

Office of Human Resources  
***110 Preventing Workplace Violence***

2025-06-03

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**Georgia Department of Human Services  
Human Resources Policy #110**

**Preventing Workplace Violence**

**Release Date:** May 1, 2001

**Revised Date:** April 19, 2024

**Next Review Date:** April 18, 2026

**References:** DHS Policy #1201- Conduct Standards and Ethics in Government

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is concerned about the health and safety of all individuals. All DHS employees are to use safe work practices, follow policies, procedures and directives, and assist in maintaining a safe and secure work environment.

## Section A: General Provisions

1. Employees, supervisors, and managers are expected to maintain a professional relationship with their colleagues, clients, patients, customers, vendors, and all other work-related contacts.
2. DHS will not tolerate any acts or threats of violence in the workplace, while on duty or off duty, when the act is directed toward a work-related contact or otherwise bears a relationship to work.
3. Examples of prohibited behavior include but are not limited to:
  - a. Threatening, abusive, or intimidating language or written material;
  - b. Fighting or other acts of violence whether directed toward a manager, supervisor, coworker, client, patient, customer, vendor or any other individual, while on duty or representing the department;
  - c. Stalking and;
  - d. Possession of weapons on the work premises unless specifically authorized due to the nature of work performed.
4. DHS reserves the right to conduct reasonable searches on all state property including but not limited to desks, lockers, work areas, state vehicles, etc.
5. All employees should remain alert and be familiar with their surroundings in order to recognize potentially serious situations. Most acts of workplace violence are preceded by direct and/or indirect threats. Employees at all levels must take all threats seriously and report them as soon as possible.

## Section B: Avoid Hiring Potential Violators

1. One of the best methods to reduce or prevent workplace violence is to avoid hiring individuals who are likely to be perpetrators of such violence. If selected applicants are to drive state or personal vehicles for work related purposes, verification of valid driver's licenses and appropriate vehicle insurance is required.
  - a. Applications for employment should be carefully reviewed. Explanation of gaps in employment history should be requested. Clarification on any other unclear areas should be sought.
  - b. Dates of previous and current employment should be verified.
  - c. Reasons given for leaving previous employers should be reviewed.
  - d. Employment references, including previous/current employer, should be checked.
  - e. Criminal background records should be checked, in accordance with DHS Policy #504: Criminal Background Check.
  - f. Drug screening should be conducted, if authorized for the position. Results must be received prior to selected applicants reporting for work.
  - g. Applicants may be asked if they have ever been charged with acts or threatened acts of violence or released from employment for these reasons.

## Section C: Warning Signs

1. Individuals may exhibit certain behaviors that may be warning signs of potential violent behavior. The presence of these behaviors does not necessarily mean someone is going to commit a violent act. Others may not exhibit any unusual behavior prior to committing acts or threats of violence. Employees, supervisors, and managers should be aware of circumstances or behaviors, including but not limited to:
  - a. Recent disciplinary action, denial of a promotion, or pending separation;
  - b. No outside interests, such as family life, hobbies or friends;
  - c. Often blames, has difficulty accepting authority and/or responsibility;
  - d. Experiencing personal challenges, such as a family crisis or illness;
  - e. History of substance abuse;
  - f. Having financial problems;
  - g. Fascinated with guns and weapons; may discuss gun ownership at work;
  - h. History of violent behavior; may frequently discuss past violent incidents;
  - i. Has made direct and/or indirect threats of violence toward coworkers or others;
  - j. Added stress in the workplace due to impending layoffs or staff reductions.

### NOTE

If appropriate, employees exhibiting potential problems should be referred to a behavioral health services program which specializes in behavioral problems/issues.

## Section D: Establishing a Plan

1. Divisions/Offices are responsible for ensuring a plan to prevent workplace violence and manage incidents and/or threats established, in each work location.
2. Each DHS work location with 50 or more employees must establish a committee that will oversee the implementation and management of the Division/Office prevention of workplace violence plan. This responsibility may be included as part of an existing committee structure (e.g., Safety Committee, Risk Management Committee, etc.) available at each work location.
3. Items to be reviewed and considered include but are not limited to:
  - a. Assess security to determine, if adequate;
  - b. Enhance lighting, if necessary;
  - c. Install alarm, intercom and/or electronic surveillance equipment system, if determined appropriate;
  - d. Improve facility entrance requirements, such as requiring all employees to wear ID badges and visitors to check in and wear visitor badges;
  - e. Secure areas that have drop boxes/cash transactions;
  - f. Establish a relationship with local law enforcement officials before any incidents occur;
  - g. Determine methods of communicating incidents with law enforcement;
  - h. Prepare a workplace crisis reaction plan to follow should incidents occur;
  - i. Determine what position(s) and/or incumbent(s) will be "in charge" should incidents occur; and,
  - j. Establish channels for reporting incidents.
4. Employees, supervisors and managers are to be advised of the workplace crisis reaction plan and trained on appropriate procedures to follow should incidents occur.

## Section E: Reporting Acts or Threatened Acts of Violence

1. Employees are responsible for notifying their supervisors or other authorized officials of all acts or threats of violence. Failure of an employee to report such acts or threats of violence is considered a basis for disciplinary action, up to and including separation from employment.

### NOTE

Safety precautions should be put in place, if determined appropriate, as soon as incidents are reported. Staff should be warned of potential danger, if directly involved or likely to be involved.

2. Employees must notify their supervisors or other authorized officials, when any restraining order has been initiated by or against them. This includes issues of a personal nature (e.g., domestic disputes, stalking, etc.), when the workplace could be affected.

**NOTE**

A restraining order may be sought by DHS on behalf of employees under circumstances where employees are threatened or harmed due to the performance of work-related duties. Employees should contact their designated HR Representative for assistance.

3. A Workplace Acts or Threats of Violence Report (see Attachment #1) must be completed by the employee, supervisor or other authorized official, as determined appropriate. This report form is also to be completed by the receiver of anonymous reports. The completed report is to be immediately forwarded to their designated HR Representative.
4. Employees who report acts or threats of violence are protected from retaliation. Any acts of retaliation should be reported to their designated HR Representative, as soon as possible.
5. All alleged acts or threats of violence are to be taken seriously. This includes anonymous reports.
6. Any recurring or continuing alleged acts or threatened acts of violence on or off of the work premises should be immediately reported.

## Section F: Investigating Procedures

1. All alleged acts or threats of violence will be reviewed by appropriate managers. When the nature of the alleged threat or act of violence warrants investigation, the means of investigation shall be determined by management in conjunction with OHR. Available resources for investigations include the Office of Inspector General, OHR, local management and local law enforcement. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation may be used with the approval of the OHR Deputy Director or OHR Deputy Commissioner.
2. Investigations are to begin, as soon as possible. When an investigation of an alleged threat or act of workplace violence is conducted, a written report containing findings and recommended actions should be completed within fifteen (15) calendar days of the reported incident(s).
3. Witnesses may be interviewed in person or by telephone, as determined necessary or appropriate.
4. Written statements may be requested.
5. In the absence of an emergency, the accused employee/individual should be interviewed and given the opportunity to provide information regarding the alleged incident(s). The accused employee/individual should not be interviewed if this would create significant potential for harm to any individual.

**NOTE**

If the investigation involves non-employees, investigators should consult with appropriate officials (e.g., law enforcement) regarding available investigative options.

6. The investigative report will be forwarded to the appropriate authorized official for review and potential action.
7. Individuals in a "need to know" status will be informed of the findings and action.

8. The employees/individuals who reported the acts or threats of violence also will be informed of the findings and action. These employees/individuals are to report any reoccurrences of acts or threats of violence to their supervisors, other authorized officials or their designated HR Representative as soon as possible.

## **Section G: Corrective Action**

1. The penalty for acts of violence shall be separation.
2. The penalty for threats of violence shall be separation, in the absence of mitigating evidence as determined by management in consultation with the employee's designated HR Manager.
3. When mitigating evidence exists and accused employees are retained, they should be referred to a behavioral health services program that deals with behavioral problems/issues, if determined appropriate.
4. If separation occurs, all items belonging to the department (e.g., keys, identification badge, access cards, etc.) are to be retrieved immediately.
5. Post separation monitoring should occur to ensure the safety of those involved.
6. If action involving non-employees is necessary, the appropriate supervisor, authorized official or their designated HR Representative should be contacted.

For additional information or assistance, please contact your designated Human Resources Representative.

## **110 A1 Workplace Acts or Threats of Violence Report**