

## RESOURCES FOR WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

Public employees often find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. There are numerous resources that are available that might be of assistance to you and help you through a difficult time. For example:

**\*Consultations** - PEER provides free consultations to public employees to help you assess the issue you are facing and define options for remedying it. Depending on the issue, we may work with you to take it on or refer you to your union, legal counsel, or other resources.

**\*Employee Unions** - Unions can be a powerful force to address personnel issues, protect employee rights, and advocate for laws to protect the interests of public employees. If you are a member of an employee union, know what's in your contract or bargaining agreement and talk with your union rep. before you jump out on a limb. If you're not a member of a union, join one. They are integral to protecting worker's rights.

**\*Professional Organizations and Societies** – Many professions such as engineers, wildlife biologists, planners, and others have professional societies that help define and uphold the ethical and scientific standards of the profession. Public and private employees have successfully used these professional standards to justify why they could not take the action that the agency was requesting of them (ie approve a building design, sign off on a monitoring plan). Joining one of these groups or organizing your profession to define and uphold professional standards can be a powerful tool in the fight to maintain and protect scientific integrity and employee's rights to refuse an order that violates professional standards.

### Washington State Programs

**Here is a brief description of some of Washington State's programs and routes to remedy followed by a listing of web links.**

**\*Know your agency's policies** – Most agencies have policies on employee's political activities, e-mail use, and other practices to ensure that employees do not violate ethics laws or use public resources for private purposes. It's advisable to know them and adhere to them. On the other hand, if the policies violate employee's rights or constrict them in violation of state or federal laws they should be challenged. Regardless, figure this out before you ignore or violate them.

**\*Filing Whistleblower Complaints with the State Auditor's Office** –Through the State Auditor's Office, state employees can file whistleblower complaints which are treated as confidential and either dismissed or investigated by the Office. Work with WA PEER, your union, or a lawyer before you decide to file a complaint. In some cases, it may not be the best route to remedy your situation. On the other hand, if you do not file you may not qualify as a "whistleblower" under state law and may be hampered if you later need to file a claim of retaliation.

**\*Reporting Retaliation via the Human Rights Commission** – This is where employees can report retaliation they have experienced as a whistleblower. However, employees rarely prevail here. At last count, of 69 cases, employees have prevailed once. Some employees who have lost at the Human Rights Commission have gone on to win in Superior Court.

**\*The Legislative Ethics Board** – the place to go to file a complaint against a legislator for violating the ethics laws. This is generally a stacked dysfunctional set-up because the board is largely composed of other legislative members rather than an independent outside party.

**\*The State Ethics Board** enforces ethics laws in agencies. PEER can file complaints for you, or request ethics opinions on your behalf so you can remain anonymous.

### **Washington State Programs**

Legislative Ethics Board - ([www.leg.wa.gov/common/ethics/default.htm](http://www.leg.wa.gov/common/ethics/default.htm)) oversees legislative ethics, reviews complaints

Washington State Auditor - ([www.sao.wa.gov](http://www.sao.wa.gov)) where whistleblower complaints must be filed

Washington State Bar Association – ([www.wsba.org](http://www.wsba.org)) legal resources

Washington State Ethics Board – ([www.wa.gov/ethics/services.html](http://www.wa.gov/ethics/services.html)) enforces ethics law, reviews complaints

Washington State Human Rights Commission – ([www.hrc.wa.gov/](http://www.hrc.wa.gov/)) investigates retaliation.

### **Public Interest Groups and Whistleblower Resources**

American Civil Liberties Union of Washington (ACLU)

Federal Whistleblower laws

Government Accountability Project (GAP)

Legal Research on the Internet, Washington focus

Municipal Research Service Center – municipal codes and contracts

National Whistleblower Center

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER)

### **Unions and Affiliations Working with Public Employees in Washington State**

American Federation of Government Employees (federal government)

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees

International Federation of Professional and Tech. Engineers (state /local)

Retired Public Employees Council of Washington –call (360) 352-8262

Washington Federation of State Employees

Washington State Labor Council - umbrella group AFL-CIO unions

Washington State Labor Center

Washington Public Employees Association (state agencies)

Washington Association of Professional Biologists