

Administrative Policy No. 18.17

Subject: Relationships and the Reporting Structure

Authorizing Source: [Chapter 42.52 RCW](#)
[Chapter 162-16-250 WAC](#)
[Chapter 357-40 WAC](#)

Information Contact: DSHS Human Resources Division

Effective Date July 1, 2005

Revised: March 20, 2023

Approved By: Original signed by Wendy Long
Senior Director, Human Resource Division

Purpose:

To provide guidance and outline the requirements to mitigate potential conflicts of interest at the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) resulting from employee relationships and reporting structure. This policy also outlines the requirement for Human Resources Division (HRD) consultation.

Scope:

This policy applies to all employees of DSHS (appointing authorities, supervisors, managers, front line employees, etcetera).

Definitions:

Household member: Persons who reside in the same home who have reciprocal duties to and do provide financial support for one another. The term does not include persons sharing the same house when the living style is primarily that of a dormitory or commune. ([WAC 357-01-182](#))

Nepotism: The practice among those with power or influence, such as appointing authorities, managers, supervisors, and the hiring panel, of favoring relatives or close friends, this would include employment opportunities.

Nibling: Children of sibling.

Relative: For purposes of this policy, a relative of a DSHS employee is:

- Anyone who is connected by blood, marriage, adoption, or other legal connection. This includes but is not limited to parents, siblings, spouse, children, in-laws, cousins, niblings (children of siblings), grandchildren, legal wards, foster children, or registered domestic partners.
- Anyone who was formerly considered to be a relative as defined above.

Reporting structure: The reporting structure of a business acts as its chain of command. It is hierarchical, with an employee answering to a supervisor above, that supervisor reporting to a manager, and so on up the hierarchy, ending with the top manager, executive, or secretary.

Romantic or sexual relationship: A current or former consensual relationship that includes but is not limited to dating, a relationship that is or was sexual in nature, engagement, and other intimate relationships.

Policy:

A. General

1. HRD provides consultations on employment, relationships, and the reporting structure.
2. To avoid real or perceived favoritism, nepotism, or other relationship-based conflicts of interest in a reporting structure, an employee must disclose to their appointing authority or to the human resources division the existence of their potential conflict with this policy.
 - a. If the conflict is with the appointing authority, the employee should notify HRD directly.
 - b. When the appointing authority is notified, the appointing authority must follow up with HRD to determine next steps.
3. Employment decisions are based on skills and suitability. Nepotism is prohibited.
4. Any exception to this policy must be approved, in writing, by the human resources, senior director.
 - a. The human resources senior director will provide consultation where employees that are relatives, household members, or close friends may remain in a reporting structure;
 - b. The human resources senior director must provide written approval; and
 - c. The human resources senior director will collaborate with the appointing authority to develop and document a plan to resolve potential situations.

5. Violating this policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with [chapter 357-40 WAC](#) and the provisions of any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

B. Employee responsibilities

1. A DSHS employee must notify the appointing authority or HRD if they apply for a position within the same reporting structure as a relative, household member, or close friend.
2. A DSHS employee must notify the appointing authority or HRD if they become aware of a relative, household member, or close friend that has applied for a department position within the same reporting structure.
3. A DSHS employee must notify the appointing authority or HRD if the employee intends to enter into or continue a relationship that is romantic or sexual with another employee where one employee is, or will be, in the same reporting structure.
4. A DSHS employee must notify the appointing authority or HRD of any change in employment status, such as a promotion to another division that may impact the reporting structure of a relative, household member, or close friend.

C. Supervisors and Managers responsibilities

1. Supervisors and managers must notify the appointing authority or HRD if they become aware of a potential conflict based on this policy.

D. Appointing authority responsibilities

1. Appointing authorities must assign staff in a way that avoids placing relatives, household members, or close friends in the same reporting structure.
2. When the appointing authority becomes aware of a relative, household member, close friend, romantic or sexual relationship within the same reporting structure, they will review the situation with HRD. The review will include:
 - a. An assessment of reporting relationships
 - b. The effect on co-workers and other relevant factors, including feasibility and suitability of a mitigation plan
 - c. Whether movement of one or more of the involved employees to another position within the administration is necessary. If so:
 - i. The appointing authority will consult with HRD to determine the employee to be moved. The final decision will be based on which move will be least disruptive to the administration as a whole.

- ii. If positions are available for involved employees in other program areas, and if the appointing authority finds that moving any involved employee would be no more disruptive than moving another involved employee, the involved employees may decide who will apply for a new position.
- iii. If the employees cannot reach a decision, or the employee is not chosen for the position to which they have indicated an interest to alleviate the reporting relationship, the employees will contact the appointing authority. Management will make the final decision based on business needs.
- iv. The appointing authority may also move any involved employee(s) of consenting romantic or sexual relationship to a different chain of command or take other actions as appropriate.

Note: For guidance on the requirements when recruiting, assessing, and finalizing candidate selection for vacancies, see administrative policy [18.16 recruitment, assessment, and certifications](#), [18.19 appointments and reemployment](#), [18.58 Washington management service](#), or applicable collective bargaining agreements.