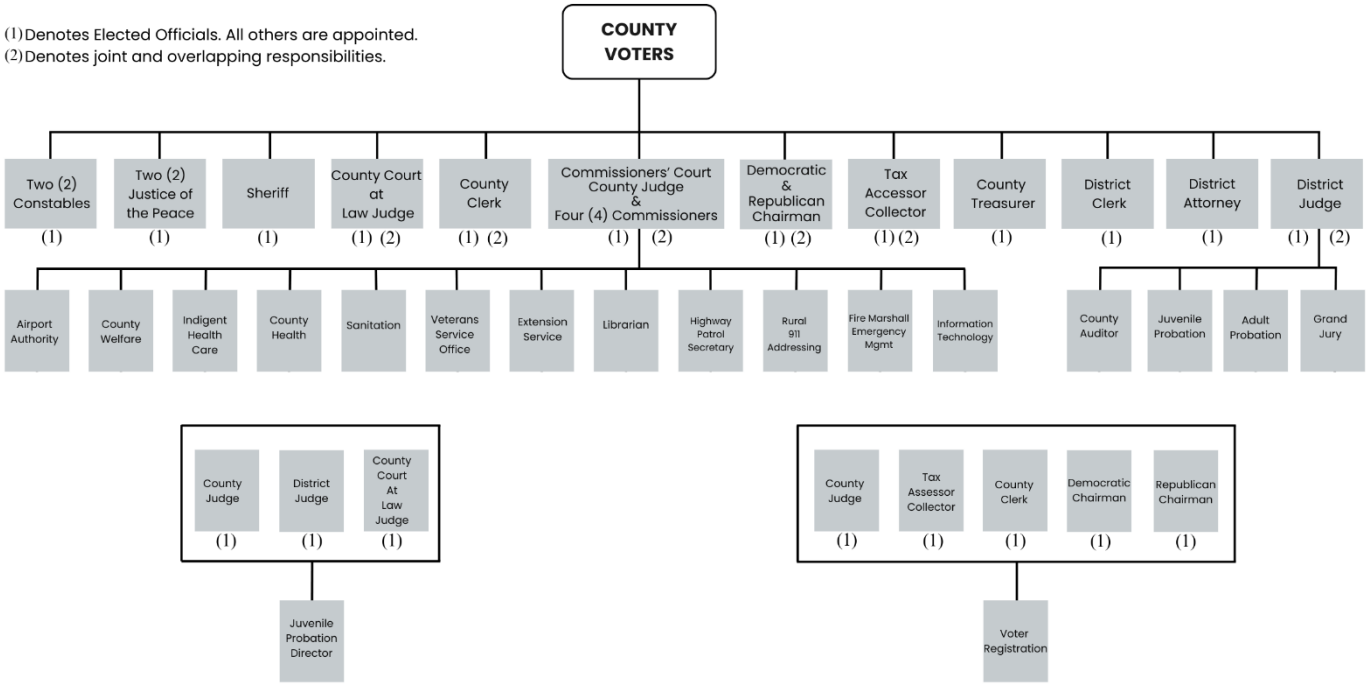
THE BUDGET

The County Judge serves as the budget officer for the Commissioners Court. Each year, the County Judge, assisted by the County Auditor, prepares a proposed budget covering anticipated expenditures for the upcoming fiscal year. The fiscal year for Panola County is the calendar year, beginning January 1 and ending December 31.

Development of the budget involves estimating revenues from various sources and working with elected officials, appointed officials, and department heads to determine County needs for the next year. The preliminary budget may include a proposed tax rate sufficient to generate revenue necessary to meet estimated expenditures. The proposed budget is submitted to the Commissioners Court for discussion, evaluation, and public hearings before adoption of the final budget.

No County funds may be spent unless the County Auditor certifies that sufficient funds are available in the appropriate budget line item and that the expenditure is authorized by law.

PANOLA COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



INTRODUCTION TO EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

These personnel policies for Panola County have been developed to provide employees with a better understanding of the employment relationship between the County and its employees.

These policies are intended to:

- Define the rights and privileges of County employees
- State the rules and regulations applicable to County employees
- Outline the expectations the County has for its employees
- Provide a system of fair and consistent treatment for all employees
- Provide information and procedures intended to promote effective personnel administration within the County

Each policy contained in this handbook is intended to stand independently. Therefore, if any policy is determined to be invalid by federal or state law or other applicable authority, such determination shall not affect the validity or application of the remaining policies.

This handbook is not intended to create, nor shall it be construed as creating, an employment contract. The policies contained in this handbook may be amended, revised, or withdrawn at any time at the sole discretion of Panola County. Any such changes shall supersede prior written, verbal, or implied policies or practices. County employees will be notified of policy changes and the effective date of those changes.

These policies are intended to serve the interests of both Panola County and its employees. Employees with questions regarding any personnel policy are encouraged to discuss them with their supervisor or department head.

1.0 COUNTY POLICIES AND EMPLOYMENT

1.01 APPLICATION OF PERSONNEL POLICIES

These personnel policies apply uniformly to all Panola County employees unless otherwise exempted by law, contract, or specific provisions applicable to certain employee groups, including law enforcement personnel.

Under Texas county government structure, each elected official serves as the administrative head of their respective office or department. Accordingly, each Elected Official, Appointed Official, and Department Head is responsible for the administration, interpretation, and enforcement of these personnel policies within their respective departments, including all personnel decisions such as hiring, supervision, discipline, and termination.

The County Treasurer's Office serves as the centralized administrative office for designated human resources-related functions, including payroll administration, onboarding and separation processing, maintenance of personnel records, benefits administration support, workers' compensation reporting, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) coordination, open enrollment administration, and intake and coordination of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints. These administrative functions are distinct from supervisory and disciplinary authority. The County Treasurer's Office does not direct, override, or participate in departmental personnel decisions such as hiring, discipline, or termination, which remain solely within the authority of the respective Elected Official or Department Head. The Treasurer's role is limited to administrative processing, policy guidance, and compliance support under applicable law and County policy.

Departments may adopt supplemental policies and procedures necessary for their operational needs, provided such policies and procedures do not conflict with this handbook or applicable federal or state law.

All employees must acknowledge receipt of the Employee Handbook by signing the required acknowledgment form no later than the fifth working day following employment or receipt of the handbook. By signing the acknowledgment, employees accept responsibility for reading, understanding, and complying with all policies contained herein. Failure to sign the acknowledgment form may result in termination of employment.

The Sheriff's Department, Detention Center, and Road & Bridge Departments maintain supplemental policies in addition to this handbook.

Employees who knowingly violate County policies are subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

1.02 EMPLOYMENT-AT-WILL

Panola County employees are at-will employees. The County or the employee may terminate the employment relationship at any time for any reason or for no reason so long as there is no illegal reason. Panola County strives to treat all employees fairly in accordance with its personnel policies. However, this handbook and the personnel policies referenced do not constitute or imply

a contract, agreement, promise or guarantee of employment or continued employment. Panola County also reserves the right to change or eliminate these policies and any benefits referenced herein at any time and without prior notice to employees.

1.03 EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATION

Employment classifications, including exempt and non-exempt status, shall be determined in accordance with applicable provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and other applicable law. Elected Officials and Department Heads may provide input regarding job duties and operational responsibilities. FLSA classification determinations shall be made in consultation with the County Treasurer's Office and legal counsel when appropriate to assist in promoting consistent application of applicable wage and hour laws and County policy. Applicable FLSA classification guidelines are included in Appendix B of this Personnel Manual.

Full-time regular employment is generally defined as employees regularly scheduled to work between 30 and 40 hours per week, as determined by the County. Full-time positions may be classified as either exempt or non-exempt in accordance with applicable law.

Full-time regular employees are eligible for County benefits, including retirement participation, health insurance, paid leave accrual, and County-recognized holidays, in accordance with applicable plan documents and County policy.

Non-exempt employees are eligible for compensatory time or overtime compensation in accordance with the requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act and County policy. Exempt employees are not eligible for compensatory time or overtime compensation.

Department Heads should notify employees of their classification at the time of hire or upon any subsequent change in classification.

Part-time regular employees are those who work 29 or fewer hours per week, subject to budgetary allowances. Part-time regular employees are eligible for County retirement benefits but are not eligible for paid holidays. Employees hired into or changed to part-time status after December 31, 2024, are not eligible for leave accrual benefits.

Temporary employees are hired on a short-term basis for a specific period not to exceed six (6) months or for a specific assignment or project. Temporary employees are not eligible for County retirement benefits, health insurance, paid holidays, or leave accrual benefits.

1.04 NOTICE OF VACANCIES AND APPLICATIONS

All vacancies in Panola County will be posted in a local newspaper of general circulation and/or on the County's official website, as determined by the hiring department. The County may also utilize additional recruitment methods, including outreach beyond Panola County, when necessary to attract qualified candidates with specialized skills or when deemed in the best interest of the County. Applications will be accepted in the office of the department with the posted vacancy or through any other submission method designated in the job posting. Applications submitted for positions that are not currently open or posted will not be retained for consideration.

1.05 EMPLOYMENT TESTING

The County may administer skills, qualification, performance, medical, and drug tests as part of the employment process to evaluate an applicant's ability to perform essential job functions and to determine eligibility for employment. Applicants who do not meet minimum qualifications or who fail to complete required testing may be removed from consideration in accordance with applicable law and County policy.

1.05(a)Post-Offer Medical and Drug Testing

Final candidates may be required to undergo post-offer medical examinations and/or drug screening by a County-designated provider. Except for select departments, the Treasurer's Office will coordinate scheduling of required testing. All required testing must be completed prior to the employee's first day of work. Failure to complete required testing may result in withdrawal of the employment offer. A positive drug test may disqualify an applicant for up to one (1) year, subject to applicable law and County policy. Testing records will be maintained as confidential in accordance with Section 1.05(c) and applicable law.

1.05(b) Record Confidentiality and Custody

Confidential testing records will be maintained in a secure location separate from personnel files and accessed only by authorized officials with a legitimate need to know. Law enforcement hiring records, including the Sheriff's Office, are maintained by the respective law enforcement agency in accordance with applicable requirements.

1.05(c) Requirements for Operation of County Vehicles and Equipment

Positions requiring operation of a motor vehicle or equipment require a valid driver's license and acceptable driving record. Licenses and driving records may be verified before hire and periodically thereafter. Employees in licensed or certified positions remain subject to Section 2.11 of this Personnel Manual.

1.06 VERIFICATION OF WORK ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFICATIONS

The employing department is responsible for verifying the applicant's employment experience, education, and skills before extending a job offer. In accordance with federal law, each new employee must, within the first three (3) days of employment, complete and sign an INS Form I-9 and provide proof of identity and employment eligibility. New employees must also complete a W-4 form, the Employee Handbook acknowledgment, and any other required employment or benefit-related forms. Employees eligible for insurance benefits must complete applicable insurance enrollment forms and provide dependent information, if applicable. The required forms mentioned above will be completed and processed through the County Treasurer's Office.

An applicant who makes false statements on an employment application, attempts to improperly influence the hiring process by offering money, services, or anything of value, or is otherwise legally disqualified from holding the position will not be considered for employment. Applicants who fail to meet required physical qualifications, when applicable, or who fail to provide proof of identity and authorization to work within the first three (3) days of employment will also be disqualified.

1.07 ORIENTATION

The County Treasurer's Office provides general employee onboarding and orientation for Panola County employees. "Onboarding" includes completion of new hire documentation, payroll setup, benefits enrollment and explanation, and distribution of the Employee Handbook and applicable workplace rules.

The onboarding process conducted by the County Treasurer's Office is administrative in nature and does not include departmental job training, supervision, or assignment-specific instruction. More detailed job duty orientation and training will be provided within the employee's specific department under the direction of the respective Elected Official, Appointed Official, or Department Head.

1.08 NEW HIRE PAPERWORK

Employment paperwork will be administered through the County Treasurer's Office. Department Heads should notify the Treasurer's office as soon as possible with notice of a new hire. Employment paperwork should be scheduled and completed no later than the first day of employment.

1.09 EXIT PAPERWORK

An employee will need to contact the County Treasurer's office to set up an appointment to fill out paperwork pertaining to retirement, separation and any other necessary exit forms. To ensure an accurate payroll process regarding insurance deductions, etc., separating employees are encouraged to contact the Treasurer's office at least 2 weeks prior to known date of separation. Retiring employees are encouraged to give as much advanced notice as possible, preferably at least one month's notice.

1.10 RETURN OF PROPERTY

Employees must return all Panola County property immediately upon request or upon termination of employment. Panola County may take all action deemed appropriate to recover or protect its property. Where permitted by applicable laws, Panola County may withhold from an employee's check or final paycheck the cost of any items that are not returned when required. Employees are responsible for items issued to them by Panola County or in their possession or control, such as, but not limited to the following:

- Uniforms/protective equipment
- Credit Cards
- Identification cards/badges/security passes
- Manuals/written materials
- Keys
- Phones/Laptops/Tablets
- Equipment/tools
- County vehicle insurance ID card (proof of insurance)

1.11 EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATIONS

All employment verification requests regarding current or former Panola County employees must be directed to the County Treasurer's Office. Employment verifications may include confirmation

of dates of employment, positions held, and pay history. Requests for additional information will be referred by the County Treasurer to the appropriate Elected Official, Appointed Official, or Department Head.

1.12 PERSONNEL RECORDS

The Panola County Treasurer's Office maintains basic personnel records for each employee. Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, and Department Heads may also maintain departmental personnel files and are responsible for ensuring those employee records remain complete and current.

Employees are responsible for promptly notifying the Treasurer's Office of any changes to personal information, including name, address, telephone number, marital status, dependents, or other pertinent information. Employees may also update mailing addresses and phone numbers through the ESS Time Entry Portal.

Personnel records are generally considered public records under Texas law. Employees may elect to keep certain personal information confidential, including home address, telephone number, emergency contact information, Social Security number, and information regarding family members. To be effective, the election must be made within fourteen (14) days of hire, election, or appointment. Election forms are completed through the Treasurer's Office during new hire orientation.

1.13 HIPAA

Panola County will safeguard protected health information in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy regulations. Employee medical records and related health information will be maintained separately from personnel files and kept confidential as required by law. Panola County will disclose only the minimum necessary protected health information needed to fulfill a request, whether or not authorization is required.

1.14 EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

It is the policy of Panola County to provide equal employment opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, military or veteran status, or any other classification protected by applicable federal, state, or local law. Discrimination in any aspect of employment is strictly prohibited. Equal Employment Opportunity applies to all terms, conditions, and privileges of employment, including recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, transfer, compensation, benefits, disciplinary action, termination, and all other employment practices.

Complaints of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation will be handled in accordance with Section 2.07 of this Personnel Manual.

1.15 AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADAAA)

Panola County complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is Panola County's policy to reasonably accommodate qualified individuals with disabilities unless the accommodation imposes an undue hardship on the County. In accordance with ADAAA, reasonable accommodation may be provided to qualified individuals with disabilities when such

accommodations are necessary to enable them to perform the essential functions of their jobs or to enjoy the equal benefits and privileges of employment. Qualified employees with disabilities needing reasonable accommodation in order to perform the essential functions of their jobs should make a request for accommodation to the applicable Elected Official or Department Head. All Elected Officials, Appointed Officials, and/or Department Heads and employees with responsibilities requiring knowledge are instructed to treat the employee's disability with confidentiality.

Employees who have a complaint involving potential violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act should follow the complaint reporting procedure outlined in the County's policy on Unlawful Workplace Discrimination and Harassment in section 2.07.

1.16 PWFA (PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT)

In compliance with the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), effective June 27, 2023, Panola County is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for employees and applicants with known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on business operations. This policy applies to all employees and applicants for employment. Employees or applicants seeking accommodation under the PWFA should submit a request to their supervisor or the County Treasurer. Requests do not need to be in writing but are encouraged for documentation purposes. Accommodation may include, but is not limited to:

- Frequent breaks: breaks should be documented through the time keeping system and deducted from accrued leave.
- Sitting/standing options
- Flexible scheduling
- Light duty or modified tasks
- Leave for pregnancy-related medical needs

Upon receiving a request, Panola County will engage in an interactive process with the employee to identify appropriate reasonable accommodation. Medical documentation may be requested as part of this process. Panola County strictly prohibits retaliation against any employee or applicant who:

- Request accommodation
- Participates in the accommodation process, or
- Files a complaint under the PWFA.

Supervisor Guidelines under the PWFA can be requested from the County Treasurer's office. Supervisors are expected to consult with the County Treasurer when applying these guidelines.

1.17 POST-RETIREMENT EMPLOYMENT

Panola County may rehire a retiree and his/her monthly TCDRS benefit will not be suspended as long as the original termination was bona fide under Internal Revenue Service guidelines and meets certain TCDRS requirements that became effective April 2006. These strict guidelines must be followed to maintain Panola County's retirement plan's qualified status with the IRS and TCDRS. A qualified plan means any contributions or deposits to the retirement plan are tax deferred. Losing

the plan's qualified status is extremely expensive and has serious tax consequences for Panola County and its employees.

The IRS requires that retirement be based on a bona fide separation from employment. No official of Panola County may make a prior agreement or arrangement, before retirement to hire an employee after he/she retires from Panola County. There can be no expectation of employment by a Panola County employee after retirement.

If Panola County loses its qualified status with the IRS, the following penalties may apply:

- Panola County may owe back taxes, interest and penalties on its employer contributions and employee deposits to TCDRS retroactive to the date the IRS determined the plan to be non-qualified.
- Panola County may have to withhold taxes on TCDRS contributions and deposits going forward.
- Panola County employees may be liable for income taxes on the value of their vested benefits even though TCDRS does not allow immediate distribution.
- Rehired retirees who did not have a bona fide separation may owe a 10% excise tax and be required to repay all of the monthly payment to TCDRS.

The following procedure applies to retired employees:

A. A bona fide separation means a separation that is not based on collusion or subterfuge, and without a promise, agreement or understanding between a Panola County official and an employee that the employee would be rehired after retirement.
B. A retiree who resumes employment with Panola County must have had a break in service of at least one (1) full calendar month from receipt of their first annuity check and must have a true and bona fide separation.
C. An affidavit sworn to and signed by the Panola County official offering the position and an affidavit sworn to and signed by the Retiree indicating there was no agreement or understanding of re-employment after retirement by either party shall be filed. The Panola County retiree and Panola County official shall include in each affidavit a full and unconditional indemnity agreement to Panola County and its employees for all penalties, taxes, interest, costs, damages, attorney and accountant fees and all other tax consequences if any question or investigation or adverse decision is initiated or made by the IRS or TCDRS. The affidavit must be acceptable to the County Judge and County Auditor. The affidavit shall be submitted to the Panola County Commissioners Court at the time the retired employee's new employment is approved or recorded by the Commissioners Court.
D. Although not required, the Panola County official offering a position to a Panola County retiree may consult the Panola County Criminal District Attorney's office to ensure all legal requirements of the IRS, TCDRS and Panola County are met.
E. A retiree who is rehired consistent with this section will establish a new membership with TCDRS and will be considered a new member for the purposes of beneficiary determination and benefit selection.

2.0 EMPLOYEE ETHICS, CONDUCT AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.01 WORK STANDARDS

Panola County is funded by taxpayer dollars, and the public is entitled to the highest standard of service. Employees are expected to perform their duties in a professional, efficient, honest, and respectful manner at all times, and to comply with all applicable County policies, procedures, and legal requirements.

Employees are responsible for maintaining appropriate conduct in the workplace, exercising sound judgment, and treating coworkers, supervisors, elected officials, and members of the public with courtesy and respect. Conduct that is unlawful, unethical, or inconsistent with County policy is prohibited.

Employees are accountable to their immediate supervisors for job performance, conduct, and compliance with assigned duties. Supervisors are responsible for assigning work, evaluating performance, and addressing employee concerns within their departments. From time to time, employees may receive direction from other authorized County officials during operations; in such cases, employees should notify their immediate supervisor to ensure proper coordination and communication.

2.02 ATTENDANCE; TIMELINESS

Regular attendance and punctuality are essential functions of County employment. Employees are expected to report to work on time, remain present for their scheduled work hours, and be prepared to perform assigned duties.

If an employee will be absent or late, the employee must notify their supervisor no later than 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start time, except in emergency situations where advance notice is not possible. Failure to provide proper notification may result in disciplinary action. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness may also result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Refer to Section 7.01 (Leave Time Approvals) for additional information.

2.03 APPEARANCE AND ATTITUDE

Employees of Panola County serve as representatives of the County and are expected to maintain a professional appearance and demeanor while on duty and when interacting with the public.

Employees are expected to maintain a neat, clean, and appropriate appearance consistent with their job duties and work environment. Good hygiene and appropriate grooming are required. Disruptive, unsafe, or unprofessional conduct, including inappropriate language, shouting, horseplay, or similar behavior, is prohibited.

Elected and appointed officials and department heads may establish additional appearance or dress standards for employees under their supervision when appropriate for the operations, duties, or work environment of their respective offices or departments. Such standards may be more restrictive than the County's general standards but shall not be inconsistent with applicable law or County policy.

Uniforms may be required for certain positions. When issued or required, uniforms must be worn properly and maintained in a clean and professional condition.

Employees whose duties involve routine office work or interaction with the public are expected to maintain attire appropriate for a professional public service environment and suitable for interaction with the public, coworkers, and County officials.

In the absence of a department-specific dress code, the following are generally considered inappropriate attire for routine County business:

- Sweatpants, loungewear, or pajama-style clothing;
- Excessively oversized or excessively baggy clothing;
- Clothing that is excessively revealing;
- Clothing with offensive, vulgar, discriminatory, or inappropriate wording or images;
- Clothing that is excessively torn, frayed, dirty, or worn; or
- Clothing that is otherwise unsuitable for a professional workplace.

Field and operational employees may be subject to modified appearance standards based on job duties, safety requirements, and operational needs. Safety equipment and protective clothing requirements shall take precedence over general appearance standards.

2.04 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Employees shall avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of impropriety in the performance of their duties.

Employees may not have a financial interest in, or participate in, County contracts, purchases, or services in a manner that creates a conflict with their official duties or results in personal gain, direct or indirect.

Employees may not accept gifts, money, services, or other benefits that could reasonably be perceived as influencing official actions or decisions. Any attempt to offer such items, or any potential conflict of interest, must be promptly reported to a supervisor and/or County legal counsel.

Employees may not engage in outside employment or self-employment that interferes with County duties, affects job performance, or creates a conflict with County interests.

2.05 NEPOTISM

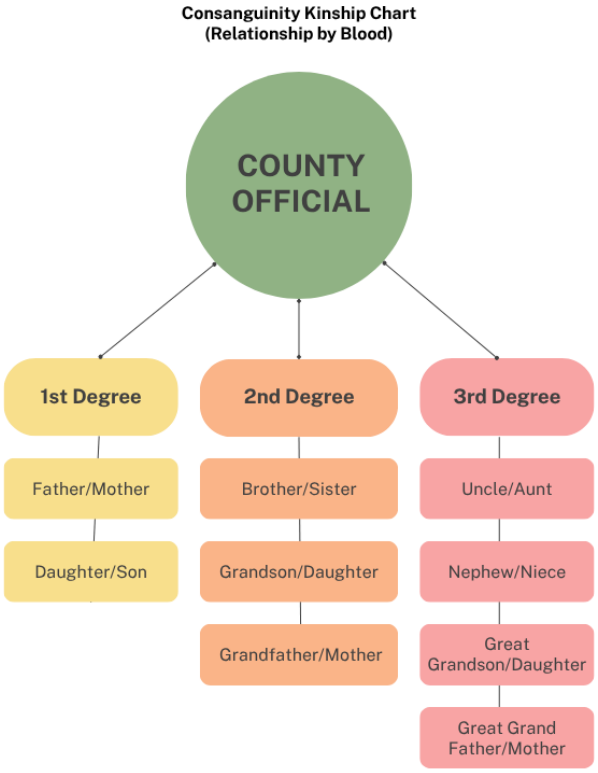
Employment decisions for Panola County shall comply with Chapter 573 of the Texas Government Code (Nepotism).

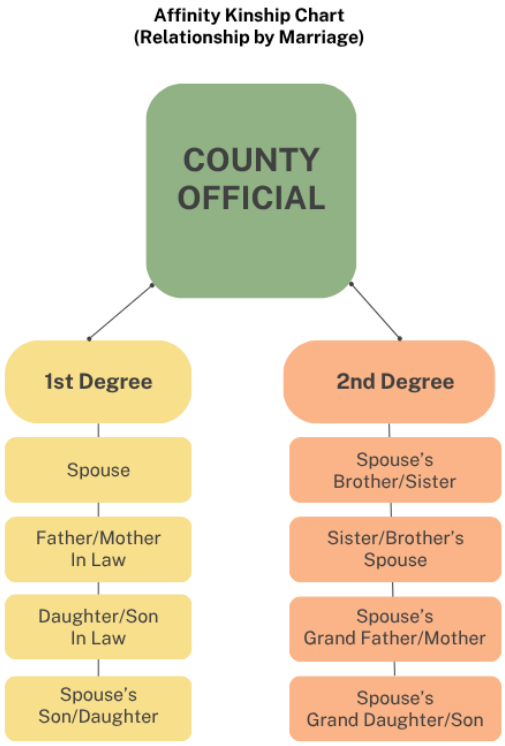
A public official may not appoint, confirm the appointment of, or vote for the appointment or confirmation of a relative within the prohibited degrees of relationship as defined by state law. This includes relatives related within the third degree of consanguinity (blood) or within the second degree of affinity (marriage), as determined under Texas Government Code Chapter 573.

No person may be employed in a position where such employment would create a violation of state nepotism laws, including situations in which a supervisory or direct reporting relationship would exist between relatives as defined by law.

No person shall be hired into a department if such employment would create a prohibited supervisory relationship or otherwise violate applicable nepotism restrictions under state law. Employment relationships that are determined to be in violation of nepotism laws may be subject to corrective action, including reassignment or termination, in accordance with applicable law and County policy.

A degree of relationship is determined under the Texas Government Code Chapter 573. (See the two charts that follow.)





2.06 GIFTS, GRATUITIES AND HONORARIUMS

Employees shall not solicit or accept any gift, benefit, or gratuity from any person or entity that:

- is subject to County regulation, inspection, or investigation; or
- is involved in, or reasonably expected to become involved in, any contract, purchase, payment, claim, or other transaction in which the employee participates or has discretionary authority.

Employees shall not accept any gift, gratuity, or benefit that could reasonably be expected to influence, or appear to influence, the employee's official duties or judgment.

Employees shall not accept an honorarium for services that would not have been provided except for the employee's County position or official duties.

2.07 UNLAWFUL WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Panola County prohibits discrimination and harassment in employment based on race, religion, color, sex, pregnancy, age, national origin, disability, military status, genetic information, or any other classification protected by applicable law.

Discrimination or harassment includes conduct that adversely affects employment decisions or creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment. The use of racial, ethnic, or other derogatory remarks or jokes is prohibited.

Sexual harassment is prohibited and includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- submission to such conduct is made a condition of employment;
- submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for employment decisions; or
- such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Employees who believe they have experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment are encouraged to report the matter to a supervisor, Department Head, or the County Treasurer. Reports may also be made to higher levels of management, up to and including the County Judge.

The County will promptly investigate all complaints and take appropriate corrective action when warranted. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible consistent with the need to conduct a thorough investigation.

Retaliation against any individual who reports discrimination or harassment, participates in an investigation, or cooperates with an external agency is strictly prohibited.

2.08 CRIMINAL CONDUCT

Employees are expected to comply with all applicable laws and to conduct themselves in a manner that supports public trust in County government.

Conduct, whether on or off duty, that may impair an employee's ability to perform assigned duties or that may adversely affect the integrity, operations, or reputation of Panola County may result in

disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, consistent with applicable law and County policy.

Employees shall promptly report to their Department Head any criminal conviction that may reasonably affect their ability to perform their duties or that involves dishonesty, theft, moral turpitude, violence, or controlled substances.

The County may consider the nature of the offense, its relationship to job duties, and applicable legal requirements when determining appropriate action.

2.09 COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

2.09 (a) Public Communications

Official communications with the public or media on behalf of Panola County may be made only by an Elected Official, Department Head, or other individual specifically authorized to speak on behalf of the County.

Employees who receive inquiries involving sensitive, controversial, legal, or policy matters shall refer those inquiries to their supervisor or designated spokesperson. Employees may respond to routine inquiries within the scope of their assigned duties.

2.09 (b) County Communications Systems

County communication systems and equipment are intended primarily for official business use. Limited personal use may be permitted if it does not interfere with job duties or County operations. Personal long-distance use is prohibited except in emergencies and with supervisory approval.

2.09 (c) Social Media and Public Representation

Employees shall not represent or imply that they are speaking on behalf of Panola County through social media unless specifically authorized as part of their job duties. Employees shall not use social media to:

- imply County endorsement of personal opinions, activities, products, or services;
- disclose confidential or non-public County information;
- share personnel information without authorization;
- use County logos, branding, or trademarks without approval; or
- use County resources or identification to support or promote political campaigns, candidates, or political causes.

Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict employees' rights under applicable law.

Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally in their personal use of social media. Employees should avoid posting content or engaging in conduct that is harassing, discriminatory, threatening, defamatory, obscene, unlawful, or otherwise violates County policy, or that materially disrupts County operations or interferes with the employee's ability to perform assigned duties.

Employees should exercise sound judgment when commenting on County programs, policies, or operations and should avoid communications that could reasonably be interpreted as official County positions or that would materially undermine the public's confidence in the County's ability to effectively carry out its mission or provide public services.

Employees are encouraged to raise workplace concerns through established internal reporting channels so that issues may be addressed promptly and effectively.

Employees are personally responsible for content they create, share, endorse, or otherwise distribute through social media and may be held accountable for posts that violate applicable laws, County policies, or standards of professional conduct.

Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

2.10 POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Employees retain the right to engage in political activity in their personal capacity during non-working hours, consistent with applicable law. However, employees shall not engage in political activity while on duty, while using County resources, or while representing the County in any official capacity.

County property, equipment, facilities, communication systems, uniforms, badges, identification cards, and other official County identifiers shall not be used for political purposes.
Employees shall not:

- use official authority or influence to affect the outcome of any election;
- coerce or attempt to coerce any person to make a political contribution or participate in political activity; or
- use County resources or official position to support or oppose any political candidate or campaign.

Nothing in this policy is intended to restrict lawful political activity conducted in an employee's personal capacity outside of work.

2.11 LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS

Employees occupying positions requiring licenses or certifications are responsible for maintaining all required credentials in good standing.

Employees must immediately notify their supervisor if a required license or certification is suspended, revoked, expired, or otherwise not renewed.

Failure to maintain required credentials may result in reassignment, demotion, or termination, depending on the requirements of the position and applicable law. Employees may not continue in positions where a valid license or certification is legally required.

2.12 TOBACCO AND VAPE FREE WORKPLACE

The use of tobacco products and electronic vaping devices is prohibited in all County buildings and County vehicles. Smoking and vaping may be permitted only in designated outdoor areas, if established by the County. Employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

2.13 DATING IN THE WORKPLACE

Panola County recognizes that personal relationships may develop in the workplace. Employees are expected to maintain professional conduct at all times to avoid conflicts of interest, favoritism, or disruption of County operations.

Employees who enter into a consensual romantic or dating relationship with another employee are encouraged to disclose the relationship to their Elected or Appointed Official or Department Head when the relationship could create a potential conflict of interest, supervisory concern, or workplace disruption.

Employees shall not engage in sexual activity while on County property or during working hours. Such conduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Supervisors are prohibited from engaging in romantic or intimate relationships with employees they directly supervise. Supervisory relationships that create conflicts of interest or the appearance of favoritism must be disclosed and may be subject to reassignment or other corrective action.

The County reserves the right to address workplace relationships that negatively affect job performance, workplace morale, or operational effectiveness, consistent with applicable law and County policy.

3.0 COUNTY PROPERTY AND EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY

3.01 EQUIPMENT AND PROPERTY

Employees are provided with County-owned tools, equipment, and vehicles as necessary to perform their duties. Employees are responsible for the proper, safe, and lawful use of all County property assigned to them and for assisting in its care and maintenance.

Any damage, malfunction, loss, or need for repair of County property must be reported promptly to a supervisor.

Personal use of County property, equipment, or vehicles is prohibited unless expressly authorized by policy or supervisory approval.

Employees operating County vehicles must possess a valid driver’s license appropriate for the vehicle being operated. When an employee uses a personal vehicle for County business, the employee must maintain proof of current personal automobile liability insurance.

Any accident involving a County vehicle or a personal vehicle used for County business must be reported immediately to law enforcement (when required by law) and to the employee's supervisor.

Seat belts must be worn at all times when operating or riding in County vehicles or equipment equipped with seat belts. Employees must comply with all applicable Texas traffic laws, including prohibitions on texting while driving.

Employees required to operate County vehicles must maintain a current defensive driving certification on file with the County Treasurer or designated office. New employees must obtain certification within 60 days of hire. The County may reimburse or pay for required certification at its discretion. Employees may not operate County vehicles without current required certification.

3.02 SEARCHES & INSPECTIONS

Employees should have no expectation of privacy in County-owned or County-controlled property, including, but not limited to, offices, desks, file cabinets, lockers, computers, electronic systems, and electronic communications.

The County reserves the right to access, inspect, and monitor County property and systems at any time for legitimate operational, safety, security, or business purposes.

When permitted by law and based on reasonable suspicion or a legitimate business need, the County may inspect personal property brought onto County premises, including vehicles located on County property.

Searches and inspections shall be conducted in a reasonable manner and, when practicable, under the direction of a Department Head or the County Judge. Employees are expected to cooperate with authorized searches and inspections.

3.03 USE OF COMPUTER RESOURCES

County computer systems, networks, email, and related communication resources are intended for official business use. Any use of County systems must comply with applicable County policies and may be monitored or audited at any time without notice. Inappropriate use of County systems is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Inappropriate use includes, but is not limited to:

- Use that violates County policies, including the Unlawful Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Policy
- Creation, transmission, or storage of unlawful, fraudulent, obscene, sexually explicit, harassing, or discriminatory content
- Use of County systems for illegal activity
- Installation of unauthorized software or programs
- Unauthorized copying or use of licensed software
- Use of programs intended to damage, disrupt, or gain unauthorized access to systems or data
- Excessive personal use that interferes with job duties or County operations

All information created, received, stored, or transmitted using County systems is County property. Employees have no expectation of privacy in any information stored on or transmitted through County systems or equipment.

3.04 COUNTY NOTARY BONDS AND FEES

When the County pays for a notary bond, seal, fees, or recordkeeping materials, any fees collected for notarial services performed in the employee's official capacity shall be remitted to the County Treasurer in accordance with applicable law and County policy. Upon separation from County employment, the employee shall return all County-issued notary materials, including the seal and recordkeeping logbook, to the County Judge, County Auditor, or County Treasurer, as directed.

4.0 SAFETY AND HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES

4.01 DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Panola County maintains a Drug-Free Workplace policy to promote a healthy, safe, and secure work environment. Employees may not report to work or remain on duty while impaired by drugs or alcohol. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with applicable law and County policy.

For purposes of this policy, "under the influence" includes any of the following:

- A blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.02 or greater, as measured by an approved testing method; or
- The presence of alcohol or drugs that, based on specific, articulable facts and observed behavior, indicates the employee is impaired or may be impaired in the safe and effective performance of essential job duties; or
- Observable physical, behavioral, or cognitive indicators consistent with impairment, sufficient to warrant removal from duty and further evaluation, whether or not confirmed by testing.

Employees who are required to maintain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and perform safety-sensitive duties are subject to this policy and all applicable U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations, including 49 CFR Parts 40 and 382. Where this policy and federal regulations address the same subject, the more restrictive requirement shall apply**.**

In accordance with federal regulations, an employee with a breath alcohol concentration of 0.02 or greater, but less than 0.04, shall be removed from safety-sensitive duties for at least 24 hours. A breath alcohol concentration of 0.04 or greater constitutes a DOT alcohol violation requiring immediate removal from safety-sensitive duties and compliance with all applicable federal return-to-duty requirements. In either circumstance, the County may impose disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with County policy.

This policy applies to all County employees, including full-time, part-time, and temporary employees. Employees who operate County vehicles or equipment may also be subject to random

drug and alcohol testing. The only exception to this policy is the lawful possession of controlled substances by law enforcement personnel in the performance of their official duties.

Employees are prohibited from unlawfully manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, possessing, selling, purchasing, or using controlled substances or drug paraphernalia on County property or while conducting County business. Employees may not be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs while on County property or while performing County duties.

Employees may not possess or use unauthorized prescription or over-the-counter medications that could impair their ability to work safely. Prescription and over-the-counter medications may only be used as directed by a physician or manufacturer and must not interfere with the safe and effective performance of job duties. Any prescription medication brought to work must remain in its original container.

Employees are responsible for consulting with their physician or pharmacist regarding the effects of any medication on their ability to safely perform their job duties. If a medication could impair job performance or workplace safety, the employee must notify their supervisor at the beginning of the workday or use appropriate leave or personnel procedures. Supervisors must keep all information regarding an employee's medication use or medical condition confidential.

4.01 (a) Treatment and Rehabilitation

Panola County encourages employees who may be experiencing problems related to drug or alcohol use to seek assistance from a qualified professional. Information regarding available benefits for substance abuse treatment may be found in the County's health plan materials.

An employee who voluntarily seeks assistance for a substance abuse problem **before violating this policy or before being required to submit to testing** will not be subject to disciplinary action solely for requesting assistance. Leave for evaluation or treatment may be available in accordance with applicable law, including the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) where applicable, and County leave policies. Nothing in this section shall be interpreted as limiting the County's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action for policy violations unrelated to the voluntary request for assistance.

Upon successful completion of a bona fide inpatient or outpatient treatment program, an employee may be required, as a condition of continued employment or return to duty, to participate in a follow-up testing program. Participation in such program shall be documented in writing. Follow-up testing may occur periodically, on either a random or scheduled basis, for a period determined by the County, not to exceed two (2) years.

Failure to comply with the requirements of a follow-up testing program, including refusal to submit to testing or a confirmed positive test result, may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Nothing in this policy limits the County's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action for violations of this policy or other County policies, consistent with applicable law.

4.01 (b) Pre-employment Drug Testing

Panola County has a pre-employment drug testing requirement that must be passed post offer before an employee starts their first day of work. All offers of employment are conditional upon passing a drug test. The employee will sign a consent waiver.

4.01 (c) Reasonable Suspicion Testing

If any employee is experiencing work performance problems, displaying behavior that may be alcohol or drug related, or otherwise demonstrating conduct that may be in violation of this Drug and Alcohol Policy where immediate action is necessary, the elected official or supervisor will require the employee to submit to a breath test or urinalysis.

The following conditions may be indicators of possible alcohol or drug use (this list is not all-inclusive):

- **Specific, Articulable Observations:** These observations must be clearly documented and based on objective facts, not mere hunches or speculation.
- **Physical Indicators:** Observable signs such as bloodshot or watery eyes, dilated or constricted pupils, slurred speech, tremors, lack of coordination, unsteady gait, hyperactivity, drowsiness, or changes in appearance or grooming.
- **Behavioral Indicators:** Erratic behavior, mood swings, irritability, paranoia, aggression, lethargy, decreased alertness, unexplained absenteeism or tardiness, or a noticeable decline in work performance.
- **Speech Indicators:** Slurred speech, rambling, incoherence, loudness, or excessive talkativeness.
- **Body Odors:** The odor of alcohol or chemicals on the employee's breath, body, or clothing.
- **Other Factors:** Observation of drug use, possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia, or association with individuals actively using drugs.
- **Chronic Use or Withdrawal Effects:** Observations may include signs consistent with chronic substance use or withdrawal symptoms.

When one or more of the above indicators are observed and there is reasonable belief that substance use may be affecting an employee's job performance or behavior, elected officials or supervisors must take appropriate action. A detailed written record of the observations and basis for reasonable suspicion must be prepared by the supervisor within a reasonable timeframe (generally within 24 hours of the observed behavior and before test results are released).

The following steps will be taken:

1. The supervisor should keep the employee under direct observation, advise the employee of the specific performance concerns and observed behavior giving rise to reasonable suspicion, and inform the employee of the alleged policy violations.
2. If the supervisor believes the performance or behavior issues may be related to substance use, the employee will be immediately required to submit to a breath test or urinalysis. Refusal to submit to testing for any reason may result in termination.
3. Employees may be asked to surrender any evidence, including alcohol or drug paraphernalia, related to the observed behavior. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. All confiscated evidence shall be documented and acknowledged by both the elected official or supervisor and the employee.

4. The elected official or supervisor will remove the employee from the worksite and ensure the employee is transported to an appropriate collection site and subsequently to the employee's residence. Under no circumstances will the employee be permitted to operate a motor vehicle until a confirmed negative test result is received.
5. The elected official or supervisor shall, within 24 hours of the observed behavior (and before test results are released), document the specific facts supporting reasonable suspicion and submit such documentation to the Panola County Treasurer's Office for filing.

4.01 (d) Post-Accident Testing

Employees and Elected Officials are required, as a condition of County policy governing the use of County property and vehicles, to submit to post-accident drug and alcohol testing when directly involved in a workplace accident or incident occurring while on County time, on County property, or while operating County vehicles or equipment that results in property damage or requires medical treatment. All post-accident testing shall be conducted at a hospital.

Testing should be conducted as soon as reasonably practicable following the incident, ideally within one (1) hour and no later than two (2) hours when feasible.

Test results will be submitted to the County Treasurer for confidential recordkeeping. Access to results shall be limited to authorized officials as appropriate. All testing results and related records shall be maintained as confidential to the extent permitted by law.

Testing Procedures:

1. The employee will be escorted and driven to the hospital for specimen collection and/or testing.
2. The employee will be required to follow the drug testing protocol of the medical facility providing the testing.
3. If the employee desires another test to be given, he/she may do so within 2 hours of the specimen being collected and the same specimen will be used. The cost of the request will be paid for by the employee. All initial costs will be paid by Panola County.
4. The employee will be placed on paid administrative leave until the results of the test are known. The elected official or supervisor will make arrangements to ensure that the employee is safely returned to his/her residence.

Each employee is expected to cooperate and consent to a drug test when requested under the terms of this policy. Refusal to consent to a drug and/or alcohol test when requested is cause for termination.

4.02 INJURY REPORTING AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

Panola County requires employees to perform all job duties in a safe manner and to take reasonable precautions to prevent injury to themselves and others. Employees must promptly report unsafe conditions, hazards, defective equipment, or other safety concerns to their supervisor.

All accidents, injuries, and near-miss incidents must be reported to a supervisor immediately. Supervisors will ensure appropriate incident documentation is completed and submitted to the County Treasurer's Office.

Employees requiring medical treatment for a work-related injury should seek care at the nearest appropriate medical facility in an emergency. For non-emergency treatment, employees should use a provider from the County's approved workers' compensation provider list.

An employee must provide a medical release from a treating physician before returning to work. Employees will not be permitted to return to duty without proper medical clearance.
See Section 4.03 Workers' Compensation for information regarding benefits and eligibility.

4.03 WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS AND ADMINISTRATION

All Panola County employees are covered by Workers' Compensation insurance for injuries or illnesses arising out of and in the course and scope of employment. Workers' Compensation may provide medical benefits and wage replacement benefits in accordance with applicable law.

Employees may be eligible for Temporary Income Benefits (TIBs) if they are unable to work for more than seven (7) consecutive calendar days due to a compensable injury. Additional benefits may apply under state law if the absence extends beyond fourteen (14) days.

Employees must use available paid leave for absences related to a Workers' Compensation claim lasting fewer than eight (8) calendar days, unless otherwise required by law. Leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) may run concurrently with Workers' Compensation leave when applicable.

Compensation for law enforcement employees shall be administered in accordance with Article III, Section 52(e) of the Texas Constitution.

Workers' Compensation benefits may be reduced or denied if the injury occurred while the employee was under the influence of drugs or alcohol or engaged in horseplay, as permitted by law.

Failure to comply with required documentation, reporting requirements, or return-to-work obligations may affect eligibility for benefits or continued employment. See Section 4.02 Injury Reporting and workplace safety for reporting procedures and return-to-work requirements.

Employees on Workers' Compensation leave may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Failure to provide required medical documentation in a timely manner;
- Failure to maintain appropriate contact with the Elected/Appointed Official or Department Head;
- Engaging in activities inconsistent with medical restrictions or that delay recovery;
- Failure to return to work after being medically released to duty; or
- Failure to provide required medical certification regarding the ability to perform essential job functions.

4.04 WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Panola County is committed to maintaining a safe and secure work environment. Threats, intimidation, harassment, violent behavior, or acts of violence by any employee while on County property or while on duty, regardless of location, are strictly prohibited.

Employees who experience or witness threats, intimidation, or acts of violence must report the incident immediately to their Department Head or supervisor. Imminent safety threats should be reported to emergency services. If an employee believes the matter has not been addressed appropriately, or if escalation is necessary due to the seriousness of the situation, the employee may report the concern to the County Treasurer or the County Judge.

4.05 WEATHER CLOSING AND EMERGENCIES

As a general practice, Panola County does not close operations unless the health, safety, and security of employees are seriously impacted. In the event of severe weather or other emergencies requiring a County-wide closure, the County Judge will authorize and announce the closure to the public, including effective dates and times.

Elected and Appointed Officials are responsible for managing the operations and schedules of their respective offices. When a County-wide closure has not been declared, each Official may determine if weather or other conditions make it unsafe for employees to report to or leave work within their department.

During a County-wide closure, employees will receive paid leave without deduction from personal leave balances. Employees should record this time using the designated "EMERGENCY CLOSURE" activity code. If County offices remain open but an employee determines it is unsafe to report to work due to weather conditions, the employee may use available paid leave (such as vacation or compensatory time) with supervisory approval or take leave without pay if approved. Refer to Section 7.07 for additional information regarding time entry during emergency closures.

4.06 CONFIDENTIALITY

Panola County is a public entity; however, some County employees acquire confidential (non-public) information as a result of their position with the County. This information must be protected. Employees who reveal confidential (non-public) information they have received as a result of their position may be subject to discipline up to and including termination. Regarding the personnel information on employees of Panola County; much of the information within an employee's personnel file, such as salary and job titles, is subject to disclosure under the Public Information Act. However, highly personal matters are typically not subject to disclosure. The County will adhere to the Public Information Act requirements.

5.0 EMPLOYEE PAYROLL

5.01 FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT (FLSA) SAFE HARBOR

Panola County will act in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act and Department of Labor regulations. Panola County makes every effort to pay employees correctly. Employees should review their pay stubs upon receipt and immediately report any suspected payroll errors to the

County Treasurer's Office. Panola County will promptly correct any inadvertent payroll errors. If a correction is necessary due to inaccurate or incomplete time reporting, the employee's Department Head or Time Approver must submit the correction in writing to the Treasurer's Office. Approved corrections will be processed on the following payroll.

5.02 COMPENSATION AND PAY ADMINISTRATION

Panola County compensates employees in accordance with the annual budget adopted by the Panola County Commissioners Court and in compliance with applicable state and federal pay laws. Compensation for any position may be increased, decreased, or remain unchanged through the budget process and may also be adjusted based on job performance or the availability of funds necessary to maintain a solvent County budget.

Supervising elected officials and administrators may make recommendations regarding employee compensation; however, final authority regarding compensation rests with the Panola County Commissioners Court. Panola County reserves the right to modify employee compensation as deemed appropriate by the Commissioners Court. In the event of a wage overpayment, the County reserves the right to recover the overpaid amount.

5.03 PAYROLL SCHEDULE & PAYMENT METHODS

Direct deposit is the County's standard method of payroll payment. All regular full-time and regular part-time employees are required to participate in the County's direct deposit program and must provide all information necessary to establish and maintain direct deposit.

In limited circumstances where direct deposit cannot be processed due to circumstances beyond the employee's control, including but not limited to bank account closure, fraud-related account holds, or rejection by the financial institution, the County may issue a paper check or other alternative payment method as a temporary measure until direct deposit can be reestablished. Such exceptions are intended to be temporary and must be resolved as soon as practicable.

Election workers and other temporary, seasonal, or intermittent employees may be exempt from the direct deposit requirement and may be paid by paper check as approved by the County Treasurer.

Paydays are every other Thursday. In the event a courthouse closure or bank holiday affects a scheduled payday, payment may be issued on the preceding Wednesday when feasible or on the following Friday if payment cannot reasonably be made on Wednesday. The County Treasurer will provide advance notice of any change to the regular payday schedule.

5.04 PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS

No payroll deductions will be made from an employee's paycheck unless required by law or authorized by the employee. Required deductions include Social Security, income taxes, retirement contributions, court-ordered child support, and any other legally mandated withholdings. Employees may authorize additional deductions for benefits such as health and dental insurance, supplemental insurance, and deferred compensation plans. Employees are responsible for promptly reporting any changes in family status, qualifying life events, or other information that may affect their withholding amounts.

5.05 REPORTING HOURS WORKED

Employees who are required to maintain time records are responsible for accurately recording all hours worked and all leave taken during each payroll period. All time worked must be entered into the electronic timekeeping system (ESS). Employees must submit their time records, and time approvers must approve them, no later than 10:00 a.m. on Monday of pay week. When holidays, courthouse closures, or payroll processing schedules require earlier processing, employees and supervisors may be required to submit and approve time records in advance of the normal deadline. Employees will be notified of any adjusted submission deadlines.

Failure to maintain accurate time records, knowingly submitting inaccurate time entries, or falsification of time records may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. In addition, falsification or tampering with time records may constitute a violation of Texas Penal Code § 37.10 and may subject an employee to criminal penalties where applicable.

5.06 WORK PERIODS; OVERTIME AND COMPENSATORY TIME

5.06(a) Workweek Definition

The Panola County work week is from 12:01 a.m. on Saturday of each week to 12:00 Midnight of the succeeding Friday.

5.06(b) General Overtime and Compensatory Time Rules

Overtime work is discouraged and must be approved by the employee's immediate supervisor prior to the performance of the work. Employees who work unauthorized overtime may be subject to disciplinary action; however, all overtime hours worked will be compensated in accordance with applicable law and County policy. For all personnel, sick leave, vacation leave, and any other non-worked hours will not be counted when calculating overtime. Authorized paid holidays will be counted as hours worked for overtime purposes, except for law enforcement personnel and dispatchers. Approved overtime hours will be compensated through compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay, in accordance with applicable law and County policy.

5.06(c) Non-Law-Enforcement Employees

For non-exempt employees who are not classified as law enforcement, overtime is calculated based on a seven-day workweek running from Saturday through Friday. Any hours worked in excess of forty (40) hours during a single seven (7)-day workweek shall accrue compensatory time in accordance with County policy and applicable law. Employees earn one and one-half (1.5) hours of compensatory time for each hour worked over forty (40) in the workweek. Employees are encouraged to use accrued compensatory time within a reasonable period; subject to departmental scheduling needs. Employees may accrue up to two hundred forty (240) hours of compensatory time, and the County may require employees to use accrued compensatory time at any time.

5.06(d) Law Enforcement

Panola County compensates non-exempt law enforcement employees in accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Section 207(k) exemption. Panola County has adopted a fourteen (14)-day work period under FLSA Section 207(k) for eligible law enforcement

personnel. Non-exempt law enforcement employees are compensated at their regular rate of pay for up to eighty-six (86) hours worked during each 14-day work period. Compensatory time is accrued at one and one-half (1.5) hours for each hour actually worked in excess of eighty-six (86) hours during the 14-day work period. Law enforcement employees may accrue up to a maximum of four hundred eighty (480) hours of compensatory time. Panola County reserves the right to require employees to use accrued compensatory time at any time.

In the event of a holiday, eligible law enforcement employees will receive eight (8) hours of holiday pay at their regular rate of pay in addition to any hours actually worked. Holiday pay will not be included when calculating compensatory time accrual. Only actual hours worked will be counted for compensatory time purposes.

5.06(e) Dispatchers/Communications Officers

Dispatchers are classified as non-exempt, non-law-enforcement employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Dispatchers work scheduled rotating shifts that may vary between workweeks within a biweekly pay period. However, overtime eligibility is determined based on a fixed seven (7)-day workweek and is not averaged across workweeks.

For each workweek, hours actually worked in excess of forty (40) hours are considered overtime under the FLSA and are compensated either through compensatory time accrual or cash payment at one and one-half (1.5) times the employee's regular rate, in accordance with County policy and applicable law.

Due to the structure of dispatcher schedules, hours worked and leave usage may occur unevenly across the biweekly pay period. The County will administer payroll and leave accounting in a manner intended to ensure employees are properly compensated for all hours worked and that leave balances accurately reflect time taken in accordance with the employee's scheduled work assignments. This administrative process may include adjustments within the same pay period to ensure accurate application of leave and compensation.

This practice does not alter the requirement that overtime eligibility and compensation are determined separately for each seven (7)-day workweek in accordance with the FLSA, nor does it change the accrual or maintenance of compensatory time balances under County policy.

In the event of a holiday, dispatchers will receive eight (8) hours of holiday pay at their regular rate of pay in addition to hours worked. Holiday pay will not be included when calculating compensatory time. Only actual hours worked will be used to calculate compensatory time accrual.

5.06(f) Exempt Employees

Certain employees are designated as "exempt employees" pursuant to applicable Fair Labor Standards Act regulations. Exempt employees do not earn overtime or compensatory time.

They are expected, at times, to work extra hours. Your supervisor will let you know if you are an exempt employee. Depending upon the needs of the department, a Department Head may allow an exempt employee to arrive late or to take off early in recognition of workload demands, but this is at the discretion of the Department Head.

It is the responsibility of the Department Head, Elected Official, or Appointed Official to ensure employees are informed of their FLSA classification status. Exemption classifications are established by the County in accordance with applicable Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements.

Before making or recommending a determination regarding an employee's exempt or non-exempt status, the Department Head, Elected Official, or Appointed Official should complete the applicable FLSA job duties test associated with the employee's classification. The applicable FLSA job duties tests are available in the Documents section of the Electronic Timekeeping System website and may also be obtained from the County Treasurer.

A list of exemption classifications is provided in Appendix B of this handbook and is also available in the Documents section of the Electronic Timekeeping System website. These classifications are maintained in accordance with applicable FLSA regulations and updated periodically as needed.

5.06(g) Compensatory Time Payout

Panola County reserves the right to reduce compensatory time balances during an employee's active employment by paying accrued compensatory time at any time.

In the event of separation from employment for any reason, an employee's accrued compensatory time balance will be paid at the employee's current regular rate of pay or the average regular rate received during the previous three (3) years, whichever is higher. (Code of Federal Regulations 29 C.F.R. § 553.27)

In the event of a transfer between departments, the employee's accrued compensatory time balance will be paid from the budget of the employee's former department. Payment will be made at the employee's most recent regular rate of pay in the former department or the average regular rate received during the previous three (3) years, whichever is higher.

5.07 AFTER-HOURS WORK AND CALL-OUT POLICY

5.07(a) Employees Subject to After-Hours Call-Out

Certain County positions, as part of their assigned duties, may be required or authorized to respond to work-related matters outside of their regularly scheduled work hours.

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Information Technology (IT) personnel responding to system outages, network issues, cybersecurity matters, or other critical technology matters;

- Maintenance personnel or Maintenance Supervisors responding to facility, utility, equipment, or other operational emergencies;
- Emergency Management or other designated personnel responding to emergencies or critical County operations;
- Road & Bridge Foreman and Operators responding to weather-related emergencies;
- Department Heads, Supervisors, or other designated employees who are specifically authorized by their Department Head to respond to after-hours matters;

The examples above are intended for illustration only and do not create an obligation for an employee to respond to after-hours matters unless the employee is required or authorized to do so by the County.

5.07(b) Authorization of After-Hours Work
After-hours call-outs shall be limited to work that is required or authorized by the employee's Department Head, supervisor, or other individual designated by the Department Head. Employees shall not initiate, extend, or continue after-hours work for the purpose of obtaining minimum call-out compensation. Employees shall not create multiple call-out events from a single incident, issue, request, or assignment for the purpose of obtaining multiple minimum compensable periods.

Authorization to perform after-hours work does not alter the requirement that employees accurately report the actual time spent performing work.

Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to authorize the County to disregard or fail to compensate work that is otherwise required to be counted under applicable law.

5.07(c) Distinction Between Standard Overtime and After-Hours Call-Out
This policy establishes procedures for after-hours call-outs and is not intended to replace or modify the County's standard overtime and timekeeping policies.

An employee who remains at the workplace or otherwise continues working as part of the employee's existing work period shall not be considered to be on a call-out solely because the employee works beyond the employee's regularly scheduled quitting time.

Such time shall be recorded as actual time worked and shall be compensated in accordance with the County's standard overtime policy and applicable law.

The minimum compensable periods established by this policy shall not apply to ordinary overtime worked as an extension of an employee's existing work period.

The call-out provisions of this policy apply when an employee has:
1. completed the employee's scheduled work period;
2. been released from duty; and
3. subsequently been required or authorized to perform work outside that completed work period.

For purposes of this policy, an employee's departure from the workplace, residence, or other location after completing the employee's work period is evidence that the employee's work period has ended. However, physical departure from the workplace is not the sole determining factor.

The determination of whether a call-out has occurred shall be based on whether the employee had completed and been released from the prior work period before being required or authorized to perform the additional work.

Example 1 — Standard Overtime, Not a Call-Out
An employee's normal workday ends at 5:00 p.m. The employee is directed to remain at work until 6:00 p.m. to complete a project. The employee shall report the actual one hour worked. The two-hour physical call-out minimum does not apply.

Example 2 — Physical Call-Out
An employee completes the employee's workday at 5:00 p.m. and leaves the workplace. At 7:00 p.m., the employee is contacted and directed to return to a County facility to address an operational emergency. The response is a physical call-out and is subject to the applicable call-out minimum.

5.07 (d) Overtime and Call-Out Compensation
For non-exempt employees, all compensable after-hours work shall be treated in accordance with applicable federal and state wage-and-hour requirements and the County's overtime policy.

Ordinary overtime worked as an extension of an employee's existing Work Period shall be recorded as actual time worked and shall be administered under the County's standard overtime policy. The minimum call-out periods established by this policy shall not apply to such overtime events.

Call-out compensation and minimum compensable periods shall be administered consistently with applicable overtime requirements.

Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted to reduce an employee's entitlement to overtime compensation required by applicable law.

5.07(e) Law Enforcement Call-Out Procedures
Due to the unique operational requirements of law enforcement, including emergency response, shift operations, on-call assignments, court appearances, investigations, and other law-enforcement-specific duties, law enforcement employees shall follow the call-out, callback, and after-hours work procedures established by their respective department or office.

In the event of a conflict between this policy and a department-specific law enforcement call-out procedure, applicable law shall govern, and the authorized department-specific procedure shall apply to the extent permitted by law.

Employees should consult their Department Head regarding department-specific procedures applicable to law enforcement call-outs.

5.07 (f) Definitions

After-Hours Work
"After-Hours Work" means an identifiable work activity performed after an employee has completed and been released from the employee's regular work period and that involves the performance of an assigned County duty, responsibility, task, or function.

Work-Related Communication
"Work-Related Communication" means a telephone call, text message, email, electronic message, or similar communication concerning County business.

A work-related communication does not automatically constitute after-hours work merely because it concerns County business or is received from or sent to another County employee.

For purposes of this policy, the employee must perform an identifiable County work duty or task for the communication to constitute a qualifying after-hours work response.

Call-Out Event
"Call-Out Event" means an after-hours response arising from the same incident, issue, request, assignment, or operational matter.

A Call-Out Event may include multiple related telephone calls, text messages, emails, remote-work activities, and follow-up communications.

Separate Call-Out
A "Separate Call-Out" occurs when an employee has completed an after-hours response and is subsequently required or authorized to respond to a separate and unrelated incident, issue, request, or assignment.

Work Period
"Work Period" means the period during which an employee is scheduled, authorized, or otherwise permitted to perform work as part of the employee's regular workday or continuous work assignment.

An employee's Work Period ends when the employee has completed the applicable work assignment and has been released from duty, subject to the circumstances of the particular assignment.

5.07 (g) Determining Whether a Communication Constitutes After-Hours Work
A telephone call, text message, email, or other communication shall constitute after-hours work when the employee performs an identifiable County work duty or task as a result of the communication. Factors that may be considered include whether the employee:

1. performed a duty or responsibility assigned to the employee's position;
2. provided operational, technical, supervisory, administrative, or other County services;
3. researched or investigated a County matter;

4. directed, coordinated, or instructed another employee or person regarding County business;
5. accessed a County system, computer, database, software, or other resource to perform a work task;
6. took action to resolve or advance a County matter; or
7. otherwise performed an identifiable work duty or task for the benefit of the County.

The subject matter of a communication alone shall not determine whether the communication constitutes work. The determining consideration is whether the employee performed an identifiable County work duty or task.

5.07(h) Non-Qualifying Communications
A communication shall not independently constitute a qualifying after-hours call-out merely because it is work-related. Examples of communications that ordinarily do not constitute a qualifying call-out include:

- merely receiving a communication;
- acknowledging receipt of a message;
- responding with a simple acknowledgment such as "okay," "yes," "no," or "received";
- confirming receipt of information without performing an additional work task;
- discussing a future schedule without performing an additional work duty;
- receiving information that does not require the employee to take action;
- communicating about a personal matter involving another County employee;
- receiving a message concerning County business but taking no work-related action;
- other communications that do not require the employee to perform an identifiable County work duty or task.

This section does not authorize the County to disregard actual compensable work performed during a communication. If an employee performs compensable work, the employee shall report the time and the County shall treat the time in accordance with applicable law and this policy.

5.07(i) After-Hours Call-Out Minimum Compensation
When a non-exempt employee has completed and been released from the employee's Work Period and is subsequently required or authorized to perform after-hours work, the employee shall be compensated for actual time worked, subject to the minimum compensable periods established by this policy.

The minimum compensable period is a County call-out compensation provision and shall not be interpreted as a determination that the employee actually performed that amount of work.

The applicable minimum compensable period shall be determined by the type of response required.

If the employee's actual time worked exceeds the applicable minimum compensable period, the employee shall be credited for the actual time worked.

Type of Response	Minimum Compensable Time	Application
Telephone/Text/Email Response	15 minutes	A minimum of 15 minutes shall be credited for an authorized after-hours telephone call, text message, email, or similar communication that requires the employee to perform an identifiable County work duty or task.
Remote Computer/Work Response	30 minutes	A minimum of 30 minutes shall be credited when the employee is required to access a County computer, system, software, database, or other County resource remotely to perform an identifiable County work duty or task.
Physical Call-Out to Worksite	2 hours	A minimum of 2 hours shall be credited when the employee is required to leave their residence or other location and report to a County worksite or other designated location to perform an identifiable County work duty or task.

5.07(j) Multiple Communications Related to the Same Call-Out
When multiple telephone calls, text messages, emails, or remote-work activities relate to the same incident, issue, request, or assignment, all such communications and work shall be considered part of one call-out. The applicable minimum compensable period shall be applied once to the call-out and shall not be applied separately to individual communications.

A communication or work activity related to the same incident, issue, request, or assignment shall not constitute a separate call-out solely because it occurs after the minimum compensable period has elapsed.

A subsequent response shall constitute a separate call-out only when it meets the requirements for a Separate Call-Out under this policy.

5.07(k) Separate Call-Outs
If an employee has completed an after-hours response and is subsequently contacted regarding a separate, unrelated incident, issue, request, or assignment, the subsequent response shall be considered a Separate Call-Out and shall be subject to the applicable minimum compensable period based on the type of response required. In determining whether a subsequent response constitutes a Separate Call-Out, the County may consider:

- whether the employee completed the original assignment;
- whether the employee was released from the original Call-Out Event;
- whether the original issue had been resolved or concluded;
- whether the subsequent request involves a different or unrelated matter; and
- whether the subsequent response is reasonably connected to the original Call-Out Event.

5.07(l) Time Reporting and ESS Documentation
When entering after-hours work into the ESS time entry system, the employee shall provide sufficient detail in the Description field to identify the nature of the after-hours Call-Out Event. The Description field shall include, at a minimum:

- the reason for the after-hours call-out;
- the nature of the work performed;
- the person or department requesting or initiating the response, when applicable;
- whether the response was by telephone/text/email, remote computer access, or physical call-out;
- time actually worked; and
- whether the response was related to an existing Call-Out Event or constituted a Separate Call-Out, when applicable.

Entries such as "work call," "phone call," "after-hours," "called by supervisor," or similar descriptions without additional detail are insufficient to document the nature of the work performed. Examples of acceptable descriptions include:

- "After-hours remote response — accessed County network to troubleshoot server connectivity issue and restored service. 27 minutes actual work."
- "After-hours physical call-out — responded to courthouse HVAC failure and performed troubleshooting/repair. 1 hour 35 minutes actual work."

Employees may be required to provide additional information or clarification when the information entered into ESS is insufficient to determine the nature of the Call-Out Event or work performed.

The employee's Department Head, supervisor, or designated timekeeping authority shall review after-hours entries for compliance with this policy.

5.07(m) Employee Responsibility for Accurate Reporting
Employees are responsible for ensuring that all after-hours work is accurately and timely entered into the ESS time entry system. Employees shall not:

- knowingly report time that was not worked;
- create multiple Call-Out Events from the same incident or assignment;
- extend a work activity unnecessarily for the purpose of obtaining additional compensation;
- characterize a communication as a Separate Call-Out when it is part of an existing Call-Out Event;
- claim a call-out minimum for ordinary overtime worked during an existing Work Period; or
- omit required details from the ESS Description field.

Nothing in this section prohibits an employee from reporting actual work performed.

5.07(n) Supervisor and Department Head Responsibilities
Supervisors and Department Heads are responsible for:

- limiting after-hours call-outs to legitimate operational needs;

- ensuring employees understand when after-hours work is authorized;
- reviewing ESS entries for accuracy and sufficient detail;
- ensuring that ordinary overtime is not improperly reported as a call-out;
- identifying and addressing inappropriate or repeated after-hours work;
- preventing employees from unnecessarily creating multiple Call-Out Events; and
- taking appropriate corrective or disciplinary action when an employee violates County authorization or time-reporting requirements.

A supervisor's failure to properly authorize after-hours work does not authorize the County to disregard compensable work that is otherwise required to be counted under applicable law.

5.08 PROMOTIONS, LATERAL JOB CHANGES, AND DEMOTIONS

Promotions are job changes that result in advancement to positions with greater responsibility and may include salary adjustments subject to budget availability and approval by the appropriate Department Head or Elected Official.

Lateral job changes are transfers to positions with similar levels of responsibility and pay. Employees who transfer laterally will generally retain their accrued leave balances and seniority, unless otherwise required by County policy or law. Pay may remain the same if within the approved salary range.

Demotions are job changes to positions with a lower level of responsibility and may result from disciplinary action, job reclassification, or performance-related decisions.

All job changes are subject to approval by the appropriate Department Head or Elected Official in accordance with County budgetary constraints and operational needs. The County reserves the right to make staffing and compensation decisions consistent with applicable law and County policy.

6.0 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

6.01 HEALTH, DENTAL, VISION AND LIFE INSURANCE

Employees who work at least thirty (30) hours per week are eligible to participate in the health, dental, vision, and life insurance plans offered by Panola County. For additional information regarding group medical benefits, employees should contact the County Treasurer’s Office. Benefit information is also available in the Links and Documents sections of the Electronic Timekeeping System (ESS).

6.02 SOCIAL SECURITY

Panola County employees are covered under the Social Security program. Required employee contributions will be deducted from each paycheck in accordance with federal law, and Panola County will make the employer contribution on behalf of eligible employees.

6.03 PENSION

Eligible employees are required to participate in the Texas County and District Retirement System (TCDRS). Employee contributions are deducted from each paycheck, and Panola County contributes to the retirement system on the employee's behalf based on a percentage of gross salary. Participation in TCDRS is mandatory upon employment for all eligible employees. For information regarding vesting, retirement eligibility, and retirement benefits, employees should contact the County Treasurer's Office or TCDRS directly. Additional retirement information is also available in the Documents section of the Electronic Timekeeping System (ESS).

6.04 UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

Panola County participates in the Texas unemployment compensation program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission. Eligible former employees may receive unemployment compensation benefits if they meet the eligibility requirements established under state law.

The County pays required unemployment insurance contributions in accordance with applicable law. Elected officials and other positions excluded under state law are not covered by unemployment compensation.

6.05 RETIREES AND SURVIVING SPOUSES

It is important that all employees, retirees, and surviving spouses understand that employee benefit plans, including retiree medical coverage, are provided in accordance with the terms of the applicable insurance contracts, County policy, and applicable law. The County reserves the right to modify, amend, or terminate benefit plans at any time, to the extent permitted by law and the terms of the applicable insurance contracts, and with reasonable notice where practicable.
Nothing in this policy shall be construed as a contract of employment or as a guarantee of benefits for any specific duration.

6.05(a) Eligibility

Continuation of group medical insurance may be available to eligible retired employees who were employed in a full-time position at the time of retirement and who begin receiving either Service Retirement or Disability Retirement benefits from the Texas County and District Retirement System (TCDRS) within two (2) months following separation from employment.

Eligibility for County-paid retiree medical insurance requires at least eight (8) years of service with Panola County, unless otherwise required by law or Commissioners Court action. For purposes of this provision, service includes only periods of employment in a regular full-time or part-time position. Time worked as a temporary employee shall not be counted toward the service requirement for retiree medical insurance eligibility.

Group medical insurance coverage may also be available to an eligible surviving spouse who:

- begins receiving monthly survivor benefits from TCDRS within two (2) months following the death of an active or retired employee; and
- was covered under the County's group medical plan at the time of the employee's death.

All eligibility determinations are subject to the terms of the applicable insurance contracts, TCDRS rules, and approval of the Commissioners Court.

Individuals may have continuation rights under federal law, including COBRA, where applicable and based on qualifying events.

6.05(b) Benefits
Benefits under this program are governed by the terms and conditions of the County's group medical insurance plan and the applicable insurance carrier's master contract. In the event of any conflict between this policy and the plan documents, the terms of the plan documents shall control.

Copies of the current plan documents are available through the County Treasurer's Office and the County Auditor's Office during normal business hours or upon request.

6.05(c) Premium Payments
The County may pay all or a portion of the premium for eligible retired employees participating in the retiree group medical insurance plan, subject to annual appropriation by the Commissioners Court and availability of budgeted funds.

Premiums for eligible surviving spouses and dependents, if offered, are the sole responsibility of the covered individual unless otherwise approved by the Commissioners Court.

Monthly premium rates are determined by the applicable insurance carrier and are subject to change at the beginning of each plan year or upon renewal of the insurance contract.

Premium payments must be submitted to the County Treasurer's Office in accordance with established procedures. Failure to make timely payment may result in termination of coverage, subject to applicable law and plan provisions.

6.05(d) Enrollment Requirements
Eligible retirees and surviving spouses must timely apply for continuation coverage and submit all required documentation.

Required forms may include:
- forms required by the current insurance carrier; and
- the County selection/enrollment form.

Enrollment must be completed within:
- thirty (30) days of the effective date of Service Retirement;
- thirty (30) days from the date survivor benefits begin; or
- thirty (30) days from the effective date of approved Disability Retirement, as determined by TCDRS.

Failure to timely submit all required enrollment documentation may result in loss of eligibility for coverage, subject to applicable law and plan provisions.

7.0 LEAVE TIME ACCRUALS & LEAVE BENEFITS

7.01 LEAVE TIME APPROVALS

All leave requests must be approved by the employee's supervisor. Supervisors are responsible for maintaining records of leave requests. Leave time must be entered into the County's electronic timekeeping system (ESS).

An unauthorized absence is any absence from work that has not been approved by the appropriate supervisor. Employees will not be compensated for unauthorized absences, and such absences may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

An employee who is absent from work for three (3) or more consecutive workdays without notifying their supervisor and without obtaining approved leave may be considered to have voluntarily resigned employment, unless the absence is protected under applicable federal or state law, including but not limited to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

If an employee experiences a break in service, leave balances and accrual rates will be reset based on the employee's most recent full-time employment date.

7.02 HOLIDAYS

Panola County pays a certain number of paid holidays each year. These holidays are adopted on an annual basis for the upcoming calendar year by the Panola County Commissioners Court during a scheduled Court meeting. Only regular full-time employees are eligible for Holiday Pay.

Law Enforcement personnel and dispatchers receive 8 hours of Holiday pay, per Court approved Holiday, in addition to all hours worked during that period.

7.03 VACATION LEAVE

Regular full-time employees are eligible for paid vacation leave. Part time employees hired on or after January 1, 2025 will not accrue vacation leave. Part time employees hired before January 1, 2025 will continue to accrue their vacation at a pro-rated amount. An employee is required to be in continuous employment for 6 months before they are eligible for vacation leave.

Upon completion of 6 months employment, full-time employees will be credited with 40 hours vacation leave.

On each successive January 1, full-time employees who have been continuously employed for 6 months through 10 years will be credited with 80 hours vacation leave for that calendar year.

On each January 1st, full-time employees who have been continuously employed for 11 years through 14 years will be credited with 100 hours for that calendar year.

On each January 1st, full-time employees who have been continuously employed for 15 years through 19 years will be credited with 120 hours for that calendar year.

On each January 1st, full-time employees who have been continuously employed for 20 or more years will be credited with 160 hours for that calendar year.

7.03(a) Approval of Vacation Leave Carryover
Vacation leave must be used in the year in which it is earned and may not be carried over unless specifically approved by the Panola County Commissioners Court. Requests for carryover will only be considered when vacation leave could not reasonably be used due to extenuating circumstances and must be submitted in writing by the employee with a recommendation from the Department Head. All requests to carry over vacation leave must be submitted to the County Judge no later than the last Commissioners Court meeting of the calendar year in which the leave is earned. A copy of the request must also be provided to the County Treasurer's Office to ensure any approved unused balances are properly carried forward to the new year.

7.03(b) Vacation Leave Request & Approval Process
Employees should submit requests for vacation leave to their Department Head as far in advance as practicable, and whenever possible at least two (2) weeks prior to the planned leave. In cases where vacation leave is unplanned or short notice is necessary, the employee should notify the Department Head as soon as possible.

All vacation leave requests are subject to approval by the Department Head based on the timing of the request and the operational needs of the department. A request may be denied if the Department Head determines that the employee's absence would create an undue hardship on the department.

If a request is denied or cannot be accommodated as submitted, the employee should work with the Department Head to schedule the leave at a mutually agreeable time.

7.03(c) Holiday Pay and Sick Leave During Vacation
If an adopted Panola County holiday occurs during an employee's scheduled vacation, the holiday shall not be deducted from the employee's vacation balance.

If an employee becomes ill while on approved vacation leave, the time of illness may be charged to the employee's available sick leave rather than vacation leave, provided that:

a) the employee has sick leave available; and
b) the employee promptly notified his/her supervisor of the illness; and
c) the employee provides the supervisor with acceptable proof of illness; and
d) the supervisor gives permission to charge the period of illness to sick leave.

Acceptable forms for proof of illness include: a doctor's note, return to work release, discharge paperwork from medical facility, telehealth visit confirmation, prescription receipt or pharmacy printout, lab confirmed illness test results.

7.03(d) Vacation payout upon Separation

Upon separation from employment, eligible employees may receive payment for accrued but unused vacation leave, subject to the following limitations:

1. Employees who separate from employment before completing one (1) year of continuous full-time service are not eligible for payment of any accrued but unused vacation leave.
2. Employees who have completed at least one (1) year but less than fifteen (15) years of continuous service at the time of separation may be paid for up to forty (40) hours of accrued but unused vacation leave.
3. Employees who have completed fifteen (15) or more years of continuous service at the time of separation may be paid for up to eighty (80) hours of accrued but unused vacation leave.
4. Employees who are terminated for gross misconduct shall forfeit any right to payment for accrued but unused vacation leave.
5. Vacation leave payouts, when applicable, will be calculated using the employee's regular rate of pay in effect on the date of separation.

The County reserves the right to verify all leave balances and determine eligibility for vacation payout in accordance with this policy.

An employee will not be paid for unused vacation time while still employed by Panola County.

7.04 SICK LEAVE

Regular full-time employees are eligible for paid sick leave, accruing at 8 hours per month or 10 hours per month for Road & Bridge employees. The maximum sick leave accrual is 1080 hours. Once maxed, employees will no longer accrue sick leave until the balance is below the maximum. For employees transferring from part-time to full-time who have already earned a pro-rated lump sum accrual during their part-time employment; they will be given the difference owed between the full-time and part-time lump sum accrual, in accordance with their employment anniversary date.

Part-time employees hired after January 1, 2025 will not accrue sick leave. Part time employees hired before January 1, 2025 will continue to accrue sick leave at a pro-rated amount equal to 4.8 hours per month. The maximum sick leave accrual is 648 hours. Once maxed, employees will no longer accrue sick leave until the balance is below the maximum.

Sick leave balances are available through the electronic timekeeping system (ESS) or upon request from the County Treasurer's Office.

7.04(a) Additional Sick Leave Accrual

Regular full-time employees who complete three (3) years of continuous service shall receive 180 additional hours of paid sick leave. Upon completion of five (5) years of continuous service, employees shall receive an additional 180 hours of paid sick leave. These 360 total hours are a one-time supplemental benefit and are not recurring.

Part-time employees hired before January 1, 2025, who complete three (3) years of continuous service shall receive 108 additional hours of paid sick leave. Upon completion of five (5) years of continuous service, employees shall receive an additional 108 hours of paid sick leave. These 216 total hours are a one-time supplemental benefit and are not recurring.

7.04(b) Sick Leave Usage, Notification, and Documentation

Sick leave may be used, once accrued, when an employee is unable to report to work due to personal illness or mental incapacity, medical appointments or treatment, medical quarantine, or to provide care for an immediate family member during illness or medical appointments. For purposes of this policy, immediate family includes the employee's spouse, children (including stepchildren and foster children placed with the employee), and parents (including mother-in-law and father-in-law).

Employees are responsible for notifying their supervisor of a sick leave absence as soon as possible and, when feasible, no later than 15 minutes prior to their scheduled start time. Employees must request that sick leave be applied to the absence.

If more than one day of sick leave is required, the employee must notify their supervisor of the expected duration on the first day or provide daily updates if the duration is unknown.
Employees absent for three (3) or more consecutive workdays due to illness must provide a physician's statement upon return to work. The statement must confirm the employee is cleared to resume regular duties or, if applicable, specify any work restrictions and their expected duration.

Employees do not accrue sick leave during any period of unpaid status.

Employees using sick leave for medical appointments must provide at least one (1) day advance notice when practicable.

7.04(c) Sick Leave Abuse and Documentation Requirements

Any abuse or unauthorized use of sick leave may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

<u>A physician's statement may be required:</u>

a) Prior to return from any absence of three (3) or more workdays;
b) Prior to return from any absence involving illness or injury that prevents the employee from performing essential job duties;
c) At the discretion of the supervisor.

<u>Patterns of sick leave use that may indicate abuse include, but are not limited to:</u>

- Calling in sick on a day previously requested off and denied, or leaving early on such a day;
- Repeated use of sick leave immediately before or after scheduled days off;
- Repeated use of sick leave adjacent to holidays, approved vacation or leave days;
- Frequent use of sick leave shortly after accrual;
- Falsifying or omitting information related to illness, injury, or documentation;
- Any pattern of conduct identified by the supervisor as potential abuse.

If a pattern of abuse is identified, the supervisor may require a physician's note for all subsequent sick leave absences for a specified period, until the requirement is lifted.

7.04(d) Sick Leave exhaustion and Unused Sick Leave Balances

Employees who exhaust accrued sick leave may use unpaid leave when authorized or may request to use accrued vacation or other available paid leave, in accordance with County policy. Sick leave may not be advanced or borrowed against future accruals.

Upon separation from employment, employees are not compensated for unused sick leave balances.

7.05 WORK PERFORMED WHILE ON APPROVED LEAVE

Approved leave is intended to provide employees with time away from work. Employees are generally expected to remain off duty while on approved leave and should not perform work unless directed, required by the nature of their position, or otherwise authorized to do so. Your Department Head will notify you if the nature of your position requires you to remain available for work-related calls or incidents outside of your regularly scheduled work hours.

If an employee performs work during their regularly scheduled work hours while on approved leave, the employee must record the actual time worked, and the corresponding amount of leave will be deducted from the employee's leave for that day. No minimum compensable period applies to work performed during the employee's regularly scheduled work hours.

If an employee performs work outside of their regularly scheduled work hours, the time worked should be recorded as hours worked in addition to the employee's full scheduled day of approved leave. Refer to Section 5.07 for After-Hours Work and Call-Out Procedures.

7.06 BREAK TIMES AND NURSING MOTHERS

In accordance with Fair Labor Standards Act and PUMP Act, Panola County supports the practice of expressing milk and will make reasonable accommodations for the needs of employees who express breast milk.

Panola County will provide reasonable breaks daily for a nursing mother to express breast milk. The employee must record these breaks through some form of their leave time and submit these entries through the Electronic Time Keeping System. Panola County prohibits any discrimination or retaliation against nursing mothers for using or asking for this break.

The County will provide a private location, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion and appropriate for expressing breast milk. Employees should contact the County Treasurer's Office to identify an appropriate location.

All other employee breaks are determined by each Elected Official, Appointed Official, and/or Department Head and are not required to be provided, except for meal periods where applicable.

If paid breaks are provided within a department, nursing mothers within that same department shall receive the same paid break treatment and shall not have lactation break time deducted from leave balances or pay.

7.07 BEREAVEMENT LEAVE OR FUNERAL LEAVE

Regular full-time employees are eligible for bereavement leave. In the event of the death of a parent, child, spouse, sibling, grandparent, parent-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, or grandchild of either spouse, up to three (3) days of paid bereavement leave may be taken without deduction from the employee's accrued leave balances.

Up to an additional two (2) days of paid bereavement leave may be approved by the Department Head when circumstances warrant additional time.

If leave is needed beyond the limits set in this policy, it may be charged to available vacation, compensatory time, or taken as leave without pay.

Regular full-time employees who are requested by the family of the deceased to officiate, serve as pallbearer, vocalist or musician at a funeral will be allowed one-half day off with bereavement pay. This is limited to no more than four funerals within a year's time.

7.08 EMERGENCY CLOSURE LEAVE AND COMPENSATION

Please refer to Section 4.05 Weather Closings and Emergencies for additional information.

7.08(a) Employee Classifications

For purposes of this section, employees may be designated as one of the following:

(1) Non-Essential Personnel

Employees whose duties may be suspended during an official courthouse or county office closure. These employees are not required to report to work unless specifically directed by their Elected Official, Department Head, or authorized supervisor.

(2) Essential Personnel

Employees whose duties are necessary to maintain critical County operations during an official closure. Essential Personnel may be required to report to work or perform duties during a closure to maintain governmental operations, legal obligations, financial functions, information technology systems, facilities protection, or other essential county operations.

Examples may include payroll personnel, information technology personnel, facilities maintenance personnel, and other employees designated by the Elected Official or Department Head.

(3) Public Safety Essential Personnel

Employees whose primary duties involve public safety, emergency response, detention operations, emergency communications, road & bridge operations, disaster response, or recovery operations. Public Safety Essential Personnel are generally expected to remain available for duty during emergency events and official closures.

Examples may include Sheriff's Office personnel, Detention Center personnel, dispatchers, emergency management personnel, Road & Bridge personnel, and other employees designated by the County.

The County Judge, Elected Official, or Department Head shall determine which positions are designated as Essential Personnel or Public Safety Essential Personnel.

7.08(b) Emergency Closure Leave for Non-Essential Personnel
When the Courthouse or County offices are officially closed by the County Judge or authorized designee due to inclement weather or other emergency conditions, Non-Essential Personnel who are scheduled to work but are unable to report will receive paid administrative leave for the duration of the closure.

This time shall be recorded using the EMERGENCY CLOSURE activity code. For Non-Essential Personnel, EMERGENCY CLOSURE time is paid administrative leave, does not require use of accrued leave balances, and is included in straight-time pay calculations. It is not considered hours worked for overtime purposes.

7.08(c) Employees Required to Work During Closure
Essential Personnel and Public Safety Essential Personnel who are required to report to work, remain on duty, or perform work during an official closure shall record all actual hours worked using the HOURS WORKED activity code.

In addition Essential Personnel and Public Safety Essential Personnel shall receive EMERGENCY CLOSURE credit equal to the number of scheduled hours occurring during the closure that the employee is required to work. This credit shall be recorded separately in the ESS Time Entry System and shall be used as straight-time compensatory credit in accordance with County policy.

7.08(d) Overtime & Compensatory Time for Essential & Public Safety Essential Personnel
Hours recorded as HOURS WORKED during an official closure shall be considered hours worked for purposes of calculating overtime and compensatory time in accordance with County policy and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Hours recorded as EMERGENCY CLOSURE are not considered hours worked for purposes of overtime or compensatory time calculations. EMERGENCY CLOSURE hours represent straight-time compensatory credit provided to Essential Personnel and Public Safety Essential Personnel required to work during an official County closure and may be used in accordance with County compensatory time policies.

7.08(e) No Duplication of Compensation
Employees shall not receive duplicate wage compensation for the same hours worked. EMERGENCY CLOSURE credit is provided as a compensatory benefit in addition to regular pay for actual hours worked and is intended to recognize employees required to perform duties during an official County closure.

7.08(f) Documentation and Time Entry

Department Heads, Elected Officials, and time approvers are responsible for ensuring proper designation of Essential Personnel and Public Safety Essential Personnel.

They are also responsible for ensuring the accurate and timely recording of all EMERGENCY CLOSURE hours and HOURS WORKED in the ESS Time Entry System for payroll, compensatory time, overtime, and recordkeeping purposes.

7.09 MILITARY LEAVE, JURY DUTY AND CIVIL LEAVE

7.09(a) Military Leave

Panola County complies with the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) of 1994 and all applicable state statutes pertaining to military leave and employee rights.

Employees will be granted paid leave of 15 workdays in a single fiscal year to participate in authorized military training or duty ordered or authorized by proper authority as provided in Chapter 437 of the Texas Government Code.

Copies of military orders must be provided to the Department Head within three (3) days of receipt. Military leave applies only to scheduled workdays.

Employees may use accrued leave or leave without pay if military duty exceeds the 15 workday paid maximum. Any unused military leave may not be carried into the next fiscal year.

Employees who leave their positions due to active military service shall be eligible for reemployment in accordance with applicable state and federal law.

7.09(b) Jury Duty

The Commissioners Court considers jury duty to be a public service and in furtherance of the County's role in the administration of justice.

Full-time regular employees will be paid for time spent on jury duty, including jury selection and actual service.

If an employee is released from jury duty before 12:00 p.m., the employee shall report to work for the remainder of the scheduled workday following a meal break.

Any compensation received for jury service may be retained by the employee.

A copy of the jury summons and proof of service must be provided to the Department Head to qualify for paid leave.

7.09(c) Civil Leave (Court Appearances and Litigation)

Employees required to appear in private litigation as a party or subpoenaed witness shall use accrued leave (vacation or compensatory time) or leave without pay.

Employees on unpaid leave must maintain a minimum of 30 hours per week of work time or paid status, as required to retain full-time employment status.

7.10 FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

It is the policy of the County to provide eligible employees with all benefits and privileges to which they are entitled under the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Many of the terms used in this policy are defined by the FMLA and have the meanings contained in the Act. This policy shall be administered in accordance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and applicable federal regulations.

7.10(a) Eligibility

To be eligible for benefits under this policy, an employee must:

- Have worked for Panola County at least twelve (12) months (need not be continuous service but must have been during the previous seven years) and
- Have worked at least one thousand two hundred fifty (1,250) hours during the twelve (12) month period immediately preceding the leave.

7.10(b) Qualifying Events

Leave under this policy may be taken for the following qualifying events:

- The birth of a son or daughter and in order to care for the newborn child; or
- The placement of a son or daughter with the employee for adoption or foster care; or
- To care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a serious health condition; or
- The serious health condition of the employee that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of the employee's job; or
- A qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that an employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a military member on covered active duty or has been notified of an impending call or order to covered active-duty status; or
- To care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the employee is the spouse, son, daughter, parent or next of kin of the covered servicemember.

7.10(c) Serious Health Condition

A serious health condition is an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves overnight inpatient care at a hospital, hospice, or residential care medical facility including any period of incapacity or subsequent treatment in connection with such inpatient care or continuing treatment by a health care provider.

7.10(d) Continuing Treatment

A serious health condition involving continuing treatment generally means a medical condition that prevents an employee from working for more than three (3) consecutive full days and requires ongoing medical care. This includes any of the following situations:

<u>(1) Illness or injury requiring more than 3 days away from work</u>

A condition that results in incapacity for more than three (3) consecutive full calendar days and involves ongoing medical care, such as:

- Two (2) or more visits to a health care provider within 30 days of the first day the employee is unable to work, or
- One (1) visit to a health care provider followed by a prescribed course of treatment or ongoing care plan.

To qualify, the first in-person medical visit must generally occur within seven (7) days of the first day the employee becomes unable to work.

(2) Pregnancy-related conditions
Any period of incapacity due to pregnancy or prenatal care.

(3) Chronic medical conditions
A condition that:
- Requires periodic treatment by a health care provider,
- Lasts for an extended period of time, and
- May cause occasional (intermittent) periods where the employee is unable to work.

Examples may include conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or similar chronic illnesses.

(4) Long-term or permanent conditions
A serious medical condition that is long-term or permanent in nature and for which treatment may not be effective in curing the condition.

(5) Multiple treatments for serious conditions
Any period of absence to receive multiple treatments such as:
- Rehabilitation after an injury or accident, or
- Treatment for a condition that would likely result in more than three (3) days of incapacity without medical care.

7.10(e) Military Family Exigency Leave
Eligible employees may take FMLA leave when an employee's spouse, son or daughter of any age, or parent is a military member on covered active duty or call to covered active-duty status. An eligible employee may take leave for one or more of the following qualifying exigencies:

A. Short-notice deployment: For example, leave may be taken to address any issue that arises because the military member was given seven (7) or fewer days' notice for active-duty deployment in support of a contingency operation. For a short-notice deployment exigency, the eligible employee may take up to seven (7) calendar days beginning on the date the military member is notified of an impending call or order to covered active duty.
B. Military events and related activities: For example, leave may be taken to attend any official ceremony, program or event sponsored by the military that is related to the covered active duty or call to covered active duty status of the military member; or to attend family support or assistance programs and informational briefings sponsored or promoted by the military, military service organizations, or the American Red Cross that are related to the covered active duty or call to covered active duty status of the military member.

C. Childcare and school activities: For example, leave may be taken to arrange for alternative childcare, provide childcare on an urgent, immediate need basis (not as routine), to attend school or daycare meetings, to enroll or transfer to a new school or day care facility a child of the military member when it is necessitated by the covered active duty or call to covered active duty status of a military member. Leave may be taken to make or update financial or legal arrangements to address the covered members' absence while on active duty or call to active-duty status.
D. Financial and legal arrangements: For example, leave may be taken to make or update financial or legal arrangements to address the military member's absence while on covered active duty or call to covered active duty status; or to act as the military member's representative before a governmental agency for obtaining, arranging or appealing military service benefits while the military member is on covered active duty or call to covered active duty status and for a period of ninety (90) days following the termination of the military member's active duty status.
E. Counseling: For example, leave may be taken to attend counseling provided by someone other than a health care provider for oneself, for the military member, or the biological, adopted, or foster child, stepchild, or legal ward of the military member or a child for whom the military member stands in loco parentis who is under age 18 or is age 18 or older and incapable of self-care because of a mental or physical disability at the time that FMLA leave is to commence provided the need for counseling arises from the covered active duty status or call to covered active duty status of the military member.
F. Rest and recuperation: For example, leave may be taken to spend time with the military member who is on a short-term, temporary, Rest and Recuperation leave during the period of deployment. Eligible employees may take up to fifteen (15) calendar days of leave for each instance of Rest and Recuperation, beginning on the date the military member commences each instance of Rest and Recuperation.
G. Post-deployment activities: For example, leave may be taken to attend post-deployment activities for the military member for a period of 90 days following the termination of the member's covered active-duty status; and to address issues that arise from the death of a military member while on covered active-duty status.
H. Parental care
I. Additional activities to address any other additional events that may arise out of the military member's covered active duty or call to covered active-duty status provided Panola County agrees the leave shall qualify as an exigency and agree to both the timing and the duration of such leave.

7.10(f) Leave Amount

A. Except for in the case of leave to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness, twelve (12) weeks leave per twelve (12) month period may be used under this policy.
B. Panola County will measure the twelve (12) month period as a rolling twelve (12) month period measured backward from the date an employee uses any leave under this policy.
C. All leave taken under this policy during the prior twelve (12) month period shall be subtracted from the employee's twelve (12) week leave eligibility and the balance is the leave the employee is entitled to take at that time.

D. If a husband and wife both work for Panola County the maximum combined leave they shall be allowed to take in any twelve (12) month period for the birth or placement of a child, or care for a parent with a serious health condition is twelve (12) weeks. The combined limit is twenty-six (26) weeks in a single twelve (12) month period if leave is to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness.

E. An eligible employee is entitled to up to twenty-six (26) workweeks of leave to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness during a single twelve (12) month period.
    i. The single twelve (12) month period begins on the first day the eligible employee takes FMLA to care for covered servicemember and ends twelve (12) months after that date.
    ii. If an eligible employee does not take all of their twenty-six (26) workweeks during this twelve (12) month period, the remaining part of the twenty-six (26) workweeks of leave entitlement to care for the covered servicemember is forfeited.
    iii. This leave entitlement is applied on a per-injury basis such that an eligible employee may be entitled to take more than one period of twenty-six (26) workweeks of leave if the leave is to care for different covered servicemembers or to care for the same covered servicemember with a subsequent serious illness or injury, except that no more than twenty-six (26) workweeks may be taken within any single twelve (12) month period.
    iv. An eligible employee is entitled to a combined total of 26 workweeks of FMLA leave for any qualifying reason during the single 12-month period applicable to military caregiver leave.

7.10(g) Paid and Unpaid Leave

Employees taking FMLA leave shall be required to use available paid leave concurrently with FMLA leave in the following order, regardless of the reason for leave:

1. Compensatory time;
2. Sick leave, when the reason for leave qualifies for sick leave use under County policy;
3. Vacation leave;
4. Any other available paid leave.

Once all applicable paid leave is exhausted, the remainder of the FMLA leave shall be unpaid. Sick leave may only be used when permitted under the County's sick leave policy and applicable law.

7.10(h) Employee Benefits

- While on FMLA leave, Panola County shall continue to pay the employee's medical insurance premium at the same rate as if the employee had been actively at work.
- The employee shall be required to pay for dependent coverage, and for any other insurance coverage for which the employee would normally pay, or the coverage will be discontinued.
- While on unpaid leave, the employee shall be required to pay for premiums due to Panola County no later than thirty (30) days after the due date which Panola County sets or the coverage shall be discontinued.

- At the end of the twelve (12) weeks leave all eligible employees will be offered COBRA if they are unable to return to work, except for the care of an injured covered military member where the eligible employee will be offered COBRA at the end of twenty-six (26) weeks in a single twelve (12) month period.

7.10(i) Intermittent Leave Schedule

A. Intermittent leave under this policy shall be allowed only where it is necessary for the care and treatment of the serious health condition of the employee or the employee's eligible family member or for the care of a covered servicemember.
B. A reduced schedule under this policy shall be allowed only where it is necessary for the care and treatment of the serious health condition of the employee or the employee's eligible family member or for the care of a covered servicemember.
C. Intermittent leave or leave on a reduced schedule is available only if there is a medical need for the leave and such medical need can be best accommodated through an intermittent or reduced leave schedule.
D. All work time missed as a result of intermittent leave or a reduced work schedule under this policy shall be deducted from the employee's twelve (12) week leave eligibility. If the time missed is for the care of a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness, the time will be deducted from the employee's twenty-six (26) week leave eligibility in a single twelve (12) month period.

7.10(j) Certification Requirements

A. Panola County shall have the right to ask for certification of the serious health condition of the employee or the employee's covered family member when the employee requests or is using leave under this policy. Medical certification forms will be provided to the employee for this purpose.
B. The employee must respond to the request for medical certification within fifteen (15) days of the request or provide a reasonable explanation for the delay. If an employee does not respond, leave may be denied.
C. Certification for leave taken because of a qualifying exigency shall include:
    1) A copy of the military member's active duty orders or other documentation issued by the military which indicates that the covered military member is on covered active duty or called to covered active duty status;
    2) The dates of the military member's covered active duty service;
    3) A statement or description, signed by the employee, of appropriate facts regarding the qualifying exigency, sufficient to support the need for leave.
    4) The approximate date on which the qualifying exigency will start and end;
    5) If the request is for an intermittent leave or reduced schedule basis, an estimate of the frequency and duration of the qualifying exigency;
    6) If the qualifying exigency involves meeting with a third party, appropriate contact information such as: name, title, organization, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address and a brief description of the purpose of the meeting.
D. A medical certification form will be provided to the employee requesting leave to be taken for a serious injury or illness of a covered servicemember.
E. If the employee requests to take intermittent leave or work a reduced schedule, a medical certification shall include dates and the duration of treatment and a statement of medical

necessity for taking intermittent leave or working a reduced schedule. Certification for intermittent or reduced schedule leave may be requested every six (6) months in connection with an eligible absence.

F. Panola County shall have the right to ask for a second opinion from a physician of the County's choice, at the expense of the County unless the FMLA leave is to care for a seriously injured or ill covered servicemember and such condition is supported by an ITO or ITA.
G. If there is a conflict between the first and second certifications, Panola County shall have the right to require a third certification, at the expense of Panola County, from a health care practitioner agreed upon by both the employee and Panola County, and this third opinion shall be considered final.

7.10(k) Requesting Leave

A. Except where leave is unforeseeable, an employee shall be required to submit, in writing, a request for leave under this policy to his or her immediate supervisor.
B. Where practicable, an employee should give his or her immediate supervisor at least thirty (30) days' notice before beginning leave under this policy.
C. Where it is not reasonably practicable to give thirty (30) days' notice before beginning leave, the employee shall be required to give as much notice as is reasonably practicable.
D. If an employee fails to provide thirty (30) days' notice for foreseeable leave, the leave request may be denied until at least thirty (30) days from the date Panola County receives notice.

7.10(l) Reinstatement

A. Employees returning from leave under this policy, and who have not exceeded the twelve (12) week maximum allowed under this policy, shall be returned to the same job or a job equivalent to that the employee held prior to going on leave. Employees who have not exceeded the twenty-six (26) week maximum, in a single twelve (12) month period, allowed to care for a seriously ill or injured covered servicemember, shall be returned to the same job or a job equivalent to the job they held prior to going on leave.
B. Where an employee is placed in another position, it will be one which has equivalent status, pay, benefits and other employment terms and one which entails substantially equivalent skill, effort, responsibility and authority.
C. Unless required to do so by other applicable law, Panola County shall have no obligation to reinstate an employee who takes leave under this policy and who is unable to return to work after using the maximum weeks of leave allowed under this policy, or who elects not to return to work after using the maximum leave; this includes employees who may still have sick leave or vacation leave still available.

7.10(m) Repayment of Premiums

Except in situations where the employee is unable to return to work because of the serious medical condition of the employee or of the employee's family member, a serious injury or illness of a covered servicemember, or other circumstances beyond the control of the employee, an employee who does not return to work after using the maximum leave allowed under this policy shall be required to reimburse Panola County for all medical premiums paid by Panola County while the employee was on leave without pay.

7.10(n) Other Benefits

While on leave without pay under this policy, an employee shall not earn vacation or sick leave, be eligible for holidays, or earn other benefits afforded to employees actively at work, except for those stated in this policy.

7.10(o) Other Issues

A. Any area or issue regarding family and medical leave, which is not addressed in this policy shall be subject to the basic requirements of the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the regulations issued to implement it. This policy is intended to provide Panola County employees with all rights due to them under the Family and Medical Leave Act but no other or further rights.
B. Panola County may require an employee who has been absent for three (3) or more days to provide a medical certification to determine FMLA eligibility. The employee should have their physician complete and return the certification within fifteen (15) days of receipt to be eligible for FMLA. Failure to return the medical certification may result in denial of FMLA.
C. Panola County may designate leave as FMLA leave when the County has sufficient information to determine that the leave qualifies under the FMLA.
D. Employees on FMLA leave because of the employee's own serious health condition will be required to provide a Fitness-for-Duty certification prior to returning to work. The Fitness-for Duty certification must state that the employee is able to perform the essential functions of his/her job and list any physical limitations. A copy of the employee's job description will be provided for the health care provider to be able to make the certification.
E. Once FMLA is exhausted, employees eligible for insurance will be offered COBRA.

7.11 LEAVE OF ABSENCE

When an employee requires a leave of absence outside the scope of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the employee must submit a written request for a leave of absence (LOA) to the employee's Department Head and obtain prior approval before beginning the leave.

A LOA may be granted at the discretion of the County, subject to the operational needs of the County and Department Head approval. Requests for LOA must include sufficient supporting documentation to enable the County to evaluate the request.

A LOA may be denied if the absence would create undue hardship on County operations.
Medical certification may be required when the requested leave relates to the employee's own medical condition or the need to care for a family member with a medical condition.

Total leave time, including FMLA leave and any approved extension, shall not exceed six (6) months unless otherwise required by law.

A LOA will not be approved unless there is a reasonable expectation that the employee will return to work at the conclusion of the approved leave period.

This policy shall be administered consistent with the County's obligations under the FMLA, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and applicable state and federal military leave laws.

A LOA is not an entitlement, and approval is at the sole discretion of the County except where otherwise required by law. All LOA requests shall be reviewed in coordination with the County Treasurer.

7.11(a) Use of All Other Available Leave

All accrued sick leave, vacation leave, compensatory time, and applicable FMLA leave must be exhausted and run concurrently with an authorized LOA. Accrued sick leave may be used only in connection with a LOA based on medical necessity. After exhaustion of all paid leave, the remaining LOA, if any, is unpaid. No paid leave benefits accrue during an unpaid LOA. The maximum six (6) month absence includes all paid and unpaid days of leave. Employees on unpaid LOA may be eligible to continue health insurance coverage under COBRA in accordance with applicable law and plan provisions.

7.11(b) Eligibility/Criteria

Except where otherwise required by law, discretionary LOA exceeding accrued paid leave is generally available only to full-time employees. Factors considered by the County in granting a LOA include:

- the reason for the leave,
- the anticipated duration of the leave,
- the documents submitted to substantiate the need for the leave (e.g., medical certification),
- the frequency with which the employee requests approval for leaves of absence, and
- the impact that granting the leave will have on County operations.

While the County will strive to grant any meritorious request for a LOA, the County must ensure that granting the LOA will not create operational hardships and that all essential obligations of the County are able to be met with the staff available for the duration of the LOA. However, Panola County has no obligation to approve a leave of absence that is not covered by FMLA or ADA requirements.

7.11(c) Reasons for LOA

A LOA may be considered in the following circumstances:

- Extended illness, injury, or temporary disability and recovery therefrom. (Pregnancy and the recovery from childbirth are treated the same as any other medical condition.)
- Extended care for an immediate family member.
- Public service commitment.
- Attending to personal matters of long duration (e.g., serving as executor of family estate matters)

7.11(d) Other Employment During Leave

Employees on LOA may not engage in outside employment or self-employment that is inconsistent with the stated reason for the leave or that otherwise violates County policy.

7.11(e) Reinstatement

Employees returning from a LOA may be reinstated to their same position, subject to operational needs and position availability. Reinstatement is not guaranteed unless required by federal or state law. If the employee's previous position is not available, the County will make its best efforts to place the employee in a position of similar pay and status. If an employee's same position or a position with similar pay and status is not available, the employee's job may be terminated with eligibility for rehire. An employee who fails to return to work at the conclusion of an approved LOA will be considered to have voluntarily resigned his or her employment with the County.

7.11(f) Revocation

The Department Head may review an authorized leave of absence if there is reasonable cause to believe the basis for the leave no longer exists or that the employee has failed to comply with the requirements of this policy.

Except where prohibited by applicable federal or state law, including the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or other protected leave provisions, a leave of absence may be modified or terminated if the employee:

- fails to provide required medical status updates or documentation within a reasonable timeframe;
- engages in activities inconsistent with the stated purpose of the leave;
- or otherwise fails to comply with County leave procedures.

Failure to return to work upon expiration of an approved leave of absence, or failure to comply with applicable leave requirements, may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to limit any rights or protections afforded to employees under applicable law.

7.12 ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE

An employee may be placed on Administrative Leave with pay when deemed appropriate by the Elected/Appointed Official or Department Head.

Administrative Leave with pay may be assigned when an employee's absence from work is determined to be in the best interest of the County, including situations in which the employee is the subject of an internal investigation.

An employee may be placed on Administrative Leave with pay for a period not to exceed five (5) working days without approval of the Commissioners Court. Administrative Leave with pay beyond five (5) working days must be approved by the Commissioners Court.

The Elected/Appointed Official or Department Head shall immediately notify the County Treasurer in writing when an employee is placed on Administrative Leave with pay.

8.0 DISCIPLINE / GRIEVANCE / SEPARATION

8.01 DISCIPLINE & AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT

Each Elected Official, Appointed Official, and/or Department Head retains authority over personnel management and disciplinary decisions within their respective office or department. Supervisors and Department Heads are expected to address employee performance issues, policy violations, misconduct, disruptive behavior, and other workplace concerns in a timely and appropriate manner consistent with County policy and applicable law.

The County Treasurer may maintain personnel records and provide guidance regarding County policies or employment-related procedures; however, authority regarding hiring, discipline, termination, and other personnel decisions remains with the applicable Elected Official, Appointed Official, or Department Head.

All County employees are employed "at will," and nothing in this policy creates a contract of employment or guarantees employment for any specific duration. Panola County reserves the right to terminate the employment relationship at any time, for any lawful reason or for no reason, with or without notice, subject only to applicable law. The County further reserves the right to modify, revoke, suspend, terminate, or change any employment policy, practice, procedure, benefit, or condition of employment at any time, with or without notice.

Conduct that violates County policy, interferes with operations, discredits Panola County, or threatens the safety, efficiency, or professionalism of the workplace may result in disciplinary action, whether or not such conduct is specifically identified in this policy.

General standards of conduct include the efficient and safe performance of assigned duties, compliance with attendance and workplace policies, and the respectful treatment of citizens, customers, coworkers, supervisors, and visitors.

The following examples of prohibited conduct are illustrative only and are not intended to be an exhaustive list of behaviors that may result in disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination of employment:

- Dishonesty or falsification of records or documents, including but not limited to employment applications, medical certifications, payroll records, or time records;
- Failure to observe assigned work schedules, including starting, quitting, or break times;
- Reckless or unsafe conduct;
- Unsatisfactory job performance;
- Violation of any security, health, safety, or environmental rule, policy, or directive;
- Smoking or use of tobacco products in unauthorized areas;
- Excessive absenteeism, tardiness, or unexcused absences;
- Failure to report to work when leave or absence has not been approved;
- Theft, attempted theft, misappropriation, or intentional damage to County property or the property of others;

- Possession of alcohol, intoxicants, or unlawfully possessed controlled substances on County property or while conducting County business;
- Reporting to work or remaining at work while under the influence of alcohol or unlawfully used controlled substances;
- Threatening, intimidating, harassing, or interfering with supervisors, contractors, employees, citizens, or visitors by words or actions;
- Insubordination or refusal to follow lawful directives;
- Fighting, assault, or violent behavior;
- Sleeping while on duty;
- Unauthorized possession of a firearm, prohibited weapon, or explosive on County property or while conducting County business, except as otherwise permitted by law;
- Conviction of a criminal offense that materially affects the employee's ability to perform the duties of the position or impacts County operations;
- Failure to report workplace accidents, injuries, safety concerns, or misconduct;
- Engaging in unlawful discrimination, harassment, or retaliation;
- Unprofessional, abusive, or disruptive conduct toward citizens, customers, coworkers, supervisors, or visitors; and
- Receiving, soliciting, or accepting a bribe, kickback, or other improper payment, gift, or service.

Disciplinary action shall be determined by the applicable Elected Official, Appointed Official, Department Head, or by a Supervisor acting within delegated authority. Corrective action may follow a progressive discipline process, which may include verbal counseling, written reprimand, suspension, demotion, final warning, or involuntary separation from employment.

However, depending on the circumstances and severity of the conduct, Panola County reserves the right to impose any level of discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment, with or without prior corrective action.

In the event of involuntary separation from employment, the employee shall be afforded any notice and opportunity to respond required by applicable law.

8.02 DISPUTE RESOLUTION & GRIEVANCES

Panola County is committed to maintaining a fair and respectful workplace and encourages employees to raise concerns promptly so they may be addressed as early as possible. Employees are encouraged, but not required, to attempt to resolve concerns informally when appropriate. Employees will not be subject to retaliation for filing a good-faith grievance or participating in a grievance review process. This policy is intended to provide a process for reporting and reviewing workplace concerns and does not create a contractual right to any particular investigative procedure, outcome, or appeal.

Employees will not be subject to retaliation for reporting, in good faith, suspected violations of law, policy violations, fraud, waste, abuse, or other improper governmental activity, or for participating in any investigation, hearing, or inquiry conducted by the County or any external agency. This includes reports made to supervisors, Department Heads, Elected or Appointed Officials, the

County Treasurer, law enforcement agencies, or state or federal regulatory agencies. Retaliation is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

This protection applies regardless of whether the concern is ultimately substantiated, provided the report or participation was made in good faith. However, this policy does not protect employees who knowingly make false reports, act in bad faith, or intentionally misuse reporting procedures.

Grievances may include, but are not limited to, allegations of:

- Unfair treatment
- Discrimination or harassment
- Improper application of policies or benefits
- Unsafe working conditions or policy violations

8.02(a) Grievance Procedure

Employees and supervisors are encouraged to follow the procedures below when addressing workplace concerns.

1. Informal Resolution

Employees are encouraged to address workplace concerns promptly and, when appropriate, to first discuss the matter with their immediate supervisor or Department Head in an effort to reach an informal resolution at the department level. Supervisors and Department Heads are expected to make reasonable efforts to address and resolve employee concerns within their authority and in accordance with County policy.

Employees are not required to use the informal process when the concern involves alleged discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or other matters that may fall under Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) protections.

2. Formal Written Grievance

If the issue is not resolved, or if informal resolution is not appropriate, the employee may submit a written grievance. The grievance should:

- Be signed by the employee
- Be submitted within two (2) weeks of the event, when practicable
- Describe the concern and the requested resolution

Grievances may be submitted to the employee's supervisor, Department Head, or directly to the County Treasurer. Failure to submit a grievance within the suggested timeframe will not automatically preclude review, particularly for complaints involving alleged discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or other legally protected concerns.

3. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Complaints

Any grievance alleging discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on a protected characteristic (including but not limited to race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, military status, sexual orientation, or other protected status) must be promptly forwarded to the County Treasurer.

Supervisors who receive EEO complaints are required to report them within one (1) business day and should not attempt to independently investigate the matter.

4. Investigation and Review
Upon receipt of a formal grievance:

- Non-EEO grievances may be reviewed by the Department Head or designee
- EEO-related complaints will be coordinated by the County Treasurer or designated investigator

The County will conduct a prompt and appropriate review of the matter. The County may utilize an internal or external investigator as needed.

5. Decision and Documentation
The County will provide the employee with notice that the review has been completed. Appropriate corrective action shall be administered by the applicable Department Head or Elected or Appointed Official with authority over the employee when warranted based on the findings. All documentation related to the grievance will be maintained in a secure and centralized location in accordance with applicable confidentiality and records retention requirements.

The County Treasurer may receive and document complaints, coordinate internal reviews of EEO-related matters, and facilitate communication regarding grievance concerns; however, Elected and Appointed Officials retain authority over personnel decisions within their respective departments, consistent with applicable law and County policy.

6. External Reporting Rights
Nothing in this policy prevents an employee from filing a complaint with external agencies, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the Texas Workforce Commission Civil Rights Division.

Panola County reserves the right to modify this process as appropriate based on the circumstances of each situation.

8.03 SEPARATION FROM EMPLOYMENT

Separation results from resignation, retirement, layoff, termination, or death. If the reason is resignation, an employee is requested to give notice in writing at least two weeks before the last day of work. For separation due to retirement, more notice is highly encouraged. Layoff may occur if a position is eliminated or when there is a lack of funding or work. Termination can occur for any reason, however Panola County intends to work with employees, where possible, to avoid involuntary separation.

If an employee resigns employment, orally or in writing, such resignation is accepted immediately by Panola County.

Final hours worked by the employee who is separated because of resignation, retirement, layoff, termination or involuntary separation will be paid on the next scheduled payday. In the event of an

employee's death, final wages will be processed promptly upon notification to the Treasurer's Office.

8.04 INSURANCE CONTINUATION AFTER SEPARATION

Panola County complies with the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA). Eligible employees and qualified beneficiaries may be entitled to continue health insurance coverage at their own expense following a qualifying event, in accordance with federal law and the terms of the County's group health plan. For information regarding COBRA rights and eligibility, contact the County Treasurer.

9.0 TRAVEL AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

9.01 TRAVEL POLICY

Section 152.001 of the Texas Local Government Code grants the Commissioners Court the authority to establish travel expenses and other allowances for county officials and employees. Panola County shall pay for approved travel and training expenses incurred for the purpose of conducting County business. Each elected official and employee is responsible for ensuring that travel and related expenses are reasonable, necessary, and properly documented in accordance with this policy.

For purposes of this policy, the term "official" means an elected official or appointed official of Panola County.

9.02 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

When Panola County requires employees or officials to participate in training programs, training costs shall be paid or reimbursed by Panola County. Time spent away from work to attend required training shall be considered work time.

Authorization to attend professional seminars, conferences, certification courses, and other training is determined on a case-by-case basis by elected officials and department heads, within the constraints of the applicable training and education budget and subject to approval by the Panola County Commissioners Court.

9.03 EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

Employees and officials shall be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with approved County business or training, in accordance with this policy.

Employees and officials are responsible for submitting all required forms, receipts, invoices, and other supporting documentation necessary to substantiate expenses for which reimbursement or payment is requested.

9.04 REQUEST FOR CONFERENCE OR TRAINING ATTENDANCE

All employees and officials requesting to attend a work-related conference or training shall complete **Form TR-01 – Conference/Travel Request** and submit the form to Commissioners Court for approval prior to the conference or training date.

Approval to attend a conference or training does not, by itself, authorize expenses that are not otherwise permitted under this policy.

Forms are available in the Documents section of the ESS Portal, in Appendix A of this Employee Handbook, or through the County Treasurer's Office.

9.05 PER DIEM FOR MEALS AND INCIDENTALS

The County will provide an approved per diem allowance for meals and incidental expenses to employees and officials traveling on authorized County business that requires an overnight stay away from the employee's or official's regular office location. The per diem rate shall be established and approved by the Commissioners Court as part of the County's annual budget or by subsequent action of the Commissioners Court.

The per diem is intended to cover breakfast, lunch, dinner, tips, gratuities, and other incidental meal-related expenses. Receipts are not required for expenses covered by the per diem, and employees and officials shall not be reimbursed for actual meal expenses in addition to the applicable per diem.

The per diem shall be provided in advance of authorized travel, provided the employee or official submits **Form TR-02 – Per Diem Advance Request** within sufficient time to allow processing through the County's normal Accounts Payable process. If the request is not submitted within sufficient time to be processed prior to travel, the per diem shall be paid as soon as practicable thereafter.

Forms are available in the Documents section of the ESS Portal, in Appendix A of this Employee Handbook, or through the County Treasurer's Office.

The County will not provide a meal per diem for alcoholic beverages, entertainment expenses, including movies, video rentals, in-room movies, tickets to entertainment events, or similar expenses. The County will also not provide a meal per diem for meals incurred within Panola County or for same-day business-related travel.

9.05(a) Cancellation or Change in Travel

If approved travel is canceled, postponed, or shortened after a per diem payment has been issued, the employee or official shall promptly notify the appropriate County office and shall be responsible for returning any per diem amount that is no longer applicable.

Any per diem amount owed to the County shall be remitted within five (5) business days of the cancellation, postponement, or change in travel status, unless otherwise approved by the County Auditor or Treasurer.

If the employee or official fails to remit the amount owed within five (5) business days, the County may seek repayment through other lawful means, including deduction from wages or subsequent payroll, provided that any required written authorization has been obtained and the deduction is otherwise permitted by applicable law.

9.06 TRAVEL, LODGING AND EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT

Employees and officials shall be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary travel and lodging expenses incurred while traveling on approved County business, provided the expenses are properly documented and submitted in accordance with County policy.

Requests for reimbursement of authorized travel, lodging, and other eligible expenses shall be submitted on **Form TR-03 – Travel Expense Reimbursement**.

Meals shall not be submitted for reimbursement through Form TR-03. Employees and officials traveling on approved County business shall receive the applicable per diem allowance in accordance with Section 9.05.

Forms are available in the Documents section of the ESS Portal, in Appendix A of this Employee Handbook, or through the County Treasurer's Office.

9.06(a) Mileage Reimbursement

Approved travel in a personal vehicle will be reimbursed at the rate determined by the Internal Revenue Service to and from the Panola County Courthouse to the destination by the most direct route. State mileage figures may be used. Two or more employees or officials traveling to the same location should travel in the same vehicle whenever practical to control expenses. In all cases, travel expenses will be limited to whichever means of travel is least expensive.

Panola County will reimburse employees and officials for mileage incurred while using their personal vehicle for approved business-related travel. This includes trips such as supply runs and other non-routine travel that is outside of the employee's or official's regular job duties or work location(s).

The following guidelines apply:

Eligible Travel

- Travel to locations outside of the employee's or official's regular worksite(s), including off-site meetings, training, events, or long-distance job-related errands approved by a supervisor.
- Business-related errands not part of the employee's or official's regular responsibilities, when approved in advance.

Non-Reimbursable Travel

- Routine or minimal travel between County offices or to common, nearby destinations that are considered part of normal job duties.
- Travel from home to work or between primary work locations unless otherwise pre-approved.

Employees and officials are encouraged to use discretion and good judgment when determining whether a trip qualifies for mileage reimbursement. If in doubt, employees should consult their supervisor prior to travel.

To submit mileage for reimbursement, employees and officials must provide:

- The date and purpose of the trip
- Start and end locations
- Total mileage

Panola County reserves the right to deny reimbursement for trips deemed minimal or routine in nature.

9.06(b) Lodging
The County will pay lodging expenses at a single-occupancy standard room rate. Panola County employees and officials are expected to make a good-faith effort to obtain the standard room rate negotiated for the designated host hotel or a likewise reasonable rate at a designated overflow or alternate conference hotel when the host hotel is unavailable.

Because lodging expenses are paid with public funds, employees and officials should refrain from room upgrades or premium accommodations that exceed the applicable standard room rate.

The maximum cost of hotel or motel accommodations paid by the County for any conference, meeting of local governmental entities, or event of County officials should not exceed the regular single-occupancy room rate, as negotiated by the hosting association, for the designated host hotel or designated overflow/alternate conference hotel.

Lodging expenses shall be allowed only for the actual days of the conference unless, due to distance or conference schedule, a night before or after the conference is deemed appropriate and necessary.

Lodging may be reserved and paid by a County credit card provided by the Treasurer's Office. Reimbursable hotel expenses include:

- Daily room charges, up to the maximum allowed
- Necessary hotel taxes
- Business phone calls
- Hotel parking fees

9.06(c) Air Travel
Travel by air should be at the coach rate and used only when time constraints would preclude driving, which may include the necessity of an overnight stop if driving is used, or when all expenses associated with air travel are not more than 20% greater than the total mileage reimbursement, lodging, and meal requirements necessitated by automobile travel.

An employee or official may elect to use air travel and receive the limits prescribed by the County as partial reimbursement of the total fare. Employees and officials are encouraged to use shuttle buses or other economical transportation for travel to and from airports and hotels whenever practical.

Prior approval by the County Judge must be obtained for air travel. The employee or official shall complete **Form TR-04 – Justification for Air Travel** and obtain the required approval before making arrangements for air travel.

A copy of the ticket charges must accompany any request for reimbursement.

Forms are available in the Documents section of the ESS Portal, in Appendix A of this Employee Handbook, or through the County Treasurer's Office.

9.06(d) Miscellaneous Travel Expenses

Other reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with approved County travel may be eligible for reimbursement when authorized by this policy and properly documented. Such expenses may include parking fees, tolls, and other necessary transportation-related expenses.

Employees and officials shall provide receipts or other required documentation for miscellaneous expenses when submitting **Form TR-03 – Travel Expense Reimbursement**.

Expenses that are personal, unnecessary, excessive, or otherwise not authorized under this policy shall not be reimbursed.

9.07 TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

All requests for reimbursement must be submitted using the applicable County form and must include the required supporting documentation.

Employees and officials shall submit **Form TR-03 – Travel Expense Reimbursement** following completion of approved travel. The form shall include sufficient information to establish the date, purpose, destination, and nature of the expenses claimed.

Receipts, invoices, mileage documentation, and other supporting records shall be provided when required by this policy or applicable County procedures.

Reimbursement shall be limited to expenses that are reasonable, necessary, and authorized under this policy.

The County reserves the right to deny reimbursement for expenses that are not properly documented or that do not comply with County requirements.

9.08 COMMUTE TIME TO AND FROM CONFERENCE

Non-exempt employees may record travel time to and from conferences as hours worked, excluding their normal commute time. Travel time should be calculated based on the distance from the County Courthouse to the destination, and from the destination back to the Courthouse. All such time must be recorded under the "Hours Worked" activity code in ESS.

To minimize overtime, employees are encouraged, when feasible, to schedule travel within their regular working hours. For example, an employee with a normal schedule of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

attending a conference that begins at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday at a location four hours away should depart at 1:00 p.m. on Monday to remain within regular working hours.

Certain departments, such as the Sheriff's Office and Detention Center, may have additional policies governing travel time. Employees who anticipate overtime must consult with their Department Head in advance.