

Complaint Policies and Procedures for Mendocino County

The Grand Jury reviewed the County complaint policies and procedures and found a lack of uniformity in the application, content, and enforcement of the policies.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury interviewed the Assistant County Administrative Officer and the previous Senior Field Representative for Local 707 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The Grand Jury reviewed Memorandum of Understanding Between The County of Mendocino and MCEBU/SEIU Local 707 (County/SEIU MOU), County Policy #16, and the policies and procedures submitted by the departments that had them.

Background Information

The Board of Supervisors adopted Policy #16 July 7, 1987, to address the procedure for the public's right to criticize County personnel.

Findings

1. County Policy #16 addresses only complaints by the public regarding County personnel and only those complaints presented to the Board of Supervisors or the Clerk of the Board.
2. The County does not have a written complaint policy to address procedural complaints presented to the individual County departments, to the Board of Supervisors, or to the Clerk of the Board.
3. The County/SEIU MOU Article 19 contains a grievance procedure for employees; however, the Human Resource Department does not have a written procedure for referring employees with grievances to the union contract.
4. Neither County ordinance nor the County Human Resource Department have written policies or procedures to accommodate any type of employee complaints not covered in the County/SEIU MOU.
5. The County does not publish or post a standard complaint form or complaint procedures.
6. The County Administrative Office does not monitor any of the departments to verify that a policy is in place to deal with all complaints.
7. The following County departments use Policy #16 as their complaint policy and therefore do not have a policy to handle about department procedures:

Administration Office

Agriculture

Auditor-Controller	Clerk of the Board
County Counsel	Farm Advisor
General Services	Human Resources
Library	Museum
Risk Management	Transportation
Treasurer-Tax Collector	Assessor/Clerk-Recorder (Complaints received at the counter or by telephone are referred to the department head.)

8. The following County departments have developed their own complaint policies and procedures and/or are using policies and procedures mandated by another agency:

Information Services	Solid Waste Division
Air Quality Management District	Animal Care and Control
Child Support Services	District Attorney
Mental Health	Planning and Building
Probation	Public Defender
Public Health	Sheriff-Coroner
Social Services	Water Agency

Recommendations

- A. The County formalize a policy outlining the procedures to be used for the expedient handling all types of complaints, either procedural or personnel. (The County does need to recognize that some departments have mandated requirements over and above the County requirements.) This policy must include the method of responding to all complaints. (Findings 1, 2, 4, 7)
- B. The Human Resource Department develop written procedures for referring employee grievances according to the SEIU MOU and post notices on employee bulletin boards in all departments. (Finding 3)
- C. The County design and publish the complaint forms and the logs needed to track all complaints. (Finding 5)
- D. The County develop a sign informing the public or employees of the complaint procedures and post these signs in all departments. (Finding 5)
- E. The County Administrative Office review the following in all departments at least once a year. (Finding 6)
 - 1. All departmental complaint logs.

2. The placement of all signs.
3. The availability of the complaint forms.
4. The departments tracking of all complaints.

Comment

Because of the lack of a County-wide complaint policy, there is inconsistency throughout the County on how complaints are handled.

Department heads would benefit from a County-sponsored personnel management training class about effective responses to employee grievances.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Response Requested

County Administrative Officer

Human Resources Department Director