VIA EMAIL
May 13, 2026 @ 2:04 PM

Robert Lambert

Dear Robert:

In accordance with Dakota County Policy 3043, Dakota County is considering placing you on an unpaid leave of absence due to a conflict of interest between your job duties and your candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff, a copy of which is enclosed. Your job duties as sergeant include, among other things, the duty to work closely with peers, direct reports, and support staff to effectively carry out and support the mission of the Dakota County Sheriff's Office and support the policies and direction set by the County Sheriff.

Prior to making a final decision regarding whether to place you on an unpaid leave of absence Pursuant to Policy 3043, a meeting will be held in Human Resources at 1590 Highway 55, Hastings, MN 55033 at **3:30pm on Thursday, May 14**. Please contact me immediately at 651-438-4382 should you prefer the meeting is conducted via telephone or virtually. I will be present at this meeting with David McKnight, Deputy County Manager. The purpose of this meeting is to provide you an opportunity to present any information you believe should be considered on your behalf, including reasons why you believe you should not be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for the duration of your candidacy for Dakota County Sheriff. Any information you provide will be considered before a final decision is made.

Your participation in this meeting is voluntary. If you choose not to attend the meeting, we will proceed in our decision-making process and advise you of the outcome. Your right to this meeting will expire at **4:30pm on Thursday, May 14**. Feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,
Andy Benish
Human Resources
Director

# Dakota County Policy 3043 Political Activities of Employees

Version:
2.0
Effective Date: 3/20/2025
Board or Administrative: Board

## Policy Statement

Dakota County recognizes that County employees have the right to express their views as members of the public,
to pursue involvement in the political systems, and become candidates.

## Definitions

Candidate: An individual who seeks nomination or election as a state constitutional officer, legislator, or judge. An individual is deemed to seek nomination or election if the individual has taken the action necessary under the law of this state to qualify for nomination or election, has received contributions or made expenditures in excess of $750, or has given implicit or explicit consent for any other person to receive contributions or make expenditures in excess of $750, for the purpose of bringing about the individual's nomination or election. A candidate remains a candidate until the candidate's principal campaign committee is dissolved as provided for in Minn. Stat. § 10A.243.

## Source

Minn. Stat. § 3.088
Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subd. 10
Federal Hatch Act of 1939 (5 U.S.C. §§ 1501, et seq.)

## General

### Permissible Activities

Dakota County recognizes that County employees have the right to express their views as members of the public, to pursue involvement in the political systems, become candidates in nonpartisan elections, and become candidates in partisan elections if the Federal Hatch Act does not prohibit it. If the County determines that there is a conflict of interest between a County employee's job duties and candidacy for elected office, the County may require that the employee take an unpaid leave of absence during the period of the candidacy. County employees may support candidates for federal, state, county, or other local office by working on behalf of such candidates outside of work hours.

## County Employees Who Are Elected to Office

If a County employee is elected to the office of the legislator or to a full-time county or city office in Minnesota, the employee must, prior to taking an oath of office for the elected office, either resign their County employment or obtain a leave of absence subject to reinstatement as provided for under Minnesota law. If a County employee is elected to the office of Dakota County Commissioner, the employee must resign their County employment prior to taking the oath of office, as the office of Dakota County Commissioner is legally incompatible with County employment. If a County employee is elected to an office other than Dakota County Commissioner which the County determines is legally incompatible with the employee's job duties, the employee must resign their employment unless the County, in its sole discretion, changes the employee's job duties prior to the employee's taking the oath of office.

## Prohibited Activities

County employees who are candidates for elected office may not exert pressure in the workplace for coworkers or members of the public to support their campaigns. County employees who are candidates for elected or appointed office must inform their supervisor of the candidacy to enable the County to alter work assignments I necessary to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest. County employees are encouraged but not require to inform their supervisors of their intentions prior to becoming candidates.

1. No County employee, during work hours at the workplace, may use authority or official influence to compel any coworker or member of the public to join a political party, to make a political contribution orto take part in any political activity. Influence includes but is not limited to wearing clothing, hats or buttons which convey messages regarding candidates or matters to be considered at the next election or distributing campaign literature in the workplace.

2. County employees whose principal employment is in connection with an activity which is financed in whole or in part by federal loans or grants are prohibited from:

    a. Using official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or nomination for office;
    b. directly or indirectly coercing, attempt to coerce, commanding, or advising a state or local officer or employee to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency, or person for political purposes; and
    c. running for or accepting appointment to a partisan office without first resigning from County employment or obtaining a personal leave of absence under Minn. Stat. § 3.088.

3. Elected County Attorney, County Sheriff and County Commissioners are not subject to the limitations of Section C.2.

**From:** Tony Spector
**Sent:** Thursday, May 14, 2026 11:35 AM
**To:** andrew.benish@co.dakota.mn.us
**Cc:** Chris Chantry <Cchantry@lels.org>; Brian Bone <BBone@lels.org>; Pennie Enghusen <PEnghusen@lels.org>
**Subject:** Sergeant Robert Lambert - Request to Reschedule Meeting and Objection to Proposed Unpaid Leave
**Importance:** High

Mr. Benish –

My name is Tony Spector, and I am a staff attorney at Law Enforcement Labor Services, Inc.. We represent Sergeant Robert Lambert and send this correspondence on his behalf.

Due to counsel's unavailability, Sergeant Lambert will not be available for today's scheduled meeting. We request that any meeting regarding this matter be rescheduled to a mutually agreeable date and time when counsel can be present. I am available for a phone call today to explore dates and times for a meeting next week.

We also write to formally object to Dakota County's contemplated placement of Sergeant Lambert on an unpaid leave of absence pursuant to Policy 3043. An involuntary unpaid leave constitutes discipline and/or an adverse employment action affecting wages, benefits, and employment status. At present, the County has not articulated any conduct, performance deficiency, or legitimate operational basis establishing just cause for such action.

Policy 3043 expressly recognizes that County employees retain the right to pursue involvement in the political process and become candidates for elected office. The policy further contemplates modification of work assignments, if necessary, to address real or apparent conflicts. The County's correspondence, however, identifies no specific factual basis demonstrating an actual conflict of interest between Sergeant Lambert's job duties and his candidacy for Dakota County Sheriff. Therefore, before contemplating the extraordinary step of removing Sergeant Lambert from active employment without pay, the County should identify:

- the specific operational conflict it believes exists;
- the factual basis supporting that determination;
- why less restrictive alternatives are purportedly insufficient; and
- whether Policy 3043 has previously been applied in a similar manner to other County employees seeking elected office.

We are further concerned that the proposed action appears directly tied to Sergeant Lambert exercising his constitutional and statutory rights to seek elected office. The timing and nature of the contemplated unpaid leave raise serious concerns regarding retaliation and interference with protected political activity.

Sergeant Lambert has continued to perform his duties professionally and effectively. A generalized assertion of a "conflict of interest," without more, is insufficient to justify removing him from active employment without pay. Accordingly, Sergeant Lambert does not waive any contractual, statutory, constitutional, or common-law rights, claims, defenses, or remedies available through

the collective bargaining agreement or applicable law. We request that the County maintain the status quo pending further discussion with counsel.

Please also preserve all documents, communications, electronic correspondence, notes, and materials relating in any way to:

- Sergeant Lambert's candidacy;
- discussions concerning Policy 3043;
- any consideration of unpaid leave related to candidacy for office; and
- any communications regarding Sergeant Lambert among County Administration, Human Resources, or the Sheriff's Office.

Again, I am available for a phone call today to explore dates and times for a meeting next week.

Sincerely,
Tony Spector

From: Benish, Andrew <Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>
Sent: Monday, May 18, 2026 5:16 PM
To: Tony Spector <TSpector@lels.org>
Cc: Brian Bone <bbone@lels.org>; Lambert, Bobby <Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>; Susan Hansen <shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com>
Subject: RE: Sergeant Robert Lambert - Request to Reschedule Meeting and Objection to Proposed Unpaid Leave

Mr. Spector:

I am writing in response to your Thursday May 14 email. Please note the County has identified the following conflicts of interest between Sergeant Lambert's job duties and candidacy for elected office. These conflicts include, but are not limited to, the following:

Support of Department Leadership
Mr. Lambert, in his role as Sergeant, has a duty to work closely with peers, direct reports, and support staff to effectively carry out and support the mission of the Dakota County Sheriff's Office. The County has a compelling interest in the promotion of harmony and cooperation between Sergeants, other staff and the Office of Sheriff. **Recent campaign posts made by Mr. Lambert have included comments that have been interpreted as critical of the mission of the Sheriff's Office. Examples include:**

* **"Too many important decisions are being made by decision makers who are emotionally compromised."**
* **"Too often this has led to long-term consequences."**
* **"If we want to get out of this rut we are in and make things better for everyone, we need to..."**

Influencing Staff and Divided Loyalties
**Mr. Lambert has used his position within the department to win political favor with department staff. An employee reported that Mr. Lambert made comments suggesting that, if he were elected County Sheriff, the employee would receive certain benefits.** A comment like this is clearly intended to win favor and can divide loyalties. The County has no assurances that similar offers haven't already been, or would in the future, made to other department staff. Further, Mr. Lambert is responsible for managing employee performance and, in some cases, assessing and administering discipline. The philosophical differences he has publicly expressed with the mission of the Sheriff's Office raise questions about his ability and willingness to carry out the Sheriff's direction when doing so may conflict with his own campaign messaging. **Further, his supervisory position creates the potential for him to gain favor with staff through the promise or provision of benefits or leniency that a supervisor has the power to grant.** This creates tension and the potential for hostility and conflict in the Office, as well as the opportunity for tacit coercion of coworkers and subordinates.

Communication and Boundary Setting
As a member of the Sheriff's Office leadership team, Mr. Lambert has access to non-public information, including insight into the County Sheriff's thinking regarding departmental mission, policy and procedural changes, among other things. Further, through the course of his work as a Sergeant, Mr. Lambert may obtain insights into internal department problems or issues that would not otherwise be available to a candidate that could be used to further Mr. Lambert candidacy.
**Mr. Lambert has not complied with County policy regarding candidacy for elected office. County Policy 3043 states, in part: "County employees who are candidates for elected or appointed office**

**must inform their supervisor of the candidacy to enable the County to alter work assignments, if necessary, to avoid real or apparent conflicts of interest."**

Although Mr. Lambert has not yet formally filed as a candidate for County Sheriff, he has publicly identified himself as a candidate, communicated to staff that he is a candidate, and has begun campaigning by creating a website titled "Bobby Lambert for Dakota County Sheriff" using the URL "bobbyLambert4sheriff.com" and soliciting campaign donations. Despite these public campaign activities, Mr. Lambert failed to notify his supervisor of his candidacy. As a result, the County was deprived of the opportunity to timely evaluate and implement appropriate safeguards or alternative assignments to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

Instead, leadership became aware of Mr. Lambert's candidacy through other employees within the Sheriff's Office, with whom Mr. Lambert had openly discussed his campaign. While the County is not raising this as a policy violation, it serves as an example of Mr. Lambert lack of awareness and boundaries with regard to his political ambitions and the position he holds.

We look forward to meeting later this week on May 22 to provide Mr. Lambert an opportunity to present information he believes should be considered on his behalf including reasons why he believes he should not be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for the duration of this candidacy.

Thank you,
Andy Benish
Human Resources Director

From: Benish, Andrew
<Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>
Sent: Tuesday, May 26, 2026 3:26 PM
To: Tony Spector <TSpector@lels.org<mailto:TSpector@lels.org>>
Cc: Lambert, Bobby
<Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>; Brian Bone
<BBone@lels.org<mailto:BBone@lels.org>>; Susan Hansen <shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com<mailto:shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com>>; McKnight, David
<David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>
Subject: Pre-Determination Meeting - Offer to Resolve

Dear Mr. Spector
I am writing in follow up to our meeting on Friday, May 22, 2026, in which we discussed the County's concerns about conflicts of interest that exist between Mr. Lambert's job duties as a Sergeant in the Dakota County Sheriff's office and his candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff and the Union's request that the County consider a less restrictive solution to address the matter.

We appreciate the discussions on Friday. Our goal is to resolve the matter in a fair and practical manner. To resolve this issue, the County proposes the following resolution:

* Mr. Lambert be placed in an alternate County position outside of the Dakota County Sheriff's Office for the duration of his candidacy.
* The alternate position the County has identified is an Assistant Probation Office (APO) in the County's Juvenile Services Center (JSC) within the Community Corrections Department.
* Mr. Lambert be paid at his current rate of pay while temporarily serving as an Assistant Probation Office.
* The County will make every effort to assign Mr. Lambert day shifts that are as similar as possible to his working hours in the Sheriff's hours, understanding that actual shift times may vary to some degree in the JSC out of operational necessity.

During his candidacy and while working in this temporary assignment, Mr. Lambert is directed to have no work contact with County Sheriff department staff and to abide by Dakota County policy 3043, Political Activities of Employees, and to avoid any conflicts of interest between Mr. Lambert's temporary job duties as an APO in the Dakota Community Corrections Department/JSC and his candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff including, but not limited to:

* Not exerting pressure in the workplace for coworkers or members of the public to support his campaigns.
* Not using authority or official influence to compel any coworker or member of the public to make a political contribution or to take part in any political activity.
* Not wearing clothing, hats or buttons which convey messages regarding candidates or matters to be considered at the next election or distributing campaign literature in the workplace.
* Avoiding any other activities that may create a conflict of interest between Mr. Lambert's employment with the County and his candidacy for elected office.

We believe this approach appropriately addresses any conflicts of interest regarding Mr. Lambert's job duties as a Sergeant in the Dakota County Sheriff's office and his candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff while balancing Mr. Lambert's and the Union's interests. Please let us know if this

The Union remains willing to continue professional discussions regarding this matter. However, under the present circumstances, Sergeant Lambert does not agree to the County's proposed reassignment, and the Union reserves all contractual, statutory, and legal rights and objections regarding this matter.

Thanks
Brian Bone
Law Enforcement Labor Services

From: Brian Bone <BBone@lels.org<mailto:BBone@lels.org>>
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2026 8:29 PM
To: Benish, Andrew
<Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>; Tony Spector
<TSpector@lels.org<mailto:TSpector@lels.org>>
Cc: Lambert, Bobby
<Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>; Susan Hansen
<shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com<mailto:shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com>>; McKnight, David
<David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US<mailto:David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>>
Subject: RE: Pre-Determination Meeting - Offer to Resolve

Hi Andy,

The Union appreciates the County's willingness to reconsider its initial proposal for an unpaid leave of absence and to engage in discussions regarding possible alternatives. After carefully reviewing the County's proposal with Sergeant Lambert, however, the Union must respectfully decline the proposed reassignment outside the Dakota County Sheriff's Office.

The Union continues to dispute the County's interpretation and application of Policy 3043 under these circumstances, including whether the policy's candidacy provisions clearly apply to a candidate for County Sheriff and whether the County has established sufficient factual or operational grounds to justify removing Sergeant Lambert from his bargaining unit assignment.

Sergeant Lambert will continue to focus on the job at hand and provide a high level of service in his role, as he has done since joining the Sheriff's Office and since he notified Sheriff Leko in September 2025 of his intent to run for Sheriff. Notwithstanding questions of 3043 applicability or lack of any directive prior to May13, 2026, Sergeant Lambert will not campaign while on duty. From the time he gets into his unmarked squad car at home until he returns home at the end of the workday, Sergeant Lambert will be singularly focused on performing his duties as a Sheriff's Sergeant. He will not discuss campaign matters or otherwise engage in campaign-related activities while on duty. Sergeant Lambert remains committed to performing his duties professionally and in accordance with County policy and lawful direction.

The Union also has substantial concerns regarding the County's claimed authority to impose an involuntary reassignment of this nature under the collective bargaining agreement, particularly where the agreement contains no temporary transfer language applicable to these circumstances and where the proposed reassignment raises significant unresolved issues regarding bargaining unit status, peace officer status, seniority, overtime opportunities, PERA contributions where the position is not peace-officer related, restoration rights, and other terms and conditions of employment.

The Union further notes that the County continues to rely, at least in part, on allegations and investigatory conclusions that have not been meaningfully disclosed to either Sergeant Lambert or the Union. At Friday's meeting, the County indicated that the complainant expressed concerns regarding possible retaliation. However, the County has not alleged that Sergeant Lambert made any threats of retaliation. Sergeant Lambert wishes to be abundantly clear on this point: there will be absolutely no retaliation or adverse treatment toward any employee in connection with this matter. At the same time, the Union remains concerned about actions by the County that could reasonably be perceived as discouraging protected political participation by public employees.

The Union remains willing to continue professional discussions regarding this matter. However, under the present circumstances, Sergeant Lambert does not agree to the County's proposed reassignment, and the Union reserves all contractual, statutory, and legal rights and objections regarding this matter.

Thanks
Brian Bone
Law Enforcement Labor Services

From: Benish, Andrew <Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>
Sent: Thursday, June 4, 2026 3:24 PM
To: Brian Bone <BBone@lels.org>; Tony Spector <TSpector@lels.org>
Cc: Lambert, Bobby <Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>; Susan Hansen <shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com>; McKnight, David <David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>
Subject: RE: Pre-Determination Meeting - Offer to Resolve

Brian and Sergeant Lambert:

Thank you for your response.

While the County continues to hold significant concerns about conflicts of interest with regard to Sergeant Lambert's candidacy for County Sheriff , the County has determined that it will not be placing Sergeant Lambert on an unpaid leave of absence at this time.

Effective June 8, 2026, Sergeant Lambert will be temporarily reassigned as the Sergeant supervising licensed deputies who are assigned court security duties at the Northern Service Center. The County expects Sergeant Lambert to abide by all policies including Dakota County policy 3043, Political Activities of Employees, and to avoid exacerbating any conflicts of interest between Sergeant Lambert's job duties and his candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff including, but not limited to:

* Not exerting pressure in the workplace for coworkers or members of the public to support their campaigns.
* Not using authority or official influence to compel any coworker or member of the public to make a political contribution or to take part in any political activity.
* Not wearing clothing, hats or buttons which convey messages regarding candidates or matters to be considered at the next election or distributing campaign literature in the workplace.
* Avoiding any other activities that may create a conflict of interest between Sergeant Lambert's employment with the County and his candidacy for elected office.

Sergeant Lambert is expected to report to the NSC on Monday, June 8 at 8:00 a.m. In the event he has any questions relative to this temporary reassignment, he should contact his current supervisor, Captain Jacobson.

It is the County's expectation that while at work, Sergeant Lambert focus solely on his job duties, which require him to be exclusively at the NSC. Sergeant Lambert's reassignment will require him to work at the NSC exclusively and not at any other county work location. Therefore, Sergeant Lambert should alert his supervisor if he has a business need to be in any other location, including Hastings. This is the County's expectation regardless of whether the Sheriff and Chief Deputy are present in the office or not.

We believe this temporary reassignment, at this time, may appropriately minimize any conflicts of interest regarding Sergeant Lambert's job duties in the Dakota County Sheriff's office and his candidacy for elected office as Dakota County Sheriff. The County reserves the right to place Sergeant Lambert on an unpaid leave of absence in the future if the circumstances change.

Thank you for your attention to his matter. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards, Andy

From: Brian Bone <BBone@lels.org>
Sent: Friday, June 5, 2026 6:44 AM
To: Benish, Andrew <Andrew.Benish@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>; Tony Spector <TSpector@lels.org>
Cc: Lambert, Bobby <Bobby.Lambert@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>; Susan Hansen <shansen@mgh-lawfirm.com>; McKnight, David <David.McKnight@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US>
Subject: RE: Pre-Determination Meeting - Offer to Resolve

Hello, Andy,
Thanks for your response and decision on this. We are in receipt and Sgt Lambert will report for duty at the NSC on the 8th. He will work with his supervisor for any remaining details.

Sgt. Lambert assures you that he will work in his capacity as a Sergeant while on duty and nothing else.

Best regards,
Brian Bone
Law Enforcement Labor Services