

City Council Conduct Policy (draft) Policy Number 0-28

PURPOSE

To establish a policy describing possible actions the City Council, acting as a whole, may take in response to conduct by any of its members that may violate federal or state laws, City ordinances, or City policies, including the Code of Ethics.

SCOPE OF APPLICATION

This policy applies only to the Mayor and City Councilmembers, and amends and supersedes the original City Council Policy 0-28, the Censure Policy.

POLICY

It is the policy of the City Council that all of its members shall abide by federal and state law, City ordinances, and City policies, including the Code of Ethics. Violation of such law or policy tends to injure the good name of the City and to undermine the effectiveness of the City Council as a whole.

Nothing in this policy shall preclude the Council from initiating an investigation of alleged conduct that may violate law or policy, consistent with its rights and responsibilities as defined in the City Charter, nor shall it preclude individual Councilmembers from making public statements regarding such alleged conduct.

In deciding whether or not to open an investigation, Council should consider whether an investigation may compromise investigations regarding the same alleged actions, or if persons involved in the allegations may choose to exercise their constitutional right against self-incrimination, which may limit the investigation's ability to present a full picture of alleged events.

While the Council has broad discretion in deciding actions it may choose to take in response to violations of law or policy, this policy provides definitions and procedures related to three types of action: admonition, sanction, and censure.

DEFINITIONS

- **Admonition**

This is the least severe form of action. An admonition may typically be directed to all members of the City Council, reminding them that a particular type of behavior is in violation of law or City policy, and that, if it occurs or is found to have occurred, could make a member subject to sanction or censure.

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An admonition may be issued in response to a particular alleged action or actions, although it would not necessarily have to be triggered by such allegations. An admonition may be issued by the City Council prior to any findings of fact regarding allegations, and because it is a warning or reminder, would not necessarily require an investigation or separate hearings to determine whether the allegation is true.

- **Sanction**

This is the next most severe form of action. Sanction should be directed to a particular member of the City Council based on a particular action (or set of actions) that is determined to be in violation of law or City policy, but is considered by the Council to be not sufficiently serious to require censure. A sanction is distinguished from censure in that it is not a punishment.

A sanction may be issued based upon Council's review and consideration of a written allegation of a policy violation. The member accused of such violation will have an opportunity to provide a written response to the allegation. A sanction may be issued by the City Council and because it is not punishment or discipline, would not necessarily require an investigation or separate hearings.

- **Censure**

Censure is the most severe form of action contemplated in this policy. Censure is a formal reprimand of the City Council officially reprimanding one of its members. It is a punitive action which serves as a penalty imposed for wrongdoing, but it carries no fine or suspension of the rights of the member as an elected official. Censure should be used for cases in which the Council determines that the violation of law or policy is a serious offense.

In order to protect the overriding principle of freedom of speech, the City Council shall not impose censure on any of its members for the exercise of his or her First Amendment rights, no matter how distasteful the expression was to the Council and the City. However, nothing herein shall be construed to prohibit the City Council from collectively condemning and expressing their strong disapprobation of such remarks.

In order to ensure the right to a fair jury trial, the City Council shall not impose censure on any of its members for the violation of any law while criminal charges are pending. However, when the criminal proceedings are final, the City Council need not be bound by the conclusions of the Court and may hold a censure hearing.

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PROCEDURES

Admonition

1. A request for an admonition must be submitted to the Rules Committee in writing by a member of the Council. The request should contain the specific language of the proposed admonition.
2. The Rules Committee shall determine whether to forward the proposed admonition to the full Council for consideration as part of the Rules Committee report agenda item at the appropriate subsequent Council meeting.
3. An admonition can be approved by a majority vote of the Council.

Sanction

- 1) A request for sanction must be submitted to the Rules Committee in writing by a member of the Council. The request should contain specific allegations of conduct in violation of federal or state law, City ordinances, and City policies, including the Code of Ethics.
- 2) A copy of the request for sanction shall be provided to the Council Member accused of the conduct prior to the Rules Committee meeting at which it will be considered.
- 3) The Rules Committee shall determine that either:
 - a) The proposed sanction should be forwarded to the City Council for consideration as part of the Rules Committee report agenda item at the appropriate subsequent Council meeting; or
 - b) No action is required.
- 4) This determination is subject to confirmation by the City Council as part of the Rules Committee report at the next Council meeting.
- 5) A sanction is based on the Council's review of the written record and approved by a majority vote of the Council.

Censure

1. A request for a censure hearing must be submitted to the Rules Committee in writing by a member of the Council. The request must contain the specific allegations of conduct in violation of federal or state law, City ordinances, and City policies, including the Code of Ethics, upon which the proposed censure is based.

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2. A copy of the request for censure and the charges shall be served on the Council Member accused of the conduct at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the Rules Committee meeting at which it will be considered.
3. The Rules Committee shall determine that either:
 - a) Further investigation of the charges is required; or
 - b) The matter is to be set for a separate public hearing; or
 - c) No action is required.
4. This determination is subject to confirmation by the City Council as part of the Rules Committee report at the next Council meeting.
5. Depending on the determination of the Rules Committee and the confirmation of the City Council;
 - a) If further investigation is required, it shall be done by an ad hoc committee appointed by the Mayor. If the Mayor is the subject of the charges, the committee shall be appointed by the Vice Mayor.

The following guidelines apply to ad hoc committee investigations:

- i) The committee may be staffed by administrative and legal staff.
 - ii) If authorized by City Council, the committee may subpoena witnesses and documents.
 - iii) In making a determination, the committee should determine if taking all of the facts and evidence into consideration, there are reasonable grounds to believe or not believe that the conduct, violation, or offense occurred.
 - iv) The committee shall issue a final report and recommendations to the City Council. The final report shall be made available to the public.
- b) If a separate public hearing is set, it must be set far enough in advance to give the member of Council subject to the charges adequate time to prepare a defense, and that member shall be given the opportunity to make an opening and closing statement and to question his or her accusers. The member subject to the charges may be represented and may have the representative speak or question on his or her behalf. The Mayor, or Vice Mayor if the Mayor is the subject of the charges, would preside at the hearing. The rules of evidence shall not apply to the hearing, which is not a formal adversarial proceeding. The City Attorney or designee shall provide legal advice to the City Council during the hearing.

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6. A decision to censure requires the adoption of a Resolution making findings with regard to the specific charges, based on substantial evidence, and approved by a two-thirds vote of the Council.