



Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals Social Media and Social Networking Policy

1. Authority

This Social Media and Social Networking Policy applies to all judiciary employees of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, including interns, externs, and other volunteer court employees. This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#) and the [Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals Computer User's Handbook](#).

This policy governs the use of all social media. The absence of an explicit reference to a specific site does not limit the extent of the application of this policy.

2. Use of Social Media

Social media and networking internet sites ("social media") allow people to connect and interact with others over the internet. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, TikTok, WhatsApp, Tumblr, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, and personal websites.

People use social media to maintain relationships with others or to pursue professional opportunities such as networking, marketing, or soliciting business ideas. The danger of social media, however, is that a large number of people, including litigants and potentially harmful individuals, may have access to, or be able to obtain access to, information displayed on such sites or make that information available later for public consumption. Certain social media sites enable the user to limit who has access to displayed information. Social media users should assume that others may have access to any information displayed even after deleted.

3. Principles

Please keep the following general policies and procedures in mind as you participate on social media sites:

Think Before You Post

Internet postings—whether texts, photos, videos, or audio—remain accessible long after the user forgets about them. Nothing is “private” on the internet despite people’s best efforts to keep things private. Do not post anything on the internet that you would not want to read on the front page of the newspaper.

Confidentiality

Court employees handle confidential and sensitive information, and the restrictions that court employees normally observe in the performance of their day-to-day duties also apply to their use of social media. Just as court employees are prohibited from disclosing sensitive, non-public information to the media and general public—in person or by e-mail, phone, or mail—the same applies to social media. Former employees should observe the same restrictions on the disclosure of confidential information that apply to current judicial employees.

Remember the Code

Public postings are governed by the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#). Be respectful to the court, its employees, and the parties before it. Court employees are expected to avoid impropriety and conduct themselves in a manner that does not detract from the dignity and independence of the judicial system. This restriction also applies to comments posted on blogs or other social media sites. An employee who maintains a blog should remove all references to that person’s employment. If there is something you would not communicate via e-mail or in person because it would be a violation of court policy, you should not communicate it to anyone via social media.

The general restriction on use or disclosure of confidential information does not prevent, nor should it discourage, an employee or former employee from reporting or disclosing misconduct, including sexual or other forms of harassment, by a judge, supervisor, or other person.

Observe Security Protocol

Court employees must take care to avoid doing anything that would compromise the security of the courthouse and its employees. To maintain security, do not post pictures of the inside or outside of the courthouse, court events, or judicial officers. Be careful when disclosing your place of employment because social media sites are notoriously unsecure. Knowledge of your place of employment could place employees in situations where pressure could be applied on them to corrupt the integrity of the judicial process. Do not post personal information about a judicial officer, including a judge’s family information, residence, or location at any given time.

Do Not Forget Your Day Job

Your online activities should not interfere with your work commitments. Checking social media throughout the day could prevent you from fulfilling your work obligations.

4. Rules

The [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#) applies to all online activities, including an

employee's use of social media. Court employees must also comply with the following rules and procedures when participating on social media sites:

Disclosure of Information

Court employees may not disclose any confidential, sensitive, or non-public information obtained during their employment. Court employees should also refrain from discussing any of the court's internal processes and procedures, whether they are of a confidential or non-confidential nature.

Court employees may not disclose any information or post any content regarding pending or other court-related matters, including comments regarding parties or attorneys who appear before the court.

Identification as a Federal Court Employee

Court employees may identify themselves on social networking sites as employees of the federal courts in general terms, but may not list the specific court or judge, subject to the following exception: When identifying their employer on professional networking websites such as LinkedIn, court employees may include a job title (e.g., "federal law clerk") and the specific court (e.g., "Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals"), but may not directly identify the specific judicial officer for whom they work. Court employees must not discuss their job responsibilities for the court on the internet without the express permission of their supervisor. An indication that you work for the court may bring unwanted attention or even harassment to you, the court, or your judge.

Restriction on Internet Use

Court employees must abide by the restrictions on personal use of the public internet set forth in the [Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals Computer User's Handbook](#). For court employees who are permitted to access social networking sites, these activities should not interfere with their work commitments.

Use of a court e-mail address for social media is not permitted.

Copyright, Fair Use, and Financial Disclosure Laws

Court employees must comply with all copyright, fair use, and financial disclosure laws. Many social networking sites require users to abide by a terms-of-service document. Court employees are responsible for reading, knowing, and complying with the terms of service of the sites they use.

Photographs

Court employees may not post any photographs that may compromise court security, the security of individual officers or employees, or the integrity of the court or judicial officers. Court employees are strictly prohibited from displaying graphics, scanned documents or data, diagrams, videos, photographs, or other types of content depicting: chambers of judicial officers, courtrooms, courthouses or federal buildings (interior or exterior), or judicial officers without those individuals' express permission.

Disclosure of Confidential Information

Court employees are prohibited from posting confidential information about a judge or court, including a judge's location at any time. For example, court employees should not disclose where a judge is on vacation or if the judge is traveling to a particular city for a work engagement.

Use of Court Seal

Court employees may not use the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals seal in any manner. Similarly, employees may not reference their position with the court where that reference would suggest that the employee is seeking special attention.

Partisan Political Activity

In accordance with the [Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees](#), court employees must refrain from partisan political activity. Court employees may not indicate a political allegiance on social media and should not express views for or against a policy that is of current political debate (including "liking" a Facebook post). Court employees may not participate in any social media that relates to any political issue, political activity, or politician, whether partisan or non-partisan.

Violations of Policy

Court employees should inform their supervisors if they become aware of any violations of the Social Media and Social Networking Policy.

Enforcement

The court reserves the right to monitor its employees' use of social media by monitoring its employees' internet activities as set forth in the [Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals Computer User's Handbook](#).

The court further reserves the right to visit and monitor social media sites to ensure that employees are not violating the court's Social Media and Social Networking Policy via court or other computers, including employees' personal computers. These policies and procedures do not supersede other existing policies. Failure to adhere to these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action, which may include termination.

For the Court:



Diane S. Sykes, Chief Judge
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for the Seventh Circuit

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