

Kentucky Law Enforcement Council

Peace Officer Professional Standards

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FORM L-2

Canon of Ethics

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Police Ethics

In order for any "job" to become a "profession": certain rules or guides must be developed in order to measure the work and attitudes of the employees. Law enforcement is no exception to this rule. Since 1956, the law enforcement profession has maintained its own standard of conduct, the Peace Officer Code of Ethics. Only by constant vigilance can the law enforcement officer keep their profession exactly what it is— a profession.

Canons of Police Ethics

ARTICLE 1. PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF JOB

The primary responsibility of the police service, and of the individual officer, is the protection of the people of the United States through the upholding of their laws; chief among these is the Constitution of the United States and its amendments. The peace officer always represents the whole of the community and its legally expressed will and is never the arm of any political party or clique.

ARTICLE 2. LIMITATIONS OF AUTHORITY

The first duty of a peace officer, as upholder of the law is to know its bounds upon them while enforcing it. Because they represent the legal will of the community, be it local, state, or federal, they must be aware of the limitations and proscriptions which the people, through law, have placed upon them. They must recognize the genius of the American system of government which gives no person, groups of people, or institution, absolute power, and they must insure that officers, as prime defenders of that system, do not pervert its character.

ARTICLE 3. DUTY TO BE FAMILIAR WITH THE LAW AND WITH RESPONSIBILITIES OF SELF AND OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIALS

The peace officer shall assiduously apply themselves to the study of the principles of the laws which they are sworn to uphold. They will make certain of their responsibilities in the particulars of their enforcement, seeking aid from their superiors in matters of technicality or principle when these are not clear to them; they will make special effort to fully understand their relationship to other public officials, including other law enforcement agencies, particularly on matters of jurisdiction, both geographically and substantively.

ARTICLE 4. UTILIZATION OF PROPER MEANS TO GAIN PROPER ENDS

The peace officer shall be mindful of the responsibility to pay strict heed to the selection of means in discharging the duties of their office. Violations of law or disregard for public safety and property on the part of an officer are intrinsically wrong; they are self-defeating in that they instill in the public mind a like disposition. The employment of illegal means, no matter how worthy the end, is certain to encourage disrespect for the law and its officers. If the law is to be honored, it must first be honored by those who enforce it.

ARTICLE 5. COOPERATION WITH PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN THE DISCHARGE OF THEIR AUTHORIZED DUTIES

The peace officer shall cooperate fully with other public officials in the discharge of authorized duties, regardless of party affiliation or personal prejudice. They shall be meticulous, however, in assuring themselves of the propriety, under the law, of such actions and shall guard against the use of their office or person, whether knowingly or unknowingly, in any improper or illegal action. In any situation open to question, they shall seek authority from their superior officer, giving them a full report of the proposed service or action.

ARTICLE 6. PRIVATE CONDUCT

The peace officer shall be mindful of their special identification by the public as an upholder of the law. Laxity of conduct or manner in private life, expressing either disrespect for the law or seeking to gain special privilege, cannot but reflect upon the police officer and the police service. The community and the service require that the peace officer lead the life of a decent and honorable person. Following the career of a peace officer gives no person special perquisites. It does give the satisfaction and pride of following and furthering an unbroken tradition of safeguarding the American republic. The officer who reflects upon this tradition will not degrade it. Rather, they will so conduct their private life that the public will regard them as an example of stability, fidelity and morality.

ARTICLE 7. CONDUCT TOWARD THE PUBLIC

The peace officer, mindful of their responsibility to the whole community, shall deal with individuals of the community in a manner calculated to instill respect for its laws and its police service. The peace officer shall conduct their official life in a manner such as will inspire confidence and trust. Thus, they will be neither overbearing nor subservient, as no individual citizen has an obligations to stand in awe of them nor a right to command them. The officer will give service where they can, and require compliance with the law. They will do neither from personal preference or prejudice, but rather as a duly appointed officer of the law discharging their sworn obligation.

ARTICLE 8. CONDUCT IN ARRESTING AND DEALING WITH LAW VIOLATORS

The peace officer shall use their powers of arrest strictly in accordance with the law and with due regard to the rights of the citizen concerned. Their office gives them no right to prosecute the violator nor to mete out punishment for the offense. They shall, at all times, have a clear appreciation of their responsibilities and limitations regarding detention of the violator; they shall conduct themselves in such a manner as will minimize the possibility of having to use force. To this end he shall cultivate a dedication to the service of the people and the equitable upholding of their laws whether in the handling of law violators or in dealing with the law-abiding.

ARTICLE 9. GIFTS AND FAVORS

The peace officer representing the government bears the heavy responsibility of maintaining, in their own conduct, the honor and integrity of all government institutions. They shall, therefore, guard against placing themselves in a position in which any person can expect special consideration or in which the public can reasonably assume that special consideration is being given. Thus, they should be firm in refusing gifts, favors, or gratuities, large or small, which can, in the public mind, be interpreted as capable of influencing their judgment in the discharge of their duties.

ARTICLE 10. PRESENTATION OF EVIDENCE

The peace officer shall be concerned equally in the prosecution of the wrongdoer and the defense of the innocent. They shall ascertain what constitutes evidence and shall present such evidence impartially and without malice. In so doing, they will ignore social, political and all other distinctions among the persons involved, strengthening the tradition of the reliability and integrity of an officer's word.

The peace officer shall take special pains to increase their perception and skill of observation, mindful that in many situations theirs is the sole impartial testimony to the facts of a case.

ARTICLE 11. ATTITUDE TOWARD PROFESSION

The peace officer shall regard the discharge of their duties as a public trust and recognize their responsibility as a public servant. By diligent study and sincere attention to self-improvement they shall strive to make the best possible application of science to the solution of crime and in the field of human relationships, strive for effective leadership and public influence in matters affecting public safety. They shall appreciate the importance and responsibility of their office, and hold public work to be an honorable profession rendering valuable service to their community and their country.