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**OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE**

Office of Human Resources

**TO:** All University System of Maryland Office Employees

**FROM:** Carolyn Skolnik, Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources

**DATE:** September 6, 2018

**RE:** Political Activity by USM Office Employees

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The State Ethics Commission has issued guidance on the subject of “Political Activity by State of Maryland Employees.” This guidance was issued on October 7, 2017, and it applies to USM employees.

Political activity by State employees is a highly complex subject, potentially involving State ethics, personnel, and election laws; the federal Hatch Act; and USM policies approved by the Board of Regents. Generally, USM employees, as individuals, are free to express any political opinion and participate in any political activity, including campaign volunteering and running for public office. However, employees may not use USM or other State resources while participating in political activities. This means that employees are prohibited from using work time, funds, facilities, equipment, services, IT systems, letterhead, or other USM assets to support their involvement in political activities.

For example, USM employees are prohibited from:

- Using their affiliation with the USM or the prestige of their position to benefit themselves individually or to benefit others;
- Involving other employees in a political campaign;
- Using confidential USM information in an unlawful or unauthorized manner, including for political activities; and
- Using their supervisory or managerial position to take an action that would suggest they are urging or requiring their subordinates to engage in political activity or make political contributions.

There are many additional considerations that potentially come into play when a State employee chooses to participate in political activities. For example, an employee who accepts a paid campaign role could have a conflict of commitment between their USM job and the secondary employment position, and/or a conflict of interest if the secondary employer has a business relationship with the USM. The State Ethics Commission suggests that in this type of situation, an employee might consider taking a leave of absence from their State job to create separation between the two and avoid any potential conflicts.

As a public employer and independent agency of the State of Maryland, the USM is committed to ensuring that its employees serve the public both faithfully and in accordance with all applicable state and federal laws and USM policies. Please contact me if you have any questions about this memo.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.