

Politics and Classified State Employees: Permitted and Prohibited Activities

In response to partisan abuses and political patronage in state employment before Michigan's civil service system was created, civil service rules restricted many political activities of classified state employees from 1940 to 1980. In 1980, a Michigan Supreme Court decision required more options for classified state employees to engage in political activities while still recognizing the commission's authority to adopt some limits. Commission [rule 1-12](#) and related laws restrict classified employees' political activities as follows:

Political activities on the job are prohibited. You cannot engage in political activities during on-duty hours. This does not mean that you cannot express opinions about politics; it only means that you cannot attempt to persuade or dissuade anyone to be for or against any candidate or issue while on duty. You also cannot do outside political work on state time or using state resources. Levying, soliciting, collecting, paying, ordering, or authorizing any type of political assessment is also prohibited.

You may run for political office. You may run for partisan or non-partisan public office if done entirely on your own time. To run for a state executive-branch office, the state legislature, or the Michigan Supreme Court or Michigan Court of Appeals, you must also request and will receive an unpaid leave of absence from your state job. The leave must start 60 days before the election or after completing candidacy-filing requirements, whichever is later. This applies to primary, general, and special elections.

Employees in federally funded positions have additional limits: If you work in a fully or partially federally funded position, the federal [Hatch Act](#) may limit some political activities. The Hatch Act prohibits candidacy for elective office in a partisan election by state employees whose salaries are fully federally funded. Violating the Hatch Act can result in separation from your job. Information on the Hatch Act and its limitations is available from the Office of the Special Counsel at www.osc.gov.

Off-duty political activity must not conflict with your job performance: When engaging in off-duty political activities, you exercise fundamental rights of every citizen. But as a classified state employee, you also are obligated to not let these activities conflict with your job. The Michigan Supreme Court found that "off-duty political involvement may adversely affect a classified employee's performance at work. If and when it does, the Commission is empowered to deal with such circumstances on a case-by-case basis." An appointing authority may take appropriate action, including discipline, against employees if otherwise permitted political activity interferes with their classified duties.

You can be active in a political party while off duty: Until 1980, classified state employees were prohibited from holding any office within a political party. For example, an employee could not be a delegate at political party conventions, serve on political party committees, or be a county chair. Now, classified state employees may hold party office, but must comply with rules over actions while on duty, use of state resources, and conflicts of interest.

Your political opinions are your own business: You cannot be advanced or held back on the job because of your personal political opinions, but it is also improper for you or any other employee to directly or indirectly pressure anyone else politically, including for a political contribution.

If you believe that a state classified employee has violated [rule 1-12](#) by engaging in prohibited political activity, please notify the state personnel director at 517-284-0115 or MCSC-SPD@mi.gov.