

# Charlotte Firefighters' Retirement System Communications Policy

The Charlotte Firefighters' Retirement System (the "System") was established pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 926 of the 1947 Sessions Laws, as amended (the "Act") to provide retirement, disability, and survivor benefits for the uniformed employees of the Charlotte Fire Department.

This Policy applies to all Authorized Persons who may be in a position to communicate about or provide comment on any and/or all aspects of the System's Business.

## I. Definitions

- a) "Authorized Persons" – include the System's Staff (including temporary help), Board Trustees, and individuals specifically approved by the Board of Trustees from time to time to communicate on behalf of the System.
- b) "System's Business" – includes its objectives, practices, services, systems, actions, policies, legislation, and operations.
- c) "Confidential Information" – includes anything defined as Confidential Information under North Carolina Public Records law.
- d) "Media" – includes any channel of communication including, but not limited to, printed (newspapers, magazines), broadcast news (radio, television), and electronic communications (social media, blogs, emails).
- e) "Participants" – as defined in the Act includes any Member, Retiree, or Beneficiary in receipt of benefits or a former Member with a deferred Accrued Benefit.
- f) "Professional" – a manner which exudes civility, respectability, and competence.

## II. Purpose

The System's Board of Trustees has established this Communications Policy to ensure clear, accurate, factual, and effective communications between the Trustees and the System's Participants, management, and external parties.

All internal and external communications should be aimed toward communicating an accurate account of the Board's actions and policies, as well as the applicable Act provisions. Only Authorized Persons are permitted to undertake official internal and external communications of the System in accordance with the System's Guiding Principles.

## III. Guiding Principals

Communications by Authorized Persons potentially represent a risk to the System in areas such as governance, Participant services, and public relations. The System is committed to the dissemination of timely and accurate information. In order to fulfill this commitment and avoid potential risks to the System, the following guiding principles should always be adhered to by all Authorized Persons:

- (a) Communications by Authorized Persons must be Professional at all times. Trustees shall be respectful of Staff and the Board and its policies and decisions in all communications.

- (b) All information disseminated shall be accurate and transparent to the extent possible while considering the need to protect Confidential Information. A Communications Policy must balance the need to mitigate communications risk with the need for open and free discourse.
- (c) Communications should be consistent, clear, concise, and intentional based on Committee and Board action. Official Communications will not contain opinions of action taken by the Board or Authorized Persons.
- (d) Communications should promote overall knowledge and awareness of the System.
- (e) The Board should speak with a single voice in order to successfully carry out its communications function for the benefit of the System's Participants.

#### **IV. Communications:**

##### **(a) In General**

- Communications by Trustees, acting in their capacity as Trustees, must at all times be consistent with the fiduciary duty to act solely in the interests of the Participants of the System.
- When communicating on System-related matters in a capacity other than that of an authorized spokesperson for the System, Trustees shall clearly establish in their communications that they are not communicating on behalf of the Board or System.
- Trustees are prohibited from disclosing, other than to another Trustee, ex officio Trustee for whom they serve as designee, or CFRS staff with knowledge of the information, any Confidential Information discussed in executive/closed sessions of a board meeting.

##### **(b) With Participants**

- Trustees should refrain from providing specific and technical advice with respect to a Participant's benefit to avoid potential liability of miscommunication or misinformation.
- Trustees should refer Participants to the Administrator or other CFRS staff member for response to specific benefit questions.
- Trustees may provide generic information about CFRS to Participants.

##### **(c) With Vendors**

- Trustees may, but are not obliged to, communicate with CFRS vendors.
- If a Trustee receives a communication regarding potential or existing investments, the Trustee shall refer the matter to the CFRS Administrator. The Administrator will then respond or forward to the appropriate Authorized Person.
- A Trustee shall not communicate, outside of the Board meeting process, with a potential vendor that is involved in a pending procurement.
- A Trustee shall not intimidate or threaten the services of a current or potential vendor.

##### **(d) With Media and External Parties**

- The Administrator shall serve as the CFRS spokesperson unless the Board designates a spokesperson on a specific issue.
- The spokesperson will alert the Board Chairperson when asked to discuss sensitive, high-profile issues. If unable to do so before commenting publicly on an issue, the Chairperson will be notified as soon as possible. The entire Board will then be notified.

- Any written press release concerning CFRS will be issued at the discretion of the Board's legal counsel and Board Chairperson. A copy of the press release will be shared with Trustees and staff.

## **V. Enforcement**

- a) An alleged breach of this Policy shall be reported to the Board Chairperson, or to the Vice Chairperson if the alleged breach is by the Chairperson.
- b) At the discretion of the Board Chairperson, reported breaches may be placed on an agenda for discussion and action at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. The meeting minutes shall include the summary of the discussion and any action taken by the Board.
- c) If the alleged breach needs to be addressed before the next regularly scheduled board meeting, a special meeting may be called by the Board Chairperson or at the written request of at least two Trustees as provided in the Act.
- d) The Board may censure a Trustee who is found, by the Board's vote in accordance with the Act, to have violated this Policy. Further, a Trustee found in violation of this policy may be ineligible for a leadership position.
- e) Any potential violations of law shall be reported to the proper authority.

## **VII. Endorsements/Statements of Support**

The System does not endorse products, services, or individuals. Use of products and/or services by the System does not imply endorsement.

## **Summary of Changes**

Adopted 4/27/2023