

COLUMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM POLICY

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Public Assistance Program Policy is to provide the citizens of Columbia County an easier method to report and resolve complaints/inquiries and to provide guidelines to the Columbia County Board of County Commission Departments on how to coordinate a citizen complaint/inquiry in order to resolve the complaint/inquiry in an amicable manner and to provide a procedure for processing the complaints/inquiries in a timely and professional manner.

2. POLICY

This policy is to provide guidelines and overall general procedures countywide, with the exception of the Public Works Department, which has a separate complaint process and procedure in place. Directors will inform all affected employees within their work areas of this policy and its requirements.

The Assistant County Manager shall designate an individual to act as the County's centralized public assistance contact person for tracking citizen complaints/inquiries submitted to all Board of County Commission departments.

The Department Heads shall act as the liaison between the complainant/inquirer and the centralized public assistance contact person throughout the complaint/inquiry process and until such complaint/inquiry is resolved. Department Heads should know and train their employees on process and procedures for processing complaints/inquiries in accordance with the Public Assistance Program Policy.

3. What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public. It may be about the Department's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action was taken or the service provided by the Department itself or a person or body acting on behalf of the Department.

A complaint may arise, for example, if a service user believes the Department has done something incorrectly, has failed to do something that it should have done or has acted in a way that may be considered unfair or discourteous.

A service user may choose to complain if, for example:

- He/she believes the Department has failed to provide a timely service;
- An inquiry or question has not received an adequate or any response;
- A Departmental policy, rule or procedure has not been followed;

- Not all relevant factors have been taken into account in dealing with a matter;

A complaint can be made by anyone:

- Who has used or seeks to use the services provided by the departments of the Columbia County Board of County Commissioners;
- Representing an individual or group of individuals who have used or seeks to use the services provided by the departments of the Columbia County Board of County Commissioners.

Complaints can come to a department in many forms: in person, by letter, by telephone, or by e-mail. Every complaint should be addressed and never ignored. The complaint could be simple to solve or extremely complex and entail several departments' cooperation. You may receive a complaint for another department or someone may contact you in search of the appropriate department. No matter how you receive a complaint you should always use your best judgment in determining how to proceed; keeping in mind that we are here to serve the public and our job responsibility is to make it as easy as possible for the public to share their concerns.

4. **PROCEDURE**

When a County employee receives a citizen's inquiry or complaint, the following procedures will apply:

Inquiry:

An inquiry usually refers to a minor matter for which there are readily available solutions and which can be handled by the employee directly responsible for the provision of the service in question or his/her Department Head/Manager. An inquiry may be made in person, by telephone, fax, letter or e-mail.

Inquiries are usually quickly resolved and they are not submitted to the centralized citizen complaint contact person for entering into the tracking system. An inquiry will often involve the employee and/or Department Head granting assurance regarding rectification of a situation, either verbally or by correspondence.

The Department should resolve inquiries within 7 working days of notification by the individual inquiring. In the event that resolution cannot be achieved within that period written notification will be provided that the inquiry is no longer stipulated as such and is considered a complaint. The inquiry information will then be forwarded to the centralized public assistance contact person to assign a tracking number and enter the same into the tracking system as a complaint.

Complaint:

A complaint usually refers to a matter for which there are no readily available solutions and/or which can not be handled solely by an employee and/or the Department Head.

Upon receipt of a complaint, whether written or verbal, the county staff person receiving the complaint must complete the Columbia County Public Assistance Program Form (Exhibit A) with information known or offered by the complainant. Forward the completed Columbia County Public Assistance Program Form with any written or documented request to the centralized public assistance_contact person for data input.

The county staff person receiving the complaint should keep lines of communication open with the complainant by making a follow-up telephone call. The staff person should contact the complainant to inform the complaint is being reviewed. Subsequent telephone calls, correspondence, e-mails, or any other form of communication should be made by the county staff person to the complainant as the issue progresses. Documentation of the same is required and must be provided to the centralized public assistance contact person.

Once the centralized public assistance contact person has received your information a tracking number will be assigned, detailed data regarding the complaint will be input into a data base tracking software program. You will be requested to coordinate with the centralized public assistance_contact person as to the follow-up communication with the complainant.


The centralized public assistance contact person will document and maintain communication with the County department receiving the complaint through to resolution and will document and notify the department when all aspects of the complaint has been resolved.

The Department should resolve complaints within 15 working days of notification by the complainant. In the event that resolution cannot be achieved within that period written notification will be provided that additional time is required to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be informed of this within the fifteen day period and will receive written updates on progress.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint, then the complainant may request a review of the outcome by the County Manager.

In the event the county staff person receiving an inquiry or complaint becomes aware the inquiry or complaint may lead to or involve a lawsuit against the county, the inquiry or complaint should be forwarded to the County Manager and/or the County Attorney for response or other appropriate action.

**COLUMBIA COUNTY BOARD
OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**



CHAIRMAN

**BCC APPROVED
5/7/09**

DATE

EXHIBIT

“A”

**COLUMBIA COUNTY
PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FORM**

COMPLAINANT/INQUIRY INFORMATION:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

DATE COMPLAINT/INQUIRY FILED: _____

NATURE OF COMPLAINT/INQUIRY: _____

RESOLUTION REQUESTED: _____

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION:

SUBMITTING
DEPARTMENT: _____

COUNTY STAFF PERSON: _____

DATE SUBMITTED: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

INTERNAL USE ONLY:

Tracking Number _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Department & Contact Person _____

Date Completed: _____ Time: _____