

Mountain Regional Library System

PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL

February 2020



Administrative Offices

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Union County Public Library
303 Hunt-Martin Street
Blairsville, GA 30512

Fannin County Public Library
400 W. Main Street, STE 104
Blue Ridge, GA 30513

Mountain Regional Library
698 Miller Street
Young Harris, GA 30582

Our Mission Statement:

The Mountain Regional Library System shall offer a full program of library service to all citizens of the participating counties to meet their informational, educational, and recreational needs; acquire and purchase library materials; circulate materials to the public through the member libraries or by other appropriate means of library extension; develop existing libraries and establish and develop member libraries, deposits, and other services as appropriate to the needs of the service area; build a reference collection adequate to provide current and reliable information of a research nature as demanded by the needs of the communities comprising the areas served; and promote the use of library resources by means of instruction, library-centered programs, exhibits, and other public relations media.

Our Customer Service Philosophy:

The customer service philosophy of the Mountain Regional Library System *is to* provide accurate, timely, and consistent service in a courteous and informed manner to all who interact with our organization.

For questions or additional information regarding this Personnel Policy Manual, contact the MRLS [Business Manager's Office](#) at (706) 379-1397.

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL

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MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF MRLS PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL for version dated September 2017

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Mountain Regional Library System (MRLS) Personnel Policy Manual. I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in the Manual as well as any revisions made to it. I also understand that if I need additional information, or if there is anything I do not understand in this Manual, I should contact my immediate Supervisor, the Business Manager's Office, or other appropriate MRLS management personnel.

I understand that MRLS is an "at will" employer and, as such, employment with MRLS is not for any definite period of time and may be terminated at the option of either employee or MRLS, with or without cause, and with or without prior notice. I also understand that nothing contained in the Manual may be construed as creating a promise of future benefits or a binding contract with MRLS for employment, benefits, or any other purpose.

In addition, I understand that this Manual reflects policies, practices, and procedures in effect on the date of publication, and that it supersedes any prior policy manual, handbook, work rules, benefits, and practices of MRLS. I further understand that the rules, policies, benefits, and practices referred to in this Manual are continually evaluated and may be modified, reduced, or discontinued at any time by MRLS, in its judgment and discretion, with or without notice.

SIGNED BY: _____ DATE: _____
(Employee signature) (Date signed)

EMPLOYEE NAME: _____
(Print employee's name)

POSITION: _____
(Employee's position)

DEPARTMENT: _____
(Employee's department)

**Please sign the Acknowledgment attached to front of Manual
and return to the Business Manager's Office.
(Keep this copy for your reference.)**

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL



WELCOME!

Welcome to employment with MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM. We are pleased that you are joining our team. We trust that you will find your employment at one of our libraries to be a positive, rewarding experience.

The MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM is an exciting place to be. We are located in one of the most beautiful regions in the state of Georgia. In addition, this is a time of dramatic changes in information technology and, therefore, in the way we serve the public (our patrons). These factors create many challenges and opportunities for change for the Library.

As our employee, YOU are key to the Library's success. Regardless of whether you work directly with patrons or behind the scenes, the quality of customer service that you provide is a reflection on the Library as a whole. If we perform our jobs well, our patrons will be pleased with the services they receive and will be supportive of our library system.

Many of the Library's policies and procedures are outlined in this Manual. Be sure to talk with your Supervisor about the location of other sources of information, including guidelines that are specific to your department. Employees are expected to follow Library policies, procedures, and guidelines with the goal of providing excellent customer service to our patrons.

Again, welcome to the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM!

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM (MRLS) welcomes you as an employee. MRLS is committed to ensuring that you have a positive work environment in which to pursue your career. To assist in creating such an environment, MRLS expects its employees to meet the following minimum employment standards:

- **Respect the Rights of Our Patrons.** Maintain privacy and confidentiality of all information related to our patrons and their use of the Library. Refrain from expressing any personal, social, political, or religious views to patrons in the course of your work.
- **Maintain Honesty and Integrity.** All MRLS employees should be honest and ethical. Always. Always comply with MRLS policies and with federal, state and local laws.
- **Have Regular and Prompt Attendance.** You cannot fulfill our purpose and our commitment to the public and you cannot be productive if you are not here.
- **Keep a Positive Attitude.** Your attitude and demeanor are infectious. When it is positive, both you and the Library can accomplish great things. That is our standard and our expectation. Negativism is nonproductive and harmful, and inconsistent with our mission. If you have a problem, let's get it addressed through the proper channels quickly.
- **Be Courteous and Helpful to the Public.** Never forget that our patrons provide us our jobs. They deserve to receive excellent service and be treated with respect.
- **Show Respect and Courtesy in All Interactions.** Always treat coworkers as the internal customers that they are, demonstrating the same respect and courtesy that would be used with a patron. Courtesy is required by the Library's Mission Statement and Customer Service Philosophy.
- **Respect Yourself and Each Other.** MRLS will not allow racial, gender, religious, or cultural bias. Jokes or other behavior that demean or insult others are not appropriate and will not be tolerated.
- **Be Productive.** Give a full day's labor for a full day's pay, and give earnest effort and thought to the work you perform. Use all of your abilities, every day, to accomplish our mission. Expect excellence from yourself.
- **Work Smart.** Set high standards for yourself and be responsible for your performance. Always try to do the right thing. Be creative. Seek to find and employ more efficient and economical ways of getting tasks accomplished.
- **Be Safe.** Accidents hurt everyone. Be careful, work safely, and bring to attention any potential safety hazards.
- **Be Accountable.** Take responsibility for your own performance. Be willing to admit to a mistake, learn from it, and move forward. Don't make excuses or blame others when problems arise. Take it upon yourself to solve problems. Never withhold information that would impair proper decision-making.
- **Be Committed.** We all spend a significant part of our lives at work. Let's make it count for something. Let's make a difference!

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL

SECTION A – EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

A-1. Purpose and Administration of Personnel Policy Manual

Responsibilities – The MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees is the governing authority for the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM (MRLS) and is responsible for formulating policies.

The policies described in this Personnel Policy Manual are administered by and under the direction of the Library Director, who is responsible for supervising library operations and implementing Board policies. In general, the Director in coordination with the Board of Trustees is responsible for administering these policies.

Each employee is responsible for cooperating with the employment policies and practices described in this Manual. Any employee who believes that he or she has not been accorded treatment conforming to these policies is urged to discuss the matter with their Supervisor or Director, or with the Business Manager.

Employees are also responsible for reading and complying with policies and practices relating to their position that may be contained in other documents, including the MRLS Operations Policy Manual and any department-specific manuals, procedural guides, instructions, emergency procedures, or other documentation. To the extent that there are any perceived conflicts between departmental operating rules and this Personnel Policy Manual, the more stringent provision shall control. If there is a question concerning any perceived conflict between departmental operating rules and the Personnel Policy Manual, the employee should direct such question to his or her Supervisor or the Business Manager in advance for clarification to be made in such instance by the Library Director.

Applicability – This Manual shall apply to all employees of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM.

Purpose of Manual – This Personnel Policy Manual provides general information about MRLS employment policies, procedures, expectations, and benefits, and is intended to serve as the source of information relating to employment with MRLS. The information in this Manual, however, cannot anticipate every situation or answer every question regarding employment. The Library Director shall make interpretive decisions for situations not specifically covered by the provisions of this Manual.

Every effort will be made to keep this Manual up to date on current employment laws. In all cases, current federal, state, and local laws will apply, even if not specifically stated.

With regard to employee benefits, information in this Manual is intended to only summarize benefits. Terms of written plan documents or insurance policies will be the controlling documents. Wherever applicable, employees should refer to official plan documents or policies for detailed plan information.

This Manual does not create an employment contract or guarantee of employment between MRLS and its employees. Employment is “at will” and for no specific period of time, and this Manual does not limit an employee’s right or MRLS’s right to terminate employment at any time for any reason. The employment at will relationship exists for all employees, unless otherwise specified by law.

All employees must sign the “Receipt of MRLS Personnel Policy Manual” form (attached and/or contained within) **to acknowledge receipt of this Manual, and must read the Personnel Policy Manual upon hire and/or upon revision.** Employees will have access to the Manual both in physical form at their library and in digital form on the website. They should refer to it as needed throughout employment.

Employees with a question concerning a policy, practice, benefit, or other aspect of employment should contact their Supervisor or the Business Manager’s Office for clarification.

Amendment – This Manual may be amended in whole or in part from time to time at the discretion of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM in order to maintain legal compliance, operational effectiveness, and desired workplace conditions. All MRLS policies, practices, and procedures are dependent on economic, legal, political, or other considerations, and **MRLS reserves the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any employment policies, practices, procedures, programs, or benefits at any time and for any reason.** While MRLS will typically attempt to notify employees of such changes (via email, newsletter, posting on MRLS staff website, printed notice, or amendment to or reprinting of this Manual), **MRLS may, in its discretion, make such changes at any time, with or without notice to employees.**

A-2. “At-Will” Nature of Employment

All employees of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM are “at-will” employees with no expectation of continuing employment. Employment with MRLS is entered into on a voluntary basis, and all employees are employed for an indefinite time period. Either the Library or the employee is free to terminate the employment relationship at any time without notice, for any reason.

No Supervisor or other representative of MRLS (except the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees and the Library Director) has the authority to enter into any agreement for employment for any specified period of time, or to make any agreement contrary to the above. Further, any employment agreement entered into by the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees and Library Director will not be enforceable unless it is in writing.

A-3. Equal Employment Opportunity

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM is an equal opportunity employer. It is the policy of MRLS to provide equal employment opportunity to qualified persons without regard to race; color; religion; gender; national origin; age; disability; genetic information; uniformed service status; pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or any other legally protected category. This policy relates to all phases of employment, including, but not limited to, recruitment, placement, promotion, transfer, reduction in force, separation, training, compensation, and benefits. All decisions regarding hiring, placement, promotion, transfer, demotion, termination, or any other term or condition of employment will be based upon the qualifications and performance of the employee or prospective employee.

In addition, MRLS will not discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant on the basis of a physical or mental disability. MRLS will strive to provide reasonable accommodations to assist disabled individuals to perform essential job functions, as long as the accommodation does not cause MRLS undue hardship.

Any employee who has concerns regarding MRLS’s equal employment opportunity policies should report those concerns to the Business Manager’s Office. Any employee found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

A-4. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), which prohibit discrimination against “a qualified individual with a disability” in recruitment, placement, promotion, transfer, reduction in force, separation, training, compensation, benefits, or other employment related activities.

Consistent with this policy not to discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant with regard to any terms or conditions of employment because of such individual’s disability, perceived disability, or handicap, MRLS will provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to allow them to perform their jobs, provided that the reasonable accommodations would not impose an undue hardship on MRLS or the operation of MRLS’s business.

How To Request Accommodation – An employee must notify the Business Manager’s Office or Supervisor that he or she needs an accommodation because of his or her disability or condition. The employee may use “plain

English" in the notification, and does not need to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." The request does not need to be in writing (although MRLS may choose to write a letter confirming the request).

Upon receipt of an accommodation request, the Business Manager's Office will meet with the employee to discuss and identify the precise limitation(s) resulting from the disability or condition and the potential accommodation(s) that MRLS might make to help overcome such limitation(s). All decisions with respect to accommodations must be coordinated with the Business Manager's Office.

A-5. Discrimination and Harassment

It is MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM's policy to maintain a working environment free of unlawful harassment, including physical, verbal or visual conduct that shows hostility toward an individual because of that person's race; color; religion; gender; national origin; age; disability; genetic information; uniformed service status; pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or any other legally protected group status. To assist in preventing or eliminating any such unwelcome harassment, MRLS will not condone or tolerate any form of unlawful harassment or discrimination by or against its employees and Supervisors. For purposes of this policy, "harassment" consists of unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that is severe and/or pervasive, and that is based on a person's protected group status and involves behavior that is personally offensive, fails to respect the rights of others, lowers morale, and interferes with work effectiveness.

All employees and Supervisors are expected to avoid any behavior or conduct that could reasonably be interpreted as harassment. Any form of harassment related to an individual's protected group status is a violation of this Policy and will be treated as a disciplinary matter. All employees have a responsibility to inform an individual whenever the individual's behavior is unwelcome, offensive, or inappropriate, and to report harassment as described herein.

Examples of behavior prohibited by this policy include, but are not limited to:

1. Verbal Harassment – Frequent, disparaging comments, jokes, or slurs pertaining to an individual's protected group status;
2. Visual Harassment – Pictures, drawings, posters, photographs, reading materials, computer monitors, emails, or other tangible items that denigrate or exploit an individual's protected group status;
3. Physical Harassment – Unwelcome physical contact, damaging one's personal property, or blocking one's path because of his or her protected group status;
4. Threatening reprisal based on an individual's protected group status; or
5. Other conduct based on a protected group status that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance and/or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Unlawful harassment can be found in a single egregious action (e.g. groping breasts; posting of pornography) or in the accumulated effect of frequent, repeated comments or slurs related to an individual's protected group status.

This policy addresses only unlawful discriminatory harassment. It is not intended to impose a civility code or to provide guidelines for professional work behavior. It is possible for behavior to be rude, annoying, insulting, or unprofessional without constituting harassment. These behaviors may still result in disciplinary action depending on their impact on teamwork and customer service.

Sexual Harassment – Sexual harassment is a form of unlawful harassment and will be treated in accordance with the terms of this policy. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical, verbal, or visual conduct based on gender (regardless of the gender of the individuals involved) constitute sexual harassment when:

1. Submission to the conduct is an explicit or implicit term or condition of an individual's employment;
2. Submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting an individual; or

3. The conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's job performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Examples of behavior prohibited by this policy include, but are not limited to:

1. Sexual assaults, including rape and molestation, and attempts or threats to commit these assaults;
2. Unwanted intentional contact of a sexual or suggestive nature, such as touching, pinching, patting, grabbing, kissing, brushing against, or poking a person's body, or blocking a person's movement;
3. Unwanted sexual advances, propositions, or comments (verbal or written), including sexually oriented gestures, leering, jokes, epithets, slurs, or comments about a person's sexuality;
4. Distributing, displaying or publicizing pictures, posters, photographs, reading materials (including emails), calendars, objects, or other tangible items that are sexually suggestive, sexually demeaning, or pornographic;
5. Preferential treatment, or the promise of preferential treatment, for engaging in sexual conduct;
6. Threatening reprisal for refusal to respond to requests for sexual favors;
7. Disciplining or retaliating against an employee in any way because he or she has resisted, reported, or complained about sexual harassment;
8. Any conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance and/or conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment; or
9. Suggesting or inferring to any employee (or applicant) that his or her employment, advancement, or treatment will be affected in any way by entering into (or refusing to enter into) any form of personal or sexual relationship.

Reporting Complaints – All employees are held accountable for accomplishing MRLS's goal of a workplace free of harassment. Any employee who believes he or she has been subjected to unlawful harassment (by a co-worker, Supervisor, patron or vendor, or by anyone else during the course of his or her employment) and/or believes that his or her employment is being affected by such conduct should immediately report such incident to the Supervisor, the Director, or the Business Manager. Employees who are witness to, or who become aware of, a co-worker being subjected to unlawful harassment should also report such incidents immediately. All reports of complaints will remain confidential.

Investigations – All allegations of unlawful harassment will be thoroughly and promptly investigated. To the extent possible, identities of the complainant, any witnesses, and the alleged harasser will be protected against unnecessary disclosure. All persons involved in the investigation are expected to refrain from discussing the matter with any person outside the investigation process. When the investigation is completed, the complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation. All employees – whether complainant, witness, or accused – are required to be truthful, accurate, and cooperative during a Library investigation.

Consequences – Any employee found by the Library to have harassed another employee will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination.

Non-Retaliation Policy – Retaliation will not be tolerated against an employee for opposing harassment, for filing a bona fide complaint of harassment, or for providing information in good faith regarding another employee's complaint. Any complaints about retaliation should be reported in the same manner as violations of this policy are to be reported. Any employee found by the Library to have retaliated against another employee for these reasons will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination. Conversely, an intentional or malicious false accusation of misconduct could have a serious effect on an individual who has been falsely accused, and any individual found to have knowingly made false complaints of misconduct will be disciplined based on the extent of the false accusation, up to and including termination.

Importance of Policy – MRLS is very serious about enforcing its policy against harassment. However, MRLS cannot respond to complaints of harassment unless it is aware of those complaints. Therefore, it is the responsibility of each employee to report any incident of harassment so that MRLS can take corrective action as needed. Anyone who experiences or observes any violation of this policy is required to report the same

under the terms of this policy prior to the end of the workday or the following workday on which the violation was believed to occur.

Supervisors Responsibility – Any Supervisor who becomes aware of possible unlawful harassment or retaliation must immediately inform the Business Manager or the Director to allow for an expeditious investigation of same. Any Supervisor failing to carry out this responsibility shall be subject to disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination.

Bullying – MRLS also prohibits workplace bullying by or against MRLS employees and volunteers. Although bullying may not be targeted to a protected group (as is illegal harassment) and therefore may not be considered illegal, bullying still involves behavior that is personally offensive, fails to respect the rights of others, lowers morale, and interferes with work effectiveness. As such, MRLS will address acts of bullying by or against its employees or volunteers.

Bullying refers to repeated or persistent actions directed towards an individual or group with intent to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine. It can involve verbal bullying, physical bullying, cyberbullying, bullying gestures, or exclusion from activities. Examples may include (but are not limited to) derogatory or offensive remarks, insults, or epithets; using a person as butt of jokes; name calling that is hurtful or insulting; public humiliation; spreading malicious rumors; damaging a person's work area or property; threatening gestures or glances; unwarranted criticism; sabotaging work performance; or excluding a person in work-related activities.

As with discrimination and harassment, retaliation will not be tolerated against an employee for opposing bullying, for filing a bona fide complaint of bullying, or for providing information about a bullying complaint.

Although bullying is not considered illegal in all circumstances, MRLS does not condone any form of bullying and will address such behavior as disciplinary issue. Any employee who believes he or she has been subjected to bullying, or who has become aware of a bullying situation, should report the situation to the immediate Supervisor, the Assistant Director, or the Director.

A-6. Immigration Law Compliance

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM is committed to full compliance with federal and state immigration laws, and will hire only individuals with the legal right to work in the United States.

Pursuant to Section 2 of the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act, all employees must complete Form I-9 and provide legal documentation of citizenship and/or work status as set forth on the form. Within 3 business days of hire, the Human Resource Office electronically verifies accuracy of the employee's Social Security number and other documentation through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security verification system. In the event of tentative non-confirmation of an employee's Social Security number, MRLS will follow the procedures designated under the E-Verify Program concerning employee notification, case referral to the Social Security Administration, continued employment during the confirmation process, monitoring of case status, and final confirmation after case resolution. This policy and its procedures are intended to comply with the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act. Should any portion of said Act be amended, modified, revised, or repealed, or if other or additional controlling federal or state immigration laws or regulations become adopted in the future, the processes and requirements set forth in such Act, laws, or regulations shall govern.

A-7. Workplace Safety

It is the policy of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM that every employee is entitled to work under the safest conditions reasonably possible. Every reasonable effort will be made to provide and maintain a safe and healthy workplace, safe equipment, and proper materials, and to establish and insist upon safe methods and practices at all times.

Responsibilities – It is the basic responsibility of all employees to make safety a part of their daily concern. Employees are obligated to observe all guidelines governing safety and appropriate conduct, to properly use the safety equipment provided, to follow common-sense safety practices, and to report all safety-related hazards or incidents. Supervisors are expected to conduct and/or implement safety training, monitor the

workplace, identify any unsafe conditions, and address safety problems and violations. The Director is expected to ensure safe conditions and adhere to safety guidelines within their assigned departments by implementing safety practices, coordinating safety inspections, investigating accidents and injuries, and correcting deficiencies.

Following Safety Guidelines – All employees should participate in training in the correct way to perform their jobs. Any questions or suggestions about better or safer methods of performing tasks should be discussed with the Supervisor. Employees should always be conscious of the safety of others, as well as themselves. Employees should always observe the following guidelines:

1. Observe all safety rules, practices, and procedures.
2. Promptly report any unsafe conditions, accidents, damaged or malfunctioning vehicles or equipment, any employee who is performing his or her job in an unsafe manner, or any other type of hazardous situation.
3. Only operate equipment assigned to the employee and for which the employee has received full training.
4. Use proper safety clothing, equipment, and personal protective equipment wherever provided, assigned, or required, as designated for the work performed.
5. Wear a seat belt when in a library vehicle, when driving on library business, or when operating any vehicle on library premises.
6. Use appropriate, safe methods to lift heavy objects, and use handcarts or other devices to assist with lifting or moving activities.
7. Never endanger themselves or other individuals through inappropriate actions, horseplay, or practical jokes, or by taking unnecessary chances.
8. Be prepared for fire or other emergency situations – know what to do, what actions to take, where to go, and the location of exits, firefighting equipment, and alarm pulls within the work environment.
9. Observe proper maintenance practices to keep work area, vehicles, tools, or other equipment in clean, safe, and operable condition.
10. If unsure of how to safely handle a task, activity, or situation, ask the Supervisor for training, guidance, or assistance.
11. Inform the Supervisor when taking medication which may impair the employee's physical or mental alertness and/or affect the employee's ability to perform the job safely.
12. Participate in safety training and education.

Reporting Safety Hazards or Deficiencies – Any employee who believes that a safety or health risk exists must report the matter to the Business Manager's Office so that MRLS may take appropriate action. The employee should make this report immediately upon detection of the safety or health risk. A safety or health risk may consist of, among other things, a condition in the workplace or the work methods of other employees.

Reporting Employee Injuries or Accidents – All workplace injuries and accidents must be reported immediately to a Supervisor, Director, or the Business Manager's Office. This ensures prompt and appropriate medical treatment, allows for timely completion of reports as required by law, and enables eligible employees to qualify for coverage as quickly as possible. Except for emergencies (in which case the employee should seek emergency treatment), if medical attention by a physician is needed, the employee must use one of the physicians specifically listed on the Workers' Compensation Notice posted by MRLS on the staff bulletin board. Failure to report an injury or to receive medical treatment from a physician on the posted panel may jeopardize payment of medical bills or other benefits under workers' compensation insurance. Workers' compensation procedures are discussed in more detail in [Section I-6](#) of this Manual.

Response to Emergency Situations* – Employees should become familiar with emergency plans established within their assigned department or work area, as well as with their assigned role in the event of an emergency situation.

*** A call to 9-1-1 may be appropriate in any emergency,
in the judgment of staff or managers involved.**

Nothing in this Manual is intended to prevent quick action to stop or reduce the risk of harm to anyone in an emergency situation, including requesting immediate assistance from law enforcement or emergency response resources. Staff should use their own judgment to do what is prudent and reasonable.

Safety Inspections – Inspections of MRLS buildings, equipment, work areas, work procedures, equipment, or other aspects of MRLS property and operations may be conducted at any time by Supervisors, Director, Facilities staff, or other representatives of MRLS. Any safety deficiencies identified in inspections will be addressed and corrected.

Investigations – Investigations will be conducted into all incidents, accidents, and injuries. This can include inspecting the scene of the incident, taking photographs, and obtaining statements from individuals who witnessed or were involved in the incident. Staff conducting the investigation will review the circumstances, identify potential causes, and recommend appropriate corrective measures to eliminate the hazard(s) and prevent future occurrences. A determination will be made as to whether the event was unavoidable or avoidable, and whether any disciplinary action would be appropriate.

Safety Violations – Accidents, injuries, damaged equipment, or destruction of materials or property can cause needless suffering, inconvenience, and expense to MRLS or its employees. As a result, any such actions by employees that could be avoided by utilizing appropriate safety practices may result in disciplinary action up to, and including, termination.

Library Closings – For information about reporting procedures when the Library closes (or postpones opening) due to inclement weather or other situations, refer to [Section J-5](#) of this Manual.

A-8. Workplace Security

It is the intent of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM to take the necessary actions to safeguard employees while on the job, as well as to protect MRLS property. All employees are strongly discouraged from being in the building when alone unless another employee is expected very soon.

Security of MRLS Buildings – MRLS controls access to library facilities through use of traditional key systems, electronic access systems, monitored alarm systems, or other methods. Any employee assigned an access key/code must follow all applicable procedures regarding use of buildings and equipment therein. Employees may use access keys and codes only when scheduled or with the knowledge and approval of appropriate management staff. Employees must sign for each key issued to them, and will be held accountable for proper use and disposition of assigned keys/codes. Anyone duplicating, possessing, or using access keys/codes in an inappropriate manner or without proper authorization will be subject to disciplinary action, or criminal charges where appropriate. All keys must be returned to MRLS upon request, upon transfer from the responsible position, or upon separation.

Employees should keep in mind that the Library does not have secure locations to store personal property or valuables of employees, and cannot be responsible for any lost, damaged, or stolen personal items.

Security Clearances – Applicants for hire, promotion, or transfer to positions involving a certain level of trust, responsibility, or access to MRLS resources (such as finance, information technology, courier, etc.) may be required to provide additional personal information that would not be needed in other areas of employment. Such individuals may also be subject to additional background screening, which may include criminal history reports, credit reports, driver's history reports, physical exams, drug testing, or other review. (The Library complies with all requirements of the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which governs the use of information contained in consumer reports, and will maintain confidentiality of information.)

A-9. Workplace Violence

MRLS is concerned about the well-being and personal safety of its employees and anyone doing business with MRLS, and consequently strictly prohibits workplace violence. Acts of violence and/or threats of violence, whether expressed or implied toward individuals in the MRLS workplace, are strictly prohibited and will not be

tolerated. All reports of incidents or perceived incidents of workplace violence or threats of workplace violence will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. This policy concerns prohibited conduct, as well as general procedures and potential responsive steps in the unfortunate event that workplace violence occurs despite these preventive measures.

Workplace violence is any conduct that is severe, offensive, or intimidating enough to make an individual reasonably fear for his or her personal safety or the safety of family, friends, or property. Examples of conduct that may be considered threats or acts of violence under this policy include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Threats of any kind (veiled or direct, verbal or non-verbal); intimidation or attempts to instill fear in others.
2. Physically aggressive, hostile, or violent behavior.
3. Behavior that suggests a propensity for violence, such as belligerent speech, excessive arguing or swearing, or sabotage or threats of sabotage of MRLS property.
4. Intentional damage or destruction of MRLS property or of another's property.
5. Harassing or threatening physical, verbal, written, or electronic communications, including comments, phone calls, emails, letters, faxes, website materials, diagrams or drawings, gestures, or any other form of communication that causes a reasonable fear or intimidation response in others.
6. Stalking (defined as a pattern of conduct over a period of time, however short, which evidences a continuity of purpose and includes physical presence, telephone calls, emails, or any other type of correspondence sent by any means).
7. Unauthorized or illegal possession of firearms, ammunition, explosives, knives, or weaponry of any type on MRLS property is strictly prohibited.

Reporting Incidents* – Any employee who is subjected to, observes, hears of, or becomes aware of any of the above actions or behavior by an individual in the MRLS workplace must immediately report such incident to a Supervisor, or Director.

****A call to 9-1-1 may be appropriate first,
in the judgment of the staff or managers involved.***

Decisions may need to be made quickly to prevent a threat from being carried out, a violent act from occurring, or a life-threatening situation from developing. Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent quick action to stop or reduce the risk of harm to anyone, including requesting immediate assistance from law enforcement or emergency response resources.

All acts of violence, or threats thereof, should be reported no matter how minor or insignificant they may appear. If an employee does not feel he or she can discuss an act or threat of violence with the immediate Supervisor, or if an employee is not satisfied with the manner in which a complaint was handled, the employee should contact the Business Manager or Director. Failure to report any threats or acts of violence in violation of this policy appropriately is in itself a violation of this policy, and may subject any employees involved to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Investigations – All reports of acts or threats of violence will be promptly investigated. MRLS may consult with law enforcement authorities or other resources as it deems appropriate. To the extent possible, identities of the reporting employee, any witnesses, and any individuals alleged to be involved in actual or threatened violence will be protected against unnecessary disclosure. All persons involved in the investigation are expected to refrain from discussing the matter with any person outside the investigation process. All employees – whether complainant, witness, or accused – are required to be truthful, accurate, and cooperative during a Library investigation. MRLS will decide whether the workplace violence policy has been violated and, based upon its findings, will take appropriate preventive, corrective, or disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Consequences – Any employee found by the Library to have engaged in violence or threats of violence will be subject to immediate and appropriate disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination.

Non-Retaliation Policy – Retaliation will not be tolerated against an employee for reporting in good faith a suspected act or threat of violence, or for providing information in good faith regarding a report made by another employee. Any complaints about retaliation should be reported in the same manner as violations of this policy are to be reported. Any employee found by the Library to have retaliated against another employee for these reasons will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination. Conversely, an intentional or malicious false accusation could have a serious effect on an individual who has been falsely accused, and any individual found to have knowingly made false complaints will be disciplined based on the extent of the false accusation, up to and including termination.

Orders of Protection – MRLS reserves the right to seek orders of protection (or restraining orders) against any person who violates the workplace violence policy. Employees who either obtain or are subject to an order of protection have additional responsibilities to report their situation to the Business Manager's Office.

- Employees who obtain orders of protection against individuals outside of the workplace must immediately notify the Business Manager's Office and their Supervisor if (a) an order of protection extends to the workplace, or (b) they reasonably believe that their safety (or the safety of others) in the workplace is affected by the order of protection. In addition to providing a copy of the order, the employee should notify Human Resources of any violations or attempted violations of the order, any changes to the order that affect the workplace, and the order being lifted.
- Employees who are subject to orders of protection requiring them to stay away from or refrain from contacting other individuals who are or may be in the workplace (including employees, patrons, vendors, or others) must immediately notify the Business Manager's Office and provide a copy of the order.

Upon being notified of an order of protection, the Business Manager's Office will contact the reporting party to gather information about the individual and assess the situation. MRLS will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality of such orders with the understanding that MRLS will use the information as necessary to maintain safety in the workplace.

Searches and Inspection – All MRLS equipment, property, and facilities (including, but not limited to, desks, workstations, file cabinets, lockers, computers and computer-stored information, email, voicemail, business records, vehicles, or any other property or equipment owned, leased, or provided by MRLS) are subject to inspection at any time and for any reason. No employee shall have any privacy interest or reasonable expectation of privacy whatsoever in any MRLS equipment, property, or facilities. If a search uncovers evidence of employee wrongdoing, illegal activity, or employee violations of MRLS rules or policies, such evidence may be used to support disciplinary action up to and including termination. In cases involving suspected illegal activity, the evidence may be provided to the proper law enforcement authorities. Further, if MRLS reasonably suspects that an employee has violated a policy that directly affects the safety or security of MRLS employees, patrons, or facilities, MRLS will take appropriate actions (such as contacting law enforcement officials, placing the employee on administrative leave while an investigation is conducted, or other actions as deemed appropriate).

A-10. Mandated Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

Individuals who work with organizations that serve children are often the first adults to notice signs of child abuse and neglect. These individuals can protect children who cannot protect themselves by reporting suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.

As an organization that serves children, MRLS is subject to Georgia law governing mandatory reporting of child abuse (O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5), a law which provides for the protection of children whose health and welfare are adversely affected and further threatened by the conduct of those responsible for their care and protection.

Effective July 1, 2012, the law expanded the definition of mandatory reporter to specify a wider range of people required to report child abuse, and these individuals are **legally required** to report any suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect. **All library staff and volunteers are considered mandated reporters, even if their positions do not involve direct contact with children.**

Georgia law requires mandated reporters to contact their county division of family and children services (DFACS) office if they have reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them is suspected of being abused or neglected. Reports must be made immediately upon the formation of reasonable belief that abuse

is or was occurring, and no longer than 24 hours after the fact. Providing the identity of the suspected abuse victim and that of the parent or caretaker to child protective services does not violate Georgia's confidentiality statute regarding library records.

Any MRLS employee or volunteer who encounters a case of suspected child abuse or neglect in the Library should immediately inform a Supervisor so that appropriate action can be taken. In cases of a time-sensitive emergency, 911 should be called. Full confidentiality will be maintained.

It is important to note that because MRLS is considered a child service organization, **ALL employees** and **ALL volunteers** (even minors) are considered mandated reporters under the law, and are required under the law to report any suspected child abuse to the proper authority immediately (within 24 hours).

SECTION B – BUSINESS ETHICS

B-1. Overview

The proper operation of a public organization requires that officials and employees be independent and impartial; that policy and decisions be made through proper channels of the organizational structure; that positions not be used for personal gain; and that the public have confidence in the integrity of the organization. The attainment of one or more of these ends is impaired whenever there is a conflict between an employee's private interests and his or her duties.

Library employees are in a unique category – not only are they employed by the Library and have an obligation to Library management, but, more importantly, they also serve the citizens of the community and have an obligation to the public. Library employees are highly visible to the community, and must adhere to high ethical standards in their work activities and conduct.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general direction and clarification on ethical issues. While it is not possible to outline specific rules to govern each employee's conduct in all aspects of the job, this section of the Manual addresses certain situations that may arise, and provides guidelines to assist employees in carrying out duties in a professional manner.

B-2. Conflicts of Interest

Employees must avoid any situation which involves (or may involve) a conflict between their personal interest and the interest of MRLS. An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when an employee is in a position to influence a decision that may result in personal gain for the employee, a relative, or a friend as a result of the Library's business dealings. (For purposes of this section, a relative is any person who is related by blood, marriage, or legal relationship; or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood, marriage, or legal relationship.) A personal gain may result in cases where an employee, relative, or friend (a) has a significant ownership in a firm with which MRLS does business or (b) receives any kickback, bribe, gift, or special consideration as a result of any transaction or business dealings involving MRLS.

Employees shall make prompt and full disclosure in writing to the Director (or other appropriate MRLS staff) of any association, relationship, business arrangement, or circumstance which may involve a conflict of interest. Such conflicts include (but are not limited to):

1. A significant ownership interest by an employee, a relative, or friend in any outside enterprise which does or seeks to do business with MRLS.
2. Serving as a director, officer, partner, or consultant (whether compensated or not) in any outside enterprise which does or seeks to do business with MRLS.
3. Acting as a broker, finder, go-between, or otherwise for the benefit of a third party in transactions involving (or potentially involving) MRLS or its interests.
4. Any other arrangements or circumstances, including family or other personal relationships, which might dissuade the employee from acting in the best interest of MRLS.

This disclosure requirement is particularly imperative if an employee has any influence on transactions involving purchases, contracts, services, or leases. All purchasing transactions should be conducted in accordance with MRLS's established purchasing policies and procedures.

B-3. Gifts, Gratuities, and Favors

Employees should never solicit, accept, or agree to accept any gifts, loans, gratuities, discounts, favors, hospitality, or services from vendors known to be seeking, bidding on, or otherwise pursuing MRLS business or contracts or from any person, association, or corporation under circumstances from which it could reasonably be inferred that a major purpose of the donor is to influence the performance of the employee's

duties. No employee should ever accept any economic opportunity under circumstances where he or she knows, or should know, that there is a substantial possibility that the opportunity is being afforded the employee with intent to influence the employee's choice of vendor.

Special care must be taken to avoid even the impression of a conflict of interest. Since MRLS employees receive compensation from the Library for the services they provide, monetary gifts should be viewed as a goodwill gesture to the Library and should be turned over to the Library, not kept by the employee performing the service on behalf of the Library. Occasionally a gift other than money (e.g., food or other material gift) may be presented in appreciation of services, and these too should be given to the Library and not to the individual.

Acceptable Gift Situations – In certain situations and with Supervisor approval, an employee may be allowed to retain an unsolicited, work-related gift of nominal value IF it is something that can be shared in an open area with the entire library staff.

Employees Supervisor are expected to use good judgment and make every effort to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest. If there is any doubt as to whether a specific situation is acceptable, the employee should assume it is not and decline the offer.

Disposition of Inappropriate Gifts – If a gift is determined inappropriate for the employee to keep, the gift must be returned to the donor and a written report made to the Library Director. If the gift was offered but not received, the same provision of notifying the Director will apply.

B-4. Civic, Professional, and Political Activities

MRLS employees may engage in civic, professional, and political activities outside working hours as long as such activities do not interfere with performance of their Library duties and do not create a real or apparent conflict of interest.

Civic Activities – MRLS recognizes the benefits of employees participating in civic organizations and community activities. In some cases the Director may authorize community activities on work time for organizations that partner with MRLS (e.g., Board of Education). Any solicitations relating to such organizations must be in compliance with the Library's solicitation policies [Section J-4](#).

Professional Activities – Professional activities may or may not be associated with MRLS employment.

- Professional activities associated with MRLS employment include speaking at meetings, workshops, or conferences (or submitting articles for publication) regarding MRLS activities or practices. Such activities require the Library Director's approval. Assuming advance approval has been obtained, employees may participate in these activities during work time.
- Professional activities not associated with MRLS employment include academic projects and personal interests (e.g., book reviews). Prior approval is not required and all activities should occur during non-working time. However, because MRLS may be mentioned in terms of an individual's credentials or current employer, employees are asked to obtain approval from MRLS before submitting any professional article, news item, or similar work for publication or use by an outside organization.

In all professional activities, it should be clear that the employee is expressing his or her opinion and not that of MRLS, unless specifically authorized by the Library Director. As a matter of professional courtesy, employees participating in professional activities are expected to ensure that their activities reflect positively on MRLS.

Political Activities – Employees are encouraged to exercise their right to vote and, on their own time if they so desire, to take part in political activities on the local, state, and federal levels. However, no employee may engage in political activities at the work place or during working time. No employee may make use of Library time, equipment, or other resources to aid a political candidate, political party, or political cause; nor may any employee use his or her position to persuade, coerce, or intimidate any person in the interest of a political candidate, party, or cause. All MRLS employees should be free of any and all political persuasion or coercion in relationship to their employment, and/or from their Supervisors, fellow employees, and co-workers, and should report any such activity to their Supervisor or the Business Manager's Office if the same should occur.

Nothing in this section shall prevent an employee from fully exercising those rights to participate in political activities granted by the laws of the State of Georgia or the laws of the United States of America.

B-5. Outside Employment or Business Activity

MRLS employees may engage in outside employment or business activity as long as they meet the performance standards of their job with MRLS and as long as the outside job or business activity does not present a conflict of interest situation. Outside employment or business activity is not permitted if it:

- Occurs during hours that the employee is employed to work for MRLS, or outside such hours in a manner or to an extent that affects or is deemed likely to affect the employee's job performance at MRLS.
- Involves use of MRLS equipment, materials, supplies, or property.
- Conflicts with the business interests or other interests of MRLS, would reflect adversely on MRLS, or would raise the appearance of, or potential for, a conflict of interest.
- Results in the employee or the outside employer providing products or services to MRLS.
- Is incompatible with proper discharge of the employee's MRLS duties or would tend to impair the employee's independence of judgment in performing MRLS duties (unless otherwise permitted by law and unless proper disclosure is made).

Outside employment or business activity will not be considered an excuse for poor job performance, absenteeism, tardiness, leaving early, or refusal to work different hours. The employee will be expected to resign from one of the positions if MRLS determines that (1) an employee's outside work activity interferes with the employee's performance or the employee's ability to meet the requirements of MRLS as they are modified from time to time, or (2) presents a conflict of interest situation. If the employee does not resign from a position in order to rectify the conflict, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action ranging from reprimand up to and including termination.

B-6. Workplace Relationships – Family and Romantic

The Library seeks to avoid any suggestion of favoritism, discrimination, or conflict of interest in making decisions to hire, promote, and transfer staff. Because of the actual or perceived problems inherent in employing individuals with close family or other relationships, family and other connections will be considered when making employment-related decisions. This policy focuses on family and romantic relationships, but may be extended to other types of relationships that lead to personal conflicts that affect the work environment.

1. Family Relationships – Preferential treatment of applicants or employees who are related to current employees is not allowed. Likewise, discriminatory or retaliatory treatment of employees who are related to other employees is not allowed.

For purposes of this policy, a "relative" is defined as a spouse, domestic partner, child, parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, first cousin, niece, or nephew (including any "step," "foster," "half," "grand," "in-law," or legal relationship). MRLS will give case-by-case consideration to situations where a relationship exists but the individuals do not meet the above definition of "relative."

The Library allows the concurrent employment of relatives. However, in order to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest, the following exclusions apply:

- Relatives may not be concurrently employed if either individual is employed in a Supervisor role in which they may have a direct effect on the other individual's progress, performance, promotion, or training. This typically means that relatives may not be in the same chain of command.
- Relatives may not work in the same building.
- An employee may not be promoted or transferred into a position in which the employee would have Supervisor responsibility over a relative (or be supervised by a relative) unless the relative can be transferred to another position that would not present a conflict under this policy.
- The Library will not hire relatives of persons who may have influence in Library funding or employment issues and/or access to confidential employment information (such as current Mountain Regional

Commissioners, Library Board of Trustees, Director, Directors, Human Resources staff, or Finance staff.

In order to avoid conflicts of interest in the volunteer program, individuals will not be assigned to volunteer positions that would result in their being in the same chain of command or same building as an employed relative. However, related volunteers may be assigned to the same location (e.g., siblings, spouses). Consideration of any of these circumstances will be given on a case-by-case basis.

If MRLS employees come to be in violation of this policy (such as through marriage), one or the other must accept a job reassignment (if available) or must elect to resign. Otherwise, MRLS will initiate appropriate action, based on the best interest of the Library and without regard to gender or other discriminatory characteristics.

This policy does not apply to relatives who are already employed by MRLS as of the effective date of this policy. This waiver, however, may not be used as a basis for further exceptions subsequent to the effective date of this policy.

The Library Director may authorize an exception to this policy if the position requires specialized training/experience not generally available, there is a vital need to fill the position, substantial efforts have been made to recruit a person who is not a relative, and the relationship is unlikely to materially affect the individuals' employment.

2. Romantic Relationships – Off-duty conduct is generally regarded as private as long as it does not create problems within the workplace. However, a romantic relationship between a Supervisor and a subordinate employee (an employee the Supervisor directly or indirectly supervises) is considered a conflict of interest and is prohibited, as it may lead to claims of favoritism or bias in work assignments, evaluations, or discipline, and may ultimately result in claims of sexual harassment.

For purposes of this policy, “romantic relationship” is defined as a relationship that involves dating, intimacy, and/or sexual contact. MRLS recognizes the ambiguity of this terminology, but expects its employees to appreciate the meaning of the term as it applies to them and to act in a manner consistent with this policy.

If a romantic relationship between a Supervisor and a subordinate employee should develop, it shall be the responsibility of the Supervisor to promptly disclose the existence of the relationship to the Business Manager's Office. The subordinate may make the disclosure as well, but the burden of doing so shall be upon the Supervisor. Circumstances when a Supervisor employee is required to report a relationship with another employee include:

- When there is a Supervisor/subordinate relationship, through any line of authority;
- When one employee is in position to interview, influence, or make decisions regarding the other employee.

Upon learning of the existence of such a relationship, MRLS will evaluate whether any conflict of interest exists and take any appropriate steps to resolve the conflict. At a minimum, measures will include ensuring the parties involved no longer work together on matters where one could influence the other. In some cases a position or location reassignment (if available) might be appropriate, in which case one employee or the other must accept the proposed reassignment or must elect to resign.

Any employee who believes that he or she has been adversely affected by a family or romantic relationship with another employee is encouraged to contact the Business Manager's Office.

B-7. Reporting Fraud or Waste

It is the policy of MRLS to comply fully with all laws and conduct business in an honest and ethical manner. The Library is committed to maintaining a workplace where employees are free to raise good faith concerns regarding improper activity or behavior that directly or indirectly involves the Library.

To help combat fraud and waste, the State of Georgia provides a mechanism for investigating and correcting financial mismanagement. O.C.G.A. § 45-1-4 authorizes public employers such as MRLS to receive and investigate complaints or information received from employees concerning the possible existence of fraud, waste, and abuse involving MRLS operations. Examples of fraudulent activities may include violations of laws or policies; fraudulent financial reporting; gross waste of public funds or resources; misuse of Library property, resources, or authority; or other wrongful conduct.

Each MRLS employee has a responsibility to report improper activities under this policy to his or her immediate Supervisor, Director, or the Business Manager. Protections are provided in two important areas – confidentiality and retaliation.

- After receiving such a complaint, MRLS will not disclose the identity of the employee without the employee's written consent, unless such disclosure is necessary and unavoidable during the course of the investigation. In such event, the employee will be notified in writing at least seven days prior to such disclosure.
- MRLS will not retaliate against an employee who makes a complaint of fraud or waste, or who refuses to participate in a practice that the employee believes to be a fraudulent activity. This includes protection from retaliation in the form of discharge, suspension, demotion, or any other adverse employment action.

Employees must exercise sound judgment to avoid baseless allegations. An employee who intentionally files a false report of wrongdoing will be subject to discipline up to and including termination.

All reports of illegal and dishonest activities will be promptly submitted to the Director, who is responsible for investigating and coordinating corrective action.

B-8. Cooperation in Internal Investigations

All MRLS employees are expected to cooperate to the fullest extent possible in any internal investigation conducted by MRLS. Employees are also expected to provide truthful and accurate information, and to refrain from discussing the matter with any person outside the investigation process. Failure to cooperate with an investigation may be considered grounds for disciplinary action.

MRLS will not tolerate any form of retaliation against individuals who cooperate in MRLS investigations. Any complaints about retaliation should be reported to the immediate Supervisor, the applicable Director, the Business Manager, or the Director for Support Services. An employee found by the Library to have retaliated against another employee will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, ranging from a written reprimand up to and including termination.

B-9. Confidential Information

MRLS endeavors to comply with all laws that govern protection of information as well as lawful disclosure of information. During the course of employment, employees often learn or have access to restricted or confidential information regarding patrons, staff, or MRLS business operations. Employees must take extreme care in how they handle information learned in the course of their jobs, and should not discuss such information with any unauthorized person, either inside or outside the workplace, except as allowed by law. No employee may use, provide, or disclose any confidential information acquired through their employment with MRLS for private gain or for the private gain of any other persons or groups.

Employees must take extra precautions when handling, transmitting, or storing confidential or personal information. Such information should only be shared with individuals who have a legitimate need to know. When it is necessary to electronically transmit information, employees should take extra steps such as password-protecting documents or confirming accuracy of phone numbers or email addresses. Documentation that is no longer needed should be shredded (unless retention is required by retention guidelines).

Patron Information – All library records which identify patrons by name or description are strictly confidential. Such records are accessible only to appropriate library staff members, and, pursuant to Georgia law (O.C.G.A. § 24-12-30), may only be disclosed as follows:

- Information may be discussed by members of the library staff in the ordinary course of business;
- Patron information may only be discussed with others upon written consent of the user of the library materials or the user's parents or guardians if the user is a minor or ward; or
- Upon appropriate court order or subpoena as determined by the Library Director.
- The MRLS employee acknowledges that they have an obligation to the Georgia PINES Project:
- The MRLS employee shall not violate the privacy and confidentiality of information entrusted to them or to which they may gain access, including a patron's private information or reading records. A patron's personal information, history, or records will not be provided to anyone without legal authorization. Further, The MRLS employee agrees to take appropriate action in regard to any illegal or unethical practices that come to his/her attention.
- The MRLS employee shall not use knowledge of a confidential nature to further their personal interests or for personal gain.
- The MRLS employee will have an obligation to the PINES Project to use equipment and software only for the purposes intended.
- The MRLS employee shall keep their personal skills and knowledge up-to-date and insure that proper expertise is available to the public as needed.
- The MRLS employee shall accept full responsibility for the work they perform.
- The MRLS employee shall cooperate with other PINES members, treating them with honesty and respect.
- The MRLS employee will avoid conflict of interest and insure that the appropriate PINES management is aware of any potential conflicts.
- The MRLS employee will not exploit the weakness of a computer system for personal gain or personal satisfaction.

In addition, patron information may be disclosed to the county division of family and children services (DFACS) office to report suspected child abuse or child neglect, as required under Georgia law governing mandatory reporting of child abuse (O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5).

This policy applies to all library records or knowledge held by library staff members, including, but not limited to, the circulation of library materials, computer database searches, interlibrary loan transactions, information requests, requests for photocopies of library materials, title reserve requests, or any in-house use of library materials.

Employee Information – Employees should not use, provide, or disclose information about other employees, and should direct any request for employee information (including employment verification or references) to the Business Manager's Office. All employees are expected to respect and maintain confidentiality of employee medical information, and to take reasonable precautions to protect such information from inappropriate disclosure.

B-10. Public/Open Records

As a public agency, MRLS is subject to the Georgia Open Records Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70 et seq.). Certain information maintained by MRLS may be considered public information subject to inspection under the Georgia Open Records Act. Under the Act, a "public record" includes all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, computer based or generated information (including email and other electronically stored or disseminated information), or similar material prepared and maintained or received in the course of the operation of a public office or agency. A "public record" also may include items received or maintained by a private person or entity on behalf of a public office or agency where the records are received or maintained by a private person, firm, corporation or other private entity in the performance of a service or function for or on behalf of a public agency.

Any subpoenas or legal requests for information under the Georgia Open Records Act should be submitted or forwarded to the Library Director.

SECTION C – DRUG- AND ALCOHOL-FREE WORKPLACE

C-1. Statement of Policy

MRLS is committed to maintaining a work environment free from the adverse impact of employee drug and alcohol abuse. Employee drug and alcohol abuse constitutes a direct threat to the lives and property of the employees and patrons of MRLS and to the public health, safety, and welfare of all persons.

MRLS does not and will not tolerate any employee's possession, sale, distribution, consumption, or presence in the body of alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs while on MRLS property and/or on MRLS business at any time.

This section of the Manual is intended to comply with federal regulations and state laws that mandate pre-employment, reasonable suspicion, random, and post-accident testing of certain positions of employment, and to further the objective of protecting the persons and property of MRLS's employees, patrons, and the general public. This section will be strictly enforced. To the extent that this section and any results from a fitness for duty test conflict, the most strenuous provision favoring a drug- and alcohol-free workplace shall govern.

C-2. Scope of Policy and Prohibitions

This section applies to all employees, volunteers, interns, and any other individuals performing services on the Library's behalf, whether paid or unpaid. For purposes of this policy section, all such persons shall be referred to herein as MRLS employees. This section applies to off-site meal breaks when an employee is scheduled to return to work, as well as to MRLS premises as discussed below. Visitors, vendors, and contractors are governed by this section to the extent that they are on MRLS premises or in MRLS vehicles and will not be permitted to conduct business if found to be in violation of this section.

C-3. Drug and Alcohol Use Prohibited on MRLS premises

Substance and alcohol use by MRLS employees during assigned working hours on MRLS premises or otherwise while on MRLS business is prohibited. This shall include the use of illegal substances, the abuse of prescription medications and over-the-counter medications, and the use of or abuse of alcohol.

As used herein, "MRLS premises" includes all property, facilities, land, platforms, buildings, structures, fixtures, installations, parking lots, and vehicles, whether leased or used by MRLS or its officials, managers, Supervisors, employees, or other agents. This definition also includes locations other than MRLS administrative offices and library branches, including all other locations of MRLS-sponsored recreational, social, or educational events, and any place where an MRLS employee is located while traveling to or from such location in the course and scope of his/her duties on behalf of MRLS, including an employee's own vehicle when the employee is using it on MRLS business or when the vehicle is parked on MRLS property. This definition shall not be interpreted to imply that MRLS assumes or accepts responsibility for any wrongful, tortious, negligent, or criminal acts of any person whom it employs when such person is not acting pursuant to an MRLS supervisor's instruction in furtherance of MRLS's business, nor shall it constitute a waiver of any immunity which MRLS or its officials or employees might have under federal, state, or local laws or ordinances.

C-4. Impairment

Drug and alcohol abuse on or off MRLS premises is entirely inconsistent with fitness for duty and as such shall constitute an impairment. MRLS prohibits employees from being at work, on MRLS premises, operating MRLS equipment, or operating any other equipment or vehicles on MRLS business while impaired due to any illegal drug(s), legally obtained drug(s), or alcohol.

C-5. Prohibited Substances

This section describes prohibited substances under MRLS's Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy.

1. Illegal Drugs or controlled substances – “Illegal drug(s) or controlled substance(s)” means any drug or substances the law prohibits individuals from manufacturing, dispensing, using, consuming, possessing, distributing, purchasing, selling, or otherwise transferring, including, without limitation, all drugs listed as controlled substances under Title 16 of the Official Code of Georgia. This definition encompasses any measurable amount of any drugs or controlled substances such as amphetamines, cannabinoids, cocaine, phencyclidine (PCP), methadone, methaqualone, opiates, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, propoxyphene, or other drugs made unlawful under federal or state laws, or a metabolite of any such substances, “look-alikes,” “designer drugs” having the same or similar psychotropic effects, unauthorized alcoholic beverages, marijuana, hallucinogens (whether natural or synthetic), inhalants, unauthorized prescription drugs, or authorized drugs which are not prescribed for a verifiable medical condition and/or are not used in strict accordance with this section and with the prescribing physician's instructions, or any other substances that are mood-altering, mind or consciousness-affecting, or which are likely to have an effect upon a person's perceptions, sensations, thought processes, self-awareness, emotions, or other mental or physiological or psychological reactions or behavior.

MRLS prohibits employees from manufacturing, dispensing, using, consuming, possessing, distributing, purchasing, selling, or otherwise transferring any illegal drug(s) or controlled substance(s) while on the job, on call, on MRLS premises, while operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or while operating any other equipment or vehicle while on MRLS business.

2. Legally Obtained Drugs – A “legally obtained drug” includes prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs. A “prescription drug” means any substance that is attainable only by lawful prescription from a physician. “Over-the-counter” medication includes any substance that does not require a prescription, but which has the capacity to affect a person physically, mentally, or emotionally, or which could otherwise affect a person's ability to perform.

Employees must not be on the job, on MRLS premises, operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or operating any other equipment or vehicle while on MRLS business while impaired due to any drug, legal or illegal, that renders the employee unfit for duty. An employee is “unfit for duty” if, in MRLS's opinion, the employee's use of legally obtained drugs jeopardizes his or her ability to work safely and efficiently. An employee who is using legally obtained drugs must notify his or her immediate Supervisor of any and all symptoms and probable adverse side effects that may render him or her unfit for duty. An employee's failure to so notify MRLS constitutes grounds for disciplinary action. If any employee's medically required use of legally obtained drugs renders the employee unfit for duty and, in the opinion of MRLS, a temporary alternative job assignment is not available, the employee will be considered unfit for duty.

Employees using legally obtained drugs while on the job shall do so in strict accordance with physician and/or manufacturer's directions. It is the employee's responsibility to notify the prescribing physician of the duties required by the employee's position and to ensure that the physician approves the use of the prescription medication while the employee is performing his or her duties.

The abuse and/or inappropriate use of legally obtained drugs while on the job, on MRLS premises, while operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or while operating any other equipment or vehicle while on MRLS business shall be prohibited and is a disciplinary matter. Job performance or attendance deficiencies resulting from abuse and/or inappropriate use shall be cause for disciplinary action.

3. Alcohol – “Alcohol” includes any beverage or substance containing alcohol manufactured for the primary purpose of personal consumption. MRLS prohibits employees from using, consuming, possessing, distributing, purchasing, selling, or otherwise transferring alcoholic beverages on the job, on MRLS premises, while operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or while operating any other equipment or vehicles while on MRLS business.

No employee shall use alcohol while on the job, on MRLS premises, while operating MRLS equipment or vehicle, or while operating any other equipment or vehicle while on MRLS business. In addition, no employee shall use alcohol within four hours of reporting for duty. Violation of these provisions is prohibited and subjects the employee to discipline, up to and including termination.

MRLS also prohibits employees from being on the job, on MRLS premises, or operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or operating any other equipment or vehicles on MRLS business while under the influence of alcohol. An employee is “under the influence of alcohol” if, based upon the employees’ speech, statements, behavior, conduct, appearance, or odor, MRLS reasonably believes the employee is under the influence of alcohol in a manner that is adversely affecting the employee’s behavior. An employee is also under the influence if an evidential breath test indicates a result of 0.04 percent or higher. An employee is further considered under the influence of alcohol if he/she has been arrested for operating under the influence of alcohol any MRLS equipment, or vehicles, or any other equipment or vehicles while on MRLS business.

C-6. Arrests/Indictments/Convictions for Drug or Alcohol Related Offenses

An employee must report his/her arrest, indictment and/or conviction for violation of a criminal drug statute (including any drug or alcohol offenses under local, state, or federal law, including but not limited to any drug or alcohol offenses enumerated in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated) whether the violation occurs in or outside the workplace or on or off duty, to his/her immediate Supervisor, Director, or the Business Manager’s Office. An employee must report such an arrest, indictment, or conviction as soon as possible, but in no event later than 72 hours after such arrest, indictment, and/or conviction.

C-7. Searches

All MRLS-issued equipment, property, and facilities, including but not limited to, desks, lockers, and vehicles (collectively “MRLS property”), are subject to inspection at any time and for any reason. No employee shall have any privacy interest whatsoever in any MRLS-issued property. No personal property may be searched unless the owner of the property has consented or a search is otherwise legally permissible. If an individual is asked to submit to a search, and refuses, that individual will be considered insubordinate and will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

If a search uncovers evidence of employee wrongdoing, illegal activity, or employee violations of MRLS rules or policies, the evidence may be used to support disciplinary actions up to, and including, termination. In cases involving suspected illegal activities, the evidence may be turned over to the proper legal authorities.

C-8. Confidentiality

All reports of test results for drug and alcohol, searches, or any employee referral to, or participation in, an assistance program or treatment program for addictive disorders, will be maintained in strict confidence. Any person authorized to have access to such confidential information, who, without authorization, discloses it to another person shall have engaged in gross misconduct and be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. The confidentiality of such information shall not apply to any use by or communication to MRLS attorneys, or where the information is relevant to MRLS’s defense in an administrative or civil action. Such information may also be disclosed to the extent required by any federal, state, or local law, statute, ordinance, or regulation.

C-9. Discipline

Following is the status of disciplinary action associated with violations of MRLS’s Drug- And Alcohol-Free Workplace Policy.

1. Immediate Suspension – An employee who tests positive for drugs or alcohol shall immediately be relieved from duty, placed on suspension without pay, and sent home pending disciplinary action. If the positive test is explained or negated by the MRO and/or subsequent confirmation testing, the employee shall be reinstated with back pay and the suspension without pay will be expunged from the employee’s personnel file.
2. Disciplinary Action – An employee who violates any provision of this section is subject to discipline, up to

and including termination. If terminated, the employee will not be eligible for rehire.

3. Immediate Termination – The following reasons shall be presumed to result in immediate termination of an employee:
 - a. Manufacturing, dispensing, using, consuming, possessing, distributing, purchasing, or selling, or otherwise transferring an illegal drug(s) or controlled substance(s) while on the job, on MRLS premises, while operating MRLS equipment or vehicles, or while operating any other equipment or vehicles on MRLS business.
 - b. Operating MRLS motorized equipment while unfit for duty due to the use of drugs and/or alcohol.
 - c. Conviction for violation of any drug law.
 - d. A confirmed positive test for drugs or alcohol.

C-10. Treatment

Employees who have a problem with drugs and/or alcohol are urged to seek help before the problem adversely affects their health, relationships, or work performance, or before it results in a violation of this policy.

SECTION D – HIRING AND CLASSIFICATION

D-1. Job Openings

In general, notices of job openings will be posted on our new website under the “Job Opportunities” link under the “ABOUT US” portion of the menu. MRLS reserves its discretionary right to not post a particular opening, as described in [Section D-4](#). Job postings will typically include job title, job overview, essential duties, qualifications, physical demands, and procedure to apply for the position.

As stated in MRLS’s Equal Employment Opportunity policy ([Section A-3](#)), MRLS will provide equal employment opportunity to qualified persons without regard to race; color; religion; gender; national origin; age; disability; genetic information; uniformed service status; pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or any other legally protected category. All employment decisions by MRLS will be based on merit, qualifications, and abilities, and will be made in a fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory manner. In addition, MRLS will not discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant on the basis of a physical or mental disability, and will strive to provide reasonable accommodations to assist disabled individuals to perform essential job functions, provided that the accommodation does not cause MRLS undue hardship. Any employee or applicant who has questions regarding MRLS’s equal employment opportunity policies should contact the Business Manager’s Office.

D-2. Employment Applications

MRLS does not accept unsolicited applications for employment, and will only accept an application in response to a current job opening. Applications must be submitted through MRLS’s Business Manager’s ~~Supervisor’s~~ office in accordance with the instructions on the job posting, and must be received by the deadline announced on the job opening. (Applications postmarked by the deadline will be accepted if received within one week of the deadline.)

Applications for employment must be made by completing a cover letter, resume, and standard MRLS employment application form, and the application must include detailed information as requested on the form regarding education, training, skills, employment experience, and other information as requested to assess the applicant’s ability to meet the minimum requirements for the position. Applications must be signed by the applicant, attesting to the truth of statements contained on the form. Any untruths, misrepresentations, or material omissions made by an applicant on an application will be grounds for rejection of the application, or if the applicant has been hired prior to MRLS learning of the discrepancy, it will be grounds for discipline, up to and including termination. In addition, any applicant found to have submitted an application containing untruths, misrepresentations, or material omissions may be disqualified from any future consideration of employment with MRLS. You must specify on the cover letter which job you are applying.

Staff Eligibility – Current MRLS employees are eligible to apply for posted MRLS positions (subject to the guidelines below). Employees, like outside applicants, must meet the minimum qualifications advertised for the position. MRLS will consider staff applications for positions that would represent a promotion, transfer, or demotion according to the following guidelines:

- Employees must have an overall satisfactory performance record in their current position to be considered for a transfer or promotion. Employees with a less than satisfactory rating in only one performance factor may be considered if the unsatisfactory rating is in an area that would not apply to the posted position.
- Employees may apply for a position in another department after completing six months of service in their current position. (For example, a Collection Support Aide could apply for an opening in the Materials department after six months of service as a Collection Support Aide.) MRLS reserves the right to grant individual exceptions due to special circumstances or operational needs of the Library.
- Employees may apply for a position involving transfer or promotion within the same department at any time there is an opening. (For example, an Information Specialist could apply to move from part-time to full-time capacity or a Collection Support Aide could apply for promotion within the Public Services Department at any time there is an opening, regardless of length of service in his or her current position.) For Public Services, sub-departments (e.g., Information, Youth Services) are considered part of a single, larger department.

- Applicants must meet the minimum qualifications as outlined in the job posting, and must follow the designated procedure to apply for an opening (including any skills testing and interviewing).
- Employees who move to a different position, even within the same department, will be subject to a new introductory period.

D-3. Screening and Selection

Applicants for positions with MRLS will be subject to a variety of screening activities associated with the hiring process. In addition to completion of MRLS's employment application form, processes such as job skills testing, interviews, references, driving history reports, or other methods may be utilized to assist in determining an applicant's qualifications for the position.

Background Checks – To promote a safe work environment for patrons and staff, criminal background checks will be required of all potential employees. In addition, positions that involve operation of a motor vehicle (either a personal vehicle or library vehicle) in the course of the job will require driving history checks. All employment offers are contingent upon successfully passing the appropriate background checks, as well as any applicable physical examination or drug testing. (Screening requirements for current employees who apply for different positions are the same as those for external applicants.) No candidate will be authorized to begin employment until the Business Manager's Office receives notification that the candidate has successfully passed these screening activities. The Library complies with all requirements of the Fair Credit Reporting Act, which governs use of information contained in consumer reports, and will maintain confidentiality of information.

D-4. Non-Competitive Appointments

Although competitive appointments as described above will be the normal practice of MRLS, non-competitive appointments may be made in certain instances. Examples of such situations include:

- Job accommodation or other legal reasons (such as accommodating a disability, or assigning an employee to a lighter duty position);
- Accommodation of an employee's request for a voluntary transfer or demotion;
- Departmental reorganization;
- Position reassignment for operational or administrative reasons (such as transferring an employee when the workload has shifted or hours are reallocated);
- Position reclassification, or to recognize higher or lower level of performance in the job (such as promotion from "assistant" level to "specialist" level);
- Increasing hours of existing staff (such as changing an employee from part-time to full-time);
- Reinstatement or rehire of an employee to a previously-held position (if vacant);
- Filling a temporary or emergency need, or to handle a specific project;
- "Temp-to-perm" assignment (such as when an individual has been performing the job on a temporary basis, and the need becomes long-term); or
- When the candidate possesses objectively outstanding or unusual abilities, experience, and/or training that uniquely qualifies the individual for the position.

In consideration of the above, MRLS shall make a determination of the appropriateness of a non-competitive appointment.

D-5. Disclosure of Convictions

Applicants for employment at MRLS must disclose any criminal records on their employment application. Existence of a criminal record does not automatically preclude employment; rather, a determination will be made based on the nature and gravity of the offense for which the applicant was convicted, the time that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence, and the nature of the position sought and relevance of the conviction to the position. An offer may be withdrawn as a result of these considerations.

Current Employees – Current employees, within ten (10) days of receipt of this Policy Manual, and thereafter within five (5) days of any future conviction subject to this section, shall have an affirmative duty to immediately, fully, and accurately report to the Business Manager's Office the following criminal conviction(s) that they have received, if any:

- All felonies;
- All crimes and offenses involving children;
- All crimes and offenses requiring the employee's registration as a sex offender;
- All crimes of moral turpitude;
- Any misdemeanor offense involving violence or theft; and
- Any conviction for violation of a law prohibiting the use, abuse, consumption, possession, manufacture, sale, purchase, transfer, dispensing, and/or distribution of illegal drugs as defined by [Section C-5](#) of this policy manual.

D-6. Assigned Work Location

Working Off-Site or From Home – In most cases, employees will regularly report to their current assigned work location. On occasion, an employee may be temporarily assigned to work at a different location for a few days (such as to assist with a library program, to attend a staff training event, or for staffing reasons). All off-site work must be coordinated closely with the Supervisor to ensure proper time reporting. In order to maintain compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), non-exempt (hourly) employees are not allowed to work from home.

Exempt employees may occasionally work from an off-site location or from home for situations where it would benefit both MRLS and the employee, provided the work can be effectively and productively performed in the off-site environment, and provided the Supervisor has given approval and is kept informed as to the employee's status.

In each case where an employee is working from home, the supervisor for that employee may require some means to prove that the work at home was actually done or completed. The manner in which this is done is up to the discretion of the supervisor and could change from project to project.

D-7. Pay

Pay Increases – Pay increases are not automatic, and depend on a variety of factors. Any type of pay increase will be dependent on funding, and the method of calculating increases may vary based on the available funding. Increases will be based on an employee's job performance. In order to qualify for a merit increase, employees must have all "satisfactory" or above ratings on their performance evaluations.

Cola increases are typically effective in early January. (Timing may vary due to the County's budget calendar and implementation schedule.)

Pay Reductions – A pay reduction may occur in the event of a demotion. Pay reductions due to a demotion will correspond with the pay range of the assigned position, and no employee's pay will be reduced to a point below the minimum of the pay range for that position. When an employee is demoted to a lower pay grade, the employee's salary will typically decrease by the dollar difference between the minimum salary of the old pay grade and the minimum salary of the new pay grade. Staff-wide pay reductions may occur if the Library receives significant funding reductions. In this situation, employees already at the minimum of their pay grades may temporarily be paid below the minimum of the pay scales for their positions.

Total Compensation – Pay (i.e., salary) is one part of the compensation program. Compensation is comprised of both pay and the benefits described in [Section H](#).

D-8. Job Descriptions

Job descriptions are intended to indicate the general kinds of duties, responsibilities, and job requirements normally associated with the position, but are not intended to be exhaustive. Employees may be assigned

other duties not included in the descriptions, and may also be required to work across departmental lines. MRLS reserves the right to alter any job description, with or without notice to the employee. The job description is not a contract of employment and does not alter the employment relationship. Every job description is subject to modification to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities.

D-9. Employment Categories

When hired, each employee will be assigned an FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) Status and a Position Status. A status may change if the employee's position changes (such as increasing or decreasing hours, or changing the position's level of responsibility).

1. **FLSA Status** – Each position is designated as either **non-exempt** or **exempt** from federal and state wage and hour laws, as described below. These designations are determined based upon the position's responsibilities and according to guidelines of the FLSA. It is the expressed intent of MRLS to pay non-exempt employees for all hours actually worked, to pay overtime for hours worked over forty per week, and to strictly comply with all requirements of the FLSA.
 - **Non-Exempt Employee** – A non-exempt employee is an employee in a position that is covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act. Non-exempt employees are subject to wage and hour laws, and receive hourly wages. Non-exempt employees are required to account for hours and fractional hours worked to ensure payment in accordance with wage and hour laws, and must be paid overtime compensation (or compensatory time, as discussed in [Section G-6](#)) if they work more than 40 hours in a week.
 - **Exempt Employee** – An exempt employee is an employee in a position that is exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act. Exempt employees typically perform a job involving a higher level of responsibility, independence, expertise, or decision-making authority. Exempt employees are excluded from specific provisions of federal and state wage and hour laws, and are not required to be paid overtime compensation. Exempt employees are typically expected to work whatever hours are necessary to meet the responsibilities assigned to the position, and thus have more flexibility in their schedules to accomplish work than do non-exempt employees.
2. **Position Status** – In addition to the above FLSA categories, a position status will be assigned to each employee, as described below:
 - **Full-Time Employee** – A full-time employee is one who is regularly scheduled to work 40 hours per week or who is an exempt employee, and who is eligible for all Library benefits, including health insurance (subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit plan).
 - **Part-Time 30-39.5 Hour Employee** – A ~~part-time~~ 30-39.5 hour employee is one who is regularly scheduled to work 30-39.5 hours per week and is eligible for all Library benefits, including health insurance (subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit plan).
 - **Part-Time 20-29.5 Hour Employee** – A ~~part-time~~ 20-29.5 hour employee is one who is regularly scheduled to work 20-29.5 hours per week and is eligible for most Library benefits *except* for health insurance (subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit plan).
 - **Part-Time Employee** – A employee is one who is regularly scheduled to work fewer than 20 hours per week, and who is not eligible for most Library benefits.

Assignment to any FLSA status or position status does not change or alter the at-will employer-employee relationship. At no time before or after assignment to any FLSA status or position status shall the employee have, obtain, or acquire any right, claim, or entitlement to continued employment. An employee may be discharged at any time, and for any reason, with or without notice.

SECTION E – PERSONNEL ACTIONS

E-1. Hiring Actions

Personnel actions relating to hiring may include initial hires, rehires, or reinstatements.

1. Initial Hire – An Initial Hire occurs upon employment of an individual who has not been previously employed by MRLS. An initial hire may consist of employment in a full-time position, or a part-time position, or a temporary position. Most employees will be required to serve an initial training period, as discussed in [Section E-2](#).
2. Rehire – A Rehire occurs upon re-employment of an individual who was previously employed by MRLS. A rehired employee will be required to serve an initial training period if rehired for a different position than previously held. Employees who were dismissed from MRLS, or who failed to resign with appropriate notice, are not generally eligible to be rehired.

In terms of benefits, a rehired employee will generally be required to meet the same eligibility requirements as a newly hired employee, but may receive credit for prior years of service. This may vary, however, depending on the guidelines of each benefit program.

- **Teachers Retirement System (TRS)** – Generally, if a rehired employee had service credit with Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and did not withdraw any funds, the employee may retain the previous service credit. In all cases, an individual's participation status is determined by TRS.
- **Annual Leave** – A rehired employee is subject to the same eligibility requirements as a new employee, and will begin accruing annual leave from a zero balance. For purposes of calculating annual leave accrual rates, the employee will receive credit for prior years of service.

The Director, with board approval, will have the discretion of granting exceptions to rehire policies if exceptional circumstances so warrant (within the provisions of any applicable law or benefit program), and will consider such instances on a case-by-case basis.

E-2. Initial Training Period

Upon initial employment, rehire, promotion, or transfer to a new position, employees will be required to serve an initial training period. This introductory period allows for training and monitoring of the new employee, and provides an opportunity for both the employee and the employer to determine whether the position is a good fit. Periodic evaluations of the employee's performance will be conducted during the initial training period, and employees are expected to have satisfactory performance in all factors on the performance evaluation by the end of the training period. Upon successful completion of the training period, the employee's status changes from introductory status to regular status.

1. Initial Employment – Newly hired employees will serve an initial training period of six months with a performance review at three months and must achieve satisfactory performance in the position. Failure to achieve a satisfactory level of performance by the end of the initial training period may result in termination of employment.
2. Rehires – Rehired employees will serve an initial training period of six months with a performance review at three months if rehired for a different position than previously held. If a rehired employee is rehired for the same position held when previously employed, the length of the initial training period will be determined based on factors such as length of time since last employed, length of time the position was held, and level of performance when last employed.
3. Promotions or Transfers – Existing employees who are promoted or transferred to a position with a different job description will serve an initial training period of six months with a performance review at three months and must achieve satisfactory performance in the position. Transfers involve changing to a different position that has the same pay grade. Promotions involve changing to a different position that has a higher pay grade. If a promoted or transferred employee fails to attain a satisfactory performance evaluation at the end of the training period, the employee may return to the previous position if it is still available, or may

be transferred or demoted to a different position if one is available and if the employee is qualified; if such opportunities are not available, employment will be terminated.

Completion of the initial training period does not change or alter the at-will employer-employee relationship. At no time during or after completion of the initial training period shall the employee have, obtain, or acquire any right, claim, or entitlement to continued employment. An employee may be discharged at any time, and for any reason, with or without notice. MRLS reserves the right to grant an extension of a training period when the situation so warrants (e.g., insufficient time for Supervisor to observe performance or employee has not been trained on part of the job).

E-3. Position Changes (Transfers, Promotions, Demotions)

Personnel actions relating to position changes may include transfers, promotions, or demotions, or an occasional interim or special assignment.

1. **Transfers** – A transfer is the movement of an employee from one position to another position that has the same pay grade, the same pay range, and a similar level of responsibility. A transfer may involve moving from one position to the same position but at a different location (e.g., changing branch locations), or from one position to the same position but at a different number of hours (e.g., from 40 hours to 20 hours), or from one position to a different position with the same pay grade (e.g., from one department to another, but at the same pay grade). Transfers may be requested by an employee or initiated by MRLS. The employee must meet the minimum qualifications of training and experience for the position.

If an open position is posted, an employee may request a transfer by following the procedure to apply for the opening and proceed through the recruitment process (subject to meeting Staff Eligibility guidelines discussed in [Section D-2](#)). Each employee applying for the open position will be considered along with all other applicants, and the best qualified applicant will be selected.

When an employee transfers to another position, the employee's pay rate remains the same (although overall compensation could change if the new position involves an increase or decrease in hours worked).

MRLS may initiate a transfer outside of the recruitment process for administrative purposes (e.g., department reorganization, reallocation of hours, disability accommodation, etc.). MRLS reserves the right to change the assigned branch or work location of any position or any employee as necessary to meet the operational needs of the library system.

2. **Promotions** – A promotion is the movement of an employee from one position to another position that has a higher pay grade and a higher pay range. The employee must meet the minimum qualifications of training and experience for the higher position.

If an open position is posted, an employee in a lower-level position may apply for a promotion by following the procedure to apply for the opening and proceed through the recruitment process (subject to meeting Staff Eligibility guidelines discussed in [Section D-2](#)). Each employee applying for the open position will be considered along with all other applicants, and the best qualified applicant will be selected. The promoted employee will be required to serve an initial training period if the new position involves a new job description.

3. **Demotions** – A demotion is the movement of an employee from one position to another position that has a lower pay grade and a lower pay range. The employee must meet the minimum qualifications of training and experience for the position to which the employee is being demoted. A demotion can involve one of the following types:
 - **Voluntary Demotion**, which results from a request by an employee or is agreed to by an employee. The employee's request or agreement must be in writing.
 - **Administrative Demotion**, which results from a reorganization, reduction in force, or disability accommodation.
 - **Performance Demotion**, which results from a performance or disciplinary issue, and would occur due to one of the following situations:

- An employee who has been transferred or promoted to a position but does not satisfactorily complete the initial training period. (A new employee who does not satisfactorily complete the initial training period would normally be terminated, not demoted.)
- The performance of a regular status employee has become unsatisfactory.

A demoted employee will be required to serve an initial training period if the new position involves different responsibilities (as discussed in [Section E-2](#)), unless the employee has previously completed a training period for that position. A regular employee will be notified of the right to appeal, as provided in this Manual.

4. **Interim or Special Assignments** – On occasion it may be necessary for MRLS to temporarily assign an employee to a different position or different level of responsibility to fill a short-term need. Interim or special assignments (and temporary adjustments in pay) may be warranted when additional responsibilities are assigned on an interim or temporary basis (e.g., while a position is vacant, while an employee is absent for an extended period, to meet an unexpected staffing need, or to handle extra duties outside the normal scope of responsibility). Typically a temporary increase in compensation will be involved. Interim or special assignments apply when employees are temporarily assigned duties that are usually performed by employees in higher pay grades. Such assignments are not intended to compensate employees for additional work that is within the scope of their current position. An interim or special assignment is one that is officially designated as such by MRLS, and agreed to by the employee. Recruitment procedures need not be followed in the event of an employee working at a higher pay grade on an interim or temporary basis.

An interim or special assignment will generally not exceed six (6) months, unless an extension is agreed upon between MRLS and the employee. When the interim or special assignment ends, the employee automatically returns to her/his former job title, pay grade, and pay rate (including any pay increase which may have occurred during the assignment).

E-4. Separations

All employees of MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM are “at-will” employees. Employment with MRLS is entered into on a voluntary basis, for an indefinite time period. Either the employee or the Library is free to terminate the employment relationship at any time, with or without notice, for any reason.

Personnel actions relating to separations may include resignation, retirement, dismissal, abandonment of position, disability, failure to return from leave of absence, reduction in force, or death.

1. **Resignation** – A resignation is a voluntary separation initiated by the employee through submittal of a notice that he or she wishes to resign the position. To resign in good standing, an employee should submit written notice of resignation at least 14 calendar days in advance of the date of resignation (30 calendar days for management personnel) and otherwise have demonstrated satisfactory performance. The written notice should include the employee’s anticipated last day of work. Failure to provide the requested 14-day (or 30-day) notice will be noted in the employee’s personnel record and may negatively impact eligibility for rehire. If an employee should submit more than the requested notice, MRLS will evaluate whether the additional notice is necessary for effective business operations and will notify the employee accordingly. The Library reserves the right to modify or waive notice requirements if exceptional circumstances so warrant, and will consider such instances on a case-by-case basis.
2. **Retirement** – MRLS employees are eligible to participate in the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS), as determined by TRS. After completing ten or more years of service under TRS, employees will be eligible to apply for retirement benefits at age 60. TRS recommends submitting required paperwork up to six months prior to the date the employee wishes to retire. The [Business Manager’s Office](#) can provide assistance and information about the retirement process.
3. **Dismissal** – A dismissal is an involuntary separation initiated by MRLS. A dismissal may be initiated when alternative personnel actions (reprimand, suspension, demotion, etc.) are not deemed sufficient, appropriate, or in the best interest of the Library. The employee will be furnished a written notice of dismissal that includes the reasons for dismissal, the effective date of dismissal, and the appeal rights available to the employee. Employees who are dismissed are not eligible for rehire.

During the initial training period, an employee may be dismissed for substandard work without prior notice. After completion of the initial training period, dismissal due to substandard work will typically occur only after the Supervisor and/or Director have counseled with the employee, explained how the employee needs to improve, and stipulated a timeframe for further review and evaluation. Failure of the employee to effect such required improvements within the time stipulated may result in dismissal. Dismissal for disciplinary reasons may be instituted without prior notice when deemed necessary to protect the Library or the employee concerned.

4. Abandonment of Position – An employee will be considered to have abandoned his or her position and resigned without notice as of the end of the third day when any of the following occur: (a) an employee is absent without notice to the Supervisor (or the Supervisor's designee) or the [Business Manager's Office](#) for all or part of three or more consecutive workdays; (b) an employee is absent for all or part of three or more consecutive workdays after providing notice, but without having sufficient paid leave for the absences and without being eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act; or (c) an employee is absent for all or part of three or more consecutive workdays without receiving approval for the absences. In most circumstances, the employee would be considered not to have left in good standing and would not be eligible for rehire. The Business Manager's Office will send the employee a notice of the separation.

An exception may be made if the reason for failure to make notification of absence is determined to have been unavoidable or due to extenuating circumstances. MRLS will make a determination as to whether extenuating circumstances existed and the Director may consider reinstatement.

5. Disability – If an employee suffers from a medical condition or a physical or mental disability that prevents the employee from performing the essential functions of the position or renders the employee unfit for the position, or if MRLS has a justifiable reason to believe that the employee's continuance in the position is a danger to the employee or to the patrons, employees, or property of MRLS, whether with a reasonable accommodation or in the absence of an available reasonable accommodation, then either MRLS or the employee may initiate a disability separation for inability to perform the essential functions of his or her position. Prior to a disability separation, MRLS may transfer or demote the employee to a different position (if available) for which the employee is qualified and is able to perform the essential functions of the position, with or without a reasonable accommodation. Disability separation is not a disciplinary action, but recognizes that continued MRLS employment is not possible.

Employees who incur or suffer a disabling illness, condition, or injury may be eligible for benefits (such as disability insurance or disability retirement), and should speak with the Business Manager's Office about their situations.

6. Failure to Return from Leave of Absence – Any employee who fails to return to duty at the expiration of a duly approved leave of absence for all or part of three consecutive workdays following the expiration of the leave of absence shall be considered to have abandoned his or her position and resigned without notice as of the end of the third day. The Business Manager's Office will send the employee a notice of the separation.
7. Reduction in Force – A reduction in force is the separation of one or more employees due to abolishment of a position, a shortage of funds, a shortage of work, a material change in duties, organizational changes, a need to increase efficiency, or other reasons not related to the employee's conduct and not reflecting dissatisfaction with the employee's service. No reduction in force will be made for the purpose of dismissing an employee for incompetence, misconduct, or for other reasons, except as included in this Policy. A reduction in force does not reflect discredit upon the service of the employee.

Regular employees will be notified in writing at least fourteen (14) calendar days prior to the effective date. Employees released due to a reduction in force will have no right to appeal their release.

8. Death – In the event of the death of an employee, separation will be considered effective as of the date of death. Compensation and benefits due as of that date will be paid to the designated beneficiary or as otherwise required by law.

E-5. Termination Process

When notified of an upcoming separation of employment, the Business Manager's Office will initiate termination

activities such as announcing the separation, determining the status of benefits, preparing relevant forms, notifying benefit companies, planning an exit interview, and planning the hiring process to fill the upcoming vacancy. Employees considering an upcoming separation (especially retirement) may wish to consult in advance with the Business Manager's Office.

No Use of Leave During Notice Period – The purpose of the period of notice is to facilitate a smooth transition of responsibilities, which may involve completing current assignments, transferring knowledge, and helping to ensure responsibilities will be effectively handled in the employee's absence. As such, employees are expected to actively work throughout the notice period and may not use annual leave during the notice period or in lieu of working the full notice. All accrued annual leave will be paid at termination. In addition, MRLS may request a doctor's medical statement for any employee requesting use of sick leave during the notice period.

Return of MRLS Property – Employees must return all MRLS property that has been provided to assist in performing their duties by the last day of work. This may include MRLS keys, name badges, training/reference books, laptop computers, iPads, computer storage devices, cell phones, or other items. Working with the Supervisor, employees must return, transfer, or delete any electronic documents, data files, software, passwords, or other electronic information (including any patron information). Failure to comply may result in ineligibility for rehire and applicable legal action taken.

E-6. Benefits at Separation

The Business Manager's Office will provide information about benefits to separating employees. In all cases, the status of an employee's benefits at separation will be based on guidelines governing the respective benefit plan in place at the time of separation.

1. **Resignation** – Employees who resign will be paid for any accrued annual leave. No payment is made at separation for accrued sick leave. Separating employees may be eligible to extend health-related benefits under COBRA by paying a monthly premium. Employees who separate after completing ten or more years of service under the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia will be eligible to apply for retirement benefits at age 60.
2. **Retirement** – The conditions and benefits of retirement are determined by the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS). Retiring employees may continue their health insurance coverage (if enrolled in health insurance at the time of retirement) under the State Health Benefit Plan by paying a monthly premium (subject to the relevant terms and conditions determined by the State Health Benefit Plan), and may be eligible to receive TRS service credit for unused sick leave. Retiring employees will be paid for any accrued annual leave at the time of retirement.
3. **Dismissal** – Employees who are dismissed will be paid for all time worked up to the time of separation, as well as any accrued annual leave. No payment is made for accrued sick leave. Employees who are dismissed (except for gross misconduct) may be eligible to extend health-related benefits under COBRA by paying a monthly premium. Employees who separate after completing ten or more years of service under the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia will be eligible to apply for retirement benefits at age 60.
4. **Disability** – Employees who separate employment due to disability may be eligible to receive benefits under MRLS's Long Term Disability insurance plan. The Business Manager's Office can provide details about the disability plan's guidelines, benefits, and procedures. Employees who separate employment due to disability will be paid for any accrued annual leave. Separating employees may be eligible to extend health-related benefits under COBRA by paying a monthly premium. Employees who separate after completing ten or more years of service under the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS) will be eligible to apply for retirement benefits at age 60; in addition, a TRS member who is mentally or physically disabled and who has at least 10 years of service credit may be eligible to apply for disability retirement.
5. **Death** – If an employee should die while employed by the Library, any outstanding wages and accrued annual leave will be paid to the employee's designated beneficiary or, in the absence of a designated beneficiary, in accordance with laws or guidelines governing outstanding payments to deceased employees. The employee's designated beneficiaries may submit claims for death benefits to the Library's life insurance carrier and the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS). Any dependents enrolled in

the employee's health plans through MRLS may be entitled to continue coverage through COBRA, subject to the rules and regulations of the respective health plan.

SECTION F – PERFORMANCE ISSUES

F-1. Performance Evaluations

MRLS utilizes a system of performance evaluations to evaluate performance of individual employees. The type of system utilized is at the discretion of MRLS, and is subject to change without prior notice.

Objective – The purpose of the employee performance evaluation is primarily to inform employees of how well they are performing their work and how they can improve performance. The evaluation provides an opportunity to discuss the employee's job tasks, performance (both positively and negatively), strengths, and weaknesses. It can be used to establish standards for the next review period and approaches for meeting goals. Evaluations may be used in determining merit increases and as a basis for training, promotion, demotion, transfer, or dismissal. In no case should employees view performance evaluations as a right of the employee, or as an obligation of MRLS; rather, they are a management tool to be used at MRLS's discretion.

Employees with less than satisfactory performance will not be eligible for a merit increase. Failure to bring performance to a satisfactory level within the designated timeframe may result in demotion or termination of employment.

Period of Evaluation – Employee performance is evaluated on a continuing basis through informal coaching and feedback from your Supervisor, with more formal evaluations performed at periodic intervals throughout employment. Employees typically receive written evaluations during their initial training period, at the end of the initial training period, and thereafter on an annual basis. Additional evaluations can be scheduled in the event of job changes and/or performance issues.

The Evaluation Process – Written performance evaluation forms are usually completed with input by the immediate Supervisor, Assistant Director or Director. After managerial approval, the written form is presented to the employee. The format for administering evaluations is at the discretion of the Director. Employees should never hesitate to approach their Supervisor with any questions about performance expectations. Should a Supervisor fail to conduct a formal evaluation, it will be assumed that the work of the employee is satisfactory, unless there is other written documentation to the contrary.

Employees are asked to sign the evaluation form. This signature verifies only that the employee has received a copy of the evaluation and has had an opportunity to discuss it with the Supervisor, and does not indicate the employee's agreement or disagreement with the performance rating. If an employee refuses to acknowledge by signature their receipt of the evaluation form, a note describing the refusal will be made on the evaluation form.

The evaluation form provides a section for employees to write any comments they may have. In addition, an employee who disagrees with the contents of an evaluation may submit to the Supervisor a written statement that will be attached to the evaluation and placed in the employee's personnel file. This action does not constitute a complaint; it is an administrative procedure requiring no action or response by MRLS. (Employees also have the option of submitting a complaint through the Complaint and Problem Resolution Procedure described in [Section F-5](#).)

Completed evaluations are maintained in employees' personnel files. Employees are entitled to receive a copy of the performance evaluation upon request.

F-2. Performance Reevaluation Period

When an employee's performance is below a satisfactory level, the employee will be placed on a performance reevaluation period. This may occur when an employee receives an unsatisfactory rating on any factor of the performance evaluation, or when an employee receives a reprimand or suspension. The employee's performance will be monitored closely during the performance reevaluation period. During this time, the employee should focus on improving the marginal or unacceptable behavior. The employee is not eligible for a merit increase during this period. Failure to bring performance to a satisfactory level within the designated timeframe may result in demotion or termination of employment.

Completion of the performance reevaluation period does not change or alter the at-will employer-employee relationship. At no time during or after completion of the performance reevaluation period shall the employee have, obtain, or acquire any right, claim, or entitlement to continued employment. An employee may be discharged at any time, and for any reason, with or without notice.

F-3. Prohibited Conduct

Certain actions or forms of behavior are considered unacceptable in the workplace. In general, conduct that interferes with the operations of MRLS, brings discredit to MRLS, or is offensive to Supervisors, co-workers, or the public is not tolerated. While it is not possible to list all of the actions considered unacceptable, the following are examples of conduct that is not permitted and will subject the individual involved to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination of employment:

1. Theft, abuse, misappropriation, or misuse of MRLS property or vehicles; failure to report damage or destruction of MRLS property to a Supervisor; loaning MRLS property or equipment without permission or proper authority; negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of property.
2. Theft, destruction, unauthorized use, or inappropriate removal or possession of property of other employees, patrons, or others doing business with MRLS.
3. Unauthorized use of, or access to, MRLS computer systems or communication systems (such as computers, databases, website, social media sites, email, Internet, telephones, cell phones, voicemail, postal or interoffice mail), and/or violation of MRLS policies governing the use of MRLS property (including telephone, Internet, and electronic property and equipment).
4. Falsification or destruction of official records or documents; or willfully giving false statements to Supervisors, officials, or the public.
5. Falsification of employment applications, timekeeping records, personnel records, or expense reports.
6. Dishonesty, lying, misrepresentation, or omission of information.
7. Careless, negligent, or inappropriate handling of MRLS funds or financial records; violation of MRLS policies or procedures relating to purchasing and use of MRLS purchase cards; failure to follow laws or procedures governing the reporting or use of funds.
8. Violation of MRLS policies regarding business ethics, conflict of interest, or acceptance of gifts or gratuities.
9. Use of official position for personal benefit, profit, or advantage.
10. Any use, threatening of use, or attempt at use of personal or political influence to secure employment benefits, including but not limited to promotion, transfer, change of pay rate, leave of absence, or character of work.
11. Violation of traffic laws while driving an MRLS vehicle; failure to report to a Supervisor any traffic violation or citation issued while on official MRLS business.
12. Conviction of a felony or a crime involving moral turpitude if the conduct leading to such conviction is job-related and the disciplinary action is consistent with business necessity (i.e., taking into consideration the nature and gravity of the offense, the time that has passed since the offense, and the nature of the job).
13. Failure to do work at an acceptable level of competence as determined by the Director; wasted time, inefficiency, sleeping while on duty, and/or loitering during working hours.
14. Behavior reflecting conduct and misconduct identified in MRLS policy against workplace violence, including unauthorized or illegal possession of firearms, ammunition, explosives, knives, or weaponry of any type on MRLS property.
15. Disorderly conduct or violence in the workplace, including fighting, threatening, abusing, or intimidating other individuals; using physical force against another individual except in self-defense; provoking a fight; causing a disturbance; engaging in horseplay or boisterous, disruptive activity; engaging in lewd, obscene, or otherwise inappropriate conduct.

16. Use of profane, obscene, or abusive language or discourteous treatment of the public or other employees; use of any form of physical abuse of the public or other employees, or making threats to the public or other employees.
17. Engaging in obscene or offensive conduct.
18. Insubordination or uncooperative attitude, including, but not limited to, disrespect to a Director, Supervisor, co-worker, or the public, and failure to follow the lawful orders or direct instructions of the Supervisor.
19. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness; unexcused absence, absence without notice, or failure to notify employer of absence or tardiness in a timely manner; absence when employee does not have sufficient accrued paid leave to accommodate the absence; leaving a scheduled work shift without authorization; absence due to incarceration.
20. Failure to acquire and maintain a valid license, registration or certification when such license, registration or certification is required and specified in the job description of the position occupied by the employee.
21. Failure to report an occupational injury or accident during the shift on which it occurred.
22. Failure to disclose criminal records on employment applications, and/or to report criminal convictions and arrests subject to MRLS policies requiring same to the Business Manager's Office.
23. Violation of MRLS policies against discrimination and harassment; violation of policies against bullying, including cyberbullying.
24. Violation of MRLS policies relating to workplace safety and workplace security, including violation of safety rules that endanger lives or safety, and/or any conduct that endangers lives or safety.
25. Violation of MRLS policies relating to a drug- and alcohol-free workplace, including use, possession, sale, or testing positive for alcohol or illegal drugs on MRLS property or while on duty, and/or failure to submit to testing for same; and including use, possession, sale, or testing positive for prescription or over-the-counter drugs that lead an employee to be unfit for duty.
26. Failure to adhere to MRLS dress code and guidelines for acceptable attire and personal grooming.
27. Unauthorized solicitation or distribution or posting of materials at or in MRLS work areas in violation of MRLS's solicitation policy.
28. Unauthorized public statements to the media pertaining to MRLS or its operations.
29. Conduct reflecting discredit upon MRLS. If there are actual complaints regarding MRLS, they should follow proper chains of command and adhere to our complaint policy.
30. Excessive personal phone calls during active working hours outside the break or lunch allowances.
31. Violation of any MRLS policies, any provisions of this Manual, or any departmental rules or procedures.

Off-Duty Conduct – In general, MRLS will only apply its disciplinary policies to any off-duty conduct that affects MRLS's business interests. Off-duty conduct such as membership in organizations to promote civil rights, religious practices protected by law, smoking, or other lawful off-duty conduct is not a matter of concern to MRLS.

While it is not possible to list all of the potential off-duty conduct that may affect MRLS interests, below are examples of off-duty conduct that is not permitted and will subject the individual involved to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination of employment:

- Off-duty sexual harassment of MRLS employees.
- Off-duty illegal conduct that occurs on MRLS property.
- Off-duty illegal conduct that indicates the potential for violence.
- Off-duty illegal conduct that causes the employee to be unable to perform his or her essential job functions.
- Off-duty disruptive actions at an MRLS-sponsored event.

F-4. Disciplinary Actions

All MRLS employees are terminable at will and at the sole discretion of MRLS. Nonetheless, MRLS seeks to resolve performance and conduct problems in the most positive and constructive manner possible. When situations arise that warrant disciplinary action, MRLS will work to treat all employees fairly and consistently and, whenever possible, provide employees with an opportunity to correct problematic behavior or poor performance.

Progressive Discipline – Progressive discipline is a process in which disciplinary action is taken in degrees of increasing severity, such that when an employee engages in different types of misconduct or poor performance, each incident can provoke increased discipline (even if the incidents are in different areas or unrelated to previous incidents). While MRLS advocates progressive discipline when appropriate, the use of progressive discipline will be discretionary.

Mechanisms for progressive discipline could include a verbal reprimand, written reprimand, suspension without pay, demotion, or dismissal (or a combination thereof). These disciplinary actions are considered formal actions that are documented in writing, provided to the employee, and placed in the employee's personnel file. Any disciplinary action may be preceded by informal approaches such as counseling or performance notes.

Although this section of the Manual sets forth five available mechanisms for discipline, this policy should not be construed to require five incidents of misconduct or poor performance prior to dismissal being an appropriate disciplinary sanction. [MRLS reserves the right to skip or combine certain steps in a disciplinary process depending upon the nature of the employee's misconduct, poor performance, re-evaluation status, and/or length of employment. Moreover, other forms of discipline not detailed in this policy may be utilized at the Director's discretion.](#)

1. **Verbal Reprimand** – A verbal reprimand is an oral notice of a policy violation, mistake, inefficiency, misconduct, poor performance, or other factor that may adversely influence an employee's ability or effectiveness in carrying out duties and responsibilities. (As mentioned above, a verbal reprimand is a formal action that is documented in writing.) A verbal reprimand may affect the employee's employment status, particularly if corrective action is not taken by the employee. The employee may submit a written response to the reprimand, which will be attached to the reprimand and placed in the employee's personnel file. (Note: Employees also have the option of submitting a complaint through the Complaint and Problem Solving Procedure described in [Section F-5](#).)
2. **Written Reprimand** – A written reprimand is a written notice of a policy violation, mistake, inefficiency, misconduct, poor performance, or other factor that may adversely influence an employee's ability or effectiveness in carrying out duties and responsibilities. It is typically utilized for repeated offenses or those of a serious nature. As with verbal reprimands, a written reprimand may affect the employee's employment status, particularly if corrective action is not taken by the employee. The employee may submit a written response to the reprimand, which will be attached to the reprimand and placed in the employee's personnel file. (Note: Employees also have the option of submitting a complaint through the Complaint and Problem Solving Procedure described in [Section F-5](#).)
3. **Suspension Without Pay** – For disciplinary purposes, the Director may suspend an employee without pay for a length of time as is considered appropriate, typically not exceeding 3 work weeks. A suspended employee may not utilize paid leave benefits so as to be compensated during the period of suspension, nor may the employee be compensated for any holidays or instances of library closure that might occur during the suspension. A written statement from the Director giving reasons, effective date, and length of suspension will be furnished to the affected employee, with a copy placed in the employee's personnel file. A regular status employee will be notified of the right to appeal, as provided in this Manual. The Director may extend a period of suspension to accommodate the timeframe of a criminal investigation or trial. Suspension may be immediate for employees arrested for crimes involving moral turpitude. The fact that a person is acquitted of any charges or that the charges are dropped does not necessarily mean the suspension or other disciplinary action will be revoked.
4. **Demotion** – A disciplinary demotion generally occurs when an employee who is not in an initial training period has been found unsuited for the employee's present position but may be expected to perform at a satisfactory level in a lower paying position. A written statement from the Director giving the reasons for the demotion will be furnished to the affected employee, with a copy placed in the employee's personnel

file. A demotion may involve a reduction in the employee's pay rate. A regular status employee will be notified of the right to appeal, as provided in this Manual.

5. **Dismissal** – An employee may be dismissed from employment for disciplinary purposes. See [Section E-4 \(Separations\)](#) for details relating to dismissal.

Exceptions to Discipline Procedures – Although progressive discipline procedures may typically be followed, progressive discipline will not be applied for situations that justify immediate termination of employment. MRLS reserves the right to omit one or more progressive steps depending on the situation and the facts involved, and to exercise appropriate actions on a case-by-case basis.

Effect of Disciplinary Action on Pay Changes or Position Changes – A satisfactory level of performance is required for any employee to receive a merit increase or be considered for promotion to another position. As a result, when any type of disciplinary action occurs, the employee becomes ineligible for any merit increase or for any promotion or transfer to another position until the issue identified in the disciplinary action is considered corrected and the employee's performance rating is considered satisfactory. MRLS reserves the right to grant individual exceptions if exceptional circumstances so warrant (such as an involuntary transfer or demotion initiated by MRLS), and will consider such instances on a case-by-case basis.

F-5. Complaint and Problem Resolution Procedure

It is MRLS's policy that every employee be treated in a fair and just manner. From time to time, however, problems, disputes, or conflicts may arise. Every effort should be made by all parties involved to resolve issues that could negatively impact the work environment or working relationships. Any employee who feels that he or she has been treated unfairly or that a situation should be corrected should follow the steps described below. Every Supervisor or manager involved in the process is expected to solve problems or resolve conflicts fairly, equitably, and promptly. **No employee will be subjected to recrimination, discrimination, or retaliation as a result of following this process.**

Note: This complaint and problem resolution procedure is not available for issues involving involuntary demotion, suspension, or dismissal, or an allegation of discrimination in promotional procedures. Employees may appeal such disciplinary or employment actions through the Appeals Procedure described in [Section F-6](#) of this Manual.

1. **Step 1** – Discuss the matter with the immediate Supervisor. This should occur within fourteen (14) calendar days of the occurrence or conflict. The Supervisor will make every effort to understand and assist in resolving the problem, and will typically provide a response within seven (7) calendar days of the initial discussion. In most instances, complaints and problems are resolved at this level.

If the employee's immediate Supervisor is the cause of the complaint and/or the employee does not feel comfortable discussing the problem with him/her, the employee may begin this process with Step 2.

2. **Step 2** – If the employee does not feel that the immediate Supervisor has given a fair and helpful answer, the employee should put the complaint or problem in writing and present it to the Assistant Director or Director. This should occur within fourteen (14) calendar days of receiving a response from the immediate Supervisor. The Assistant Director or Director will typically meet with the employee within seven (7) calendar days of receiving the complaint and provide a written response within seven (7) calendar days of the meeting.

The Director's decision is final in matters concerning performance ratings, employee evaluations, verbal reprimands, or written reprimands, and such matters are not subject to further appeal or review.

The time limits at any step set forth in this section may be extended by the Library Director or mutually agreed to by all parties involved. A complaint not advanced to the higher step within the time limit provided shall be deemed permanently withdrawn, and as having been settled on the basis of the decision most recently given.

Serious/Legal Issues (Harassment, Discrimination, Retaliation) – Exceptions to the normal chain of command may include complaints of sexual harassment, unlawful discrimination, retaliation, or other

unlawful acts by a Supervisor or manager. In such situations, the employee may follow the procedure outlined in the respective section of this Manual, or may directly contact the Business Manager, or Director.

F-6. Appeals Procedure

Before initiating a formal appeal, employees and Supervisors should make every effort to resolve a complaint or problem informally. [Section F-5](#) (Complaints and Problem Resolution) in this Manual provides guidance in following the chain of command to informally resolve problems. No employee will be subjected to recrimination, discrimination, or retaliation as a result of following this process

This Appeals Procedure is available in the following situations:

- An employee who has followed all steps outlined in [Section F-5](#) (Complaints and Problem Resolution) may appeal the Library Director's decision to the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees. The appeal must be made in writing within seven (7) calendar days of receiving the Director's decision. (Note: This Appeals Procedure is not available for matters involving performance ratings, employee evaluations, verbal reprimands, and written reprimands; for those matters, the Director's decision is final and no further appeal is available.)
- An employee who has been involuntarily demoted, suspended, or dismissed, or who alleges discrimination in promotional procedures, has the right to appeal to the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees. The appeal must be made in writing within seven (7) calendar days of the effective date of such actions.
- If a regular status employee does not feel comfortable bringing a complaint to the Director, the employee may follow the appeals procedure outlined in this section but submit the appeal directly to the Chairperson of the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM Board of Trustees instead of to the Director. The Board will accept direct appeals only when there is a clear conflict of interest with the regular appeal process.

Notification of Appeals – An appeal must be in writing and should include the reason(s) why the employee feels he or she has been treated unfairly or inequitably. An appeal must be submitted to the Director. When received by the office of the Director, copies of said appeal shall be promptly sent to each Library Board member and the concerned Supervisor.

Time and Place of Hearing – The Chairperson of the Library Board will schedule a time and place to conduct a hearing. The Director shall notify in writing the appellant, all Library Board members, and the concerned Supervisor(s) of such time and place. The hearing may be held at the Library Board's next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting called specifically for that purpose. The appeals must be heard and determined within sixty (60) days after receipt of the appeal. The Director is responsible for ensuring that all parties directly involved have been notified of the date and time of the hearing, and that such notice is made at least seven (7) calendar days prior to the date of the hearing. In compliance with the Georgia Open Meetings Act (O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1), hearings before the Library Board (during which evidence is heard) shall be open to the public. However, that portion of a hearing during which the Board deliberates on the appeal may be closed to the public as allowed by law.

Hearing Procedures – Appeal hearings will be conducted informally and technical rules of evidence shall not apply. All testimony shall be under oath. The decision of the Library Board shall be final. If the Board rules in favor of the employee, the Board shall determine what corrective action will be taken (within limits of applicable laws, regulatory guidelines, or benefit plan requirements). Further details on appeal hearing procedures are available from the Business Manager's Office.

The time limits at any step set forth in this section may be extended by the Board Chairperson or mutually agreed to by all parties involved. A complaint not advanced to the higher step within the time limit provided shall be deemed permanently withdrawn, and as having been settled on the basis of the decision most recently given. Failure on the part of MRLS's representative to answer within the time limit set forth in any step may entitle the employee to proceed to the next step.

SECTION G – PAYROLL AND ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

G-1. Employment Records

The Business Manager's Office is responsible for maintaining employment records on all employees.

Changes in Personal Information – Employees are responsible for promptly notifying MRLS of changes in their personal information, including:

- Notifying the Business Manager's Office of changes in name, address, or phone number, as well as any "life changes" that can affect payroll or benefits. Such events may include marriage, divorce, birth or death in the immediate family, Social Security number corrections, a spouse's gain or loss of employment, a gain or loss of health insurance, or a dependent reaching an age to be ineligible for health coverage. Employees should also regularly update emergency contact information and beneficiary designation information. (A life changes checklist is available on the staff website or from the Business Manager's Office.)
- Notifying the immediate Supervisor of any changes in name or phone number. This is important so departmental call trees can be updated and Supervisors can notify employees of schedule changes or emergency situations.

Requests for References or Verification of Employment – The Business Manager's Office is responsible for responding to any inquiries regarding employment records, employment verification, or employment/credit references on present or previous employees. As a matter of policy, any response to requests for references must be limited to factual information that can be substantiated by MRLS records. Any employee receiving such a request should forward the request to the Business Manager's Office for response.

Access to Employment Records – Within the Library, only specific members of the headquarters have access to all employee records. Supervisors have limited access to position- and performance-related information for employees under their supervision. Library employees have access to their own personnel files. Employees wishing to review their files should contact the Business Manager to schedule an appointment.

Georgia Open Records Act – Certain information maintained by MRLS about its employees and their employment records is considered to be a matter of public record and is subject to the Georgia Open Records Act. This means that a citizen may request access to certain information contained in a personnel file without the employee's knowledge or consent. Open Records requests are filed with the Library Director and, by law, MRLS must provide access to the requested information within the statutorily required time. Although certain information is excluded by law and cannot be accessed under provisions of the Open Records Act, an individual's employment history, salary history, and performance evaluations are among the material that may be available for review.

G-2. Paychecks

All MRLS employees are paid bi-monthly on the 15th and last business day of the month. MRLS does not provide advances in pay or loans.

Headquarters staff work together to ensure that employees receive their pay in a timely and accurate manner. To help in this process, employees should:

- Turn in completed, signed time sheets in time for the Supervisor to review, sign, and submit to Payroll by the deadline. (see [Section G-5](#)).
- Review each paycheck and pay stub to verify that the information is correct.
- Notify the Business Manager's Office of changes in personal information, such as name, marital status, address, or Social Security number. It is very important that the name and Social Security number on paychecks match the data on record with the IRS and Social Security Administration.
- Be aware of appropriate tax withholding. MRLS's payroll system only takes into account the employee's MRLS pay, not other sources of income. An employee may need to adjust withholding during the year.

Payroll Deductions – Deductions from an employee's paycheck shall be made in accordance with applicable law or as authorized by the employee. Mandatory deductions such as state and federal income taxes, Social Security, and Medicare are withheld from pay every pay period. The employee's contribution to the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia is also a mandatory deduction for employees who are scheduled to work 20 hours or more a week. Court-ordered deductions such as wage garnishments or child support payments will be deducted in accordance with the appropriate court order. In addition, employees may authorize deductions for benefits such as health insurance premiums, flexible spending accounts, or voluntary retirement plans.

G-3. Standard Work Week

The official work week of MRLS will begin at 12:01 a.m. Saturday morning and end at 12:00 midnight the following Friday night. The number of hours an employee is expected to work each week depends upon their FLSA status and position status.

Making Up Missed Time – If an employee takes time off and the Supervisor authorizes the employee to make up the time, the time should be made up within the same work week.. If making up the time would result in an overstaffed situation or an overtime situation, then the situation would not be approved.

G-4. Work Schedules

The Library is open to the public during daytime, evening, and weekend hours. Hours of work and shift assignments vary for each department, based on services provided by the department and staffing requirements to provide those services. Supervisors must schedule staff so that adequate staffing levels are maintained during these hours, and Supervisors are limited in the amount of scheduling flexibility they can demonstrate. Headquarters departments also face staffing challenges that may limit scheduling flexibility. Each Supervisor will establish employee work schedules in accordance with the needs of the department. Employees are required to work the hours assigned.

Employees should be aware that their work schedule will be subject to change at any time during employment. MRLS reserves the right to change the assigned hours of any branch, any department, any position, or any employee as necessary to meet the operational needs of the library system. If an assigned schedule is changed, the change will be communicated to all affected employees.

It is understood that employees have commitments outside of their employment with the Library. However, staff members should be aware that library work schedules cannot necessarily accommodate other employment, school schedules, or other recurring demands.

Requesting Time Off – The procedure to request time off is described in [Section G-9](#) (Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off). In most cases, Supervisors are able to approve requests for time off. However, if an absence would result in inadequate staffing for the timeframe requested, the request may be denied.

Swapping Shifts – In departments where several employees with similar duties share responsibility to cover a weekly schedule, swapping shifts among employees may be allowed under certain circumstances, subject to the Supervisors' approval and compliance with department staffing procedures. Supervisors have discretion in determining whether swapping may be allowed in their department and, if allowed, employees must (a) obtain supervisor approval to conduct swapping and (b) keep the supervisor informed of all changes. In no case can employees swap shifts if the swap would result in inadequate staff coverage, in an employee working overtime, or in noncompliance with a supervisory directive.

On-Call Assignments – Employees in certain positions may be required to be "On-call" for the purpose of responding to urgent or emergency situations. "On-call" is a status where employees are required to be available outside of their normal work hours to be reached by telephone (or other means) in the event that they are needed to return to work (or handle problems remotely) for urgent or emergency situations. Supervisors assign on-call coverage in advance, and employees assigned to on-call coverage are required to respond to calls during the assigned timeframe.

According to the Fair Labor Standards Act, non-exempt employees' waiting time while on-call is not compensable as hours worked as long as the conditions on the employees' activities are not so restrictive that they cannot use the time effectively for personal pursuits. It is the intent of MRLS that employees shall be able to effectively use on-call time for personal pursuits such that on-call time is not compensable. If a non-exempt employee is assigned on-call coverage and is called in to work during that time, the employee will be paid for all time worked, with a minimum of two (2) hours of pay.) For example, a non-exempt, on-call employee who comes to work to handle an urgent situation and works one hour will be paid the minimum of two hours. If the employee works for a longer period, such as three hours, the employee will be paid for all of the time worked.) The actual time worked should be reported on the non-exempt employee's time sheet, with a notation of "on-call" time. If actual time worked is fewer than 2 hours, non-worked on-call hours do not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime. Exempt employees are not eligible for compensation for time worked while on-call.

G-5. Time Sheets

Employees are required to accurately report their time worked, using methods or forms provided by MRLS. In accordance with requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), non-exempt employees will be paid for all hours worked. Worked time is defined as the time actually spent on the job performing assigned duties. It does not include time spent driving to work, or running personal errands.

- **Non-Exempt (Hourly) Employees** – Non-exempt employees must record their worked time for each day, including the times they start working, stop working, leave for an unpaid break, and return from an unpaid break. Employees are expected to begin and end work in accordance with their established schedule, and may not clock in ahead of the time they are expected to commence work, nor may they delay their clock-out time when work hours are completed. Any deviation to an employee's scheduled start, stop, or break times will require Supervisor approval.

In addition to recording worked time, non-exempt employees will record any holidays, leave, or other non-worked time on the time sheet. To use paid leave, employees must have sufficient leave time accrued and the nature of the leave must be appropriate to the absence (e.g., annual leave can be used for any absence, but sick leave can only be used for medical absences). The total number of weekly hours (worked and non-worked) should normally equal the employee's assigned schedule.

Exempt (Salaried) Employees – Exempt employees must record their worked time on a daily basis, and will record one worked day for each normally-scheduled day that the employee works. Holidays and leave days are also recorded on the time sheet. For payroll purposes, exempt employees' leave days are calculated in 8-hour increments (i.e., when an employee reports 1 day of leave, Payroll will deduct 8 hours from the employee's accrued leave benefits).

Discrepancies – All wage and hour records are subject to audit by the U.S. Department of Labor. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that time records are properly completed and are accurate upon submission for payment. In the event that an inaccuracy is identified or a correction is needed on a time sheet that has already been submitted, either the Supervisor or the employee must immediately notify the Business Manager's Office.

It is MRLS's policy and practice to compensate employees accurately and in compliance with all applicable laws. MRLS takes all reasonable steps to ensure that employees are paid promptly on the scheduled payday and that employees receive the correct amount of pay in each paycheck. Any employee who believes that a mistake has occurred in a time sheet or paycheck, improper deductions have been made from pay, or a paycheck does not accurately reflect hours worked should immediately contact the Business Manager's Office. A prompt investigation will be made, and if it is determined that an error has occurred, the appropriate correction will be promptly made.

Any employee found to be falsifying a time sheet is subject to discipline, up to and including termination. Any employee who is instructed to falsify a time sheet should report it immediately. Every report will be investigated and corrective action taken where appropriate. In addition, MRLS will not allow any form of retaliation against individuals who report alleged violations of this policy or who cooperate in MRLS's investigation of such reports.

G-6. Overtime

Overtime work may be necessary from time to time, based on department workload or staffing.

- **Non-Exempt (Hourly) Employees** – Overtime compensation is paid to non-exempt employees in accordance with federal and state wage and hour guidelines. All overtime must be reported in the pay period in which it is worked. Non-exempt employees will be paid at the rate of one and one-half (1½) the normal rate for hours actually worked over forty (40) per week. Overtime pay is based on actual hours worked – time off for holidays, sick leave, annual leave, or other non-worked time and are not considered hours worked for purposes of calculating overtime payments. Except in a staffing emergency, employees must receive advance supervisory approval to work overtime. Regardless of whether advance approval was received, all overtime must be reported on the time sheet and will be paid in accordance with law. For budgetary reasons, supervisors will make every effort to adjust work schedules within the same work week to avoid an overtime situation. Repeated unauthorized overtime where the employee could have received advanced supervisory approval for same but did not do so will subject the employee to disciplinary action. If any non-exempt employee is asked to work overtime without being compensated, he or she should report this immediately to the Business Managers office.
- **Exempt (Salaried) Employees** – Exempt employees are not eligible for overtime pay, and will receive their normal salary, regardless of hours worked.

Compensatory Time (Employees) – Compensatory time (paid time off granted to an employee in lieu of overtime) is not a standard payroll practice at MRLS, as the Library would prefer that all time worked be paid during the pay period in which it was worked.

Note: As a public agency, MRLS could choose under the FLSA to grant compensatory time in lieu of overtime. This is not MRLS's normal practice, and such a situation would require advance coordination with payroll as well as advance approval by the supervisor. In this situation, a non-exempt employee could be granted 1½ compensatory time in lieu of overtime. The compensatory time would need to be taken within thirty days of the time it is earned. In all cases, the employee would need to report all worked time, and the supervisor would be responsible for accurately maintaining records of the accrual and use of compensatory time.

Discretionary Time (Exempt Employees) – For exempt employees, at the discretion of the Assistant Director or Director, an exempt employee may occasionally be allowed to take discretionary time off for time worked beyond the normal work week. This is not a standard practice, as exempt employees are not paid based on the number of hours worked. When approved, such time must be taken at the convenience of MRLS.

G-7. Breaks

The Library recognizes two different types of breaks – Paid Rest Breaks and Unpaid Meal Breaks.

Paid Rest Breaks (15 minutes) – Rest breaks are designed to provide periodic rest for the employee during the work shift, independent of longer meal breaks. All employees are encouraged to take a 15-minute break on Library time for every 4 hours they are scheduled to work, as the rest break contributes to the employee's welfare and the Library's productivity. With limited exceptions, rest breaks are not required by law, and employees should keep in mind that breaks are a privilege, not a right. All rest breaks are contingent upon workload and coverage, and may not be provided in times of heavy workload or insufficient coverage at the discretion of the Supervisor. Paid rest breaks are not recorded on the employee's time sheet.

A rest break schedule will be developed within each department, taking into consideration operational and coverage needs. Employees are expected to take their rest breaks at the times designated by their Supervisors. If an employee misses a scheduled break, the break is considered lost. Breaks may not be "saved" or lumped together, and unused break time may not be used to leave early, to extend meal breaks or other rest breaks, or to make-up for absenteeism or tardiness.

These paid rest breaks are intended to provide a brief respite from work with the assumption that the employee remains on site. If an employee needs to leave the premises (which would generally require more than 15 minutes), they should do so on their own time and an unpaid break should be reflected on the time sheet.

Unpaid Meal Breaks (usually 30 minutes) – A 30 minute meal break on the employee's time (off the clock) is required of non-exempt employees working more than 6 consecutive hours. This meal break is optional for non-exempt employees working between 5 and 6 hours, and is not generally scheduled for employees working 4 hours. Unpaid meal breaks must be reflected on the employee's time sheet.

A meal break schedule will be developed within each department, taking into consideration operational and coverage needs. Employees are expected to take their meal breaks at the times designated by their Supervisors. Unused meal breaks may not be used to leave early or to extend other meal breaks or rest breaks.

In some cases, a supervisor may approve additional unpaid break time (such to leave the premises or for a special lunch event). If a non-exempt requests a longer meal break, and if the supervisor approves the request, it needs to be incorporated into the employee's schedule (e.g., to allow for a 1-hour meal break, a 9:00-5:30 would change to 9:00-6:00 or 8:30-5:30).

Non-exempt employees should take unpaid meal breaks away from the work area, since they are not being paid for this time, and being in the work area implies that the employee is available for work and the meal break may be interrupted. In addition to a lack of privacy during the unpaid break, handling personal business or eating in a work area presents an unprofessional image. If, due to exceptional circumstances (e.g., the library is very busy), an employee has to work through an unpaid break, he or she must (a) notify the supervisor and (b) record the worked time on the time sheet to be paid for the time. If a meal is combined with a work-related event and the employee's presence is required or expected (e.g., Staff Day, departmental meeting), the employee is entitled to pay for that time; no unpaid meal period should be recorded on the time sheet.

Attending Events on Library Premises – As a public site, the Library is often used by outside groups for events or activities that the public may attend, and employees are often interested in attending such functions (e.g. voting, blood donations, book sales, community meetings, etc.). Library-sponsored programs and events may also be of personal interest to employees. If an employee's presence at such functions is not clearly related to the employee's assigned tasks, or is not in the employee's role as a MRLS employee, then such attendance may not be charged to MRLS as time worked and must be on the employee's own time (such as during an unpaid break).

Break Time for Nursing Mothers – In keeping with the Fair Labor Standards Act and with O.C.G.A. § 34-1-6, MRLS will provide an employee who is nursing with reasonable unpaid breaks each day to express breast milk for her nursing child as frequently as needed. MRLS will provide a room or other location for the break, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public.

G-8. Attendance Issues – Absence & Tardiness

To successfully provide dependable library services to the community, the Library depends on all employees to be present and on time every scheduled workday to perform their assigned duties.

For purposes of this section:

- The term "absence" refers to any time missed during the scheduled workday. This can include an absence for the entire workday, a tardiness (which causes absence at the beginning of the workday), an early departure (which causes absence near the end of the workday), or an extended break (which causes absence in the middle of the workday).
- A "tardiness" will be considered to have occurred when an employee reports to work (5) minutes after the scheduled time to start work or return from a break.

Employees are expected to arrive to work on time, to promptly take and return from breaks, and to leave work at the scheduled time. MRLS recognizes that there are instances when absence is unavoidable. An absence will be considered acceptable if it is reported promptly and the reason is appropriate, or if it is properly requested and approved in advance (see [Section G-9](#), Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off). An absence will be considered unacceptable if proper notification is not given, if the reason for the absence is unacceptable or questionable, if the absence follows denial of a request for time off, or if a employee has insufficient paid leave available to cover the absence. Any pattern of excessive absence is considered unacceptable.

Frequent or excessive absence or tardiness for any reason will not be tolerated, and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

G-9. Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off

The procedures described below apply to all employees for properly reporting absences and requesting time off. Each employee is responsible for becoming familiar with specific procedures and contact information for his or her department or branch. If an employee has followed these procedures but has been unable to reach a Supervisor, the employee should contact the Director or the Business Manager's Office.

Reporting an Absence – If an employee will be unable to arrive to work, remain at work, or leave work as scheduled, the employee must personally notify his or her Supervisor (or other designated authority) immediately. This notice must be given as far in advance as possible. The notice does not excuse the absence, but simply notifies the Supervisor that a schedule change may be necessary.

In circumstances where it is impossible for the employee to personally talk to the Supervisor (or designated authority), the employee should (a) have someone else make the notification as soon as possible, and (b) personally call and discuss the situation with the Supervisor as soon as circumstances permit.

Requesting Time Off – requests can be made for the following reasons:

- Routine time off, such as for vacation.
- A partial-day absence, such as for an appointment.
- A medical absence, such as for a medical procedure, a surgery, or caring for a family member. *(See below for additional requirements for medical absences.)*
- An extended absence (also refer to [Section I-5](#), Personal Leave of Absence).

To request time off, employees should submit a request to their Supervisor as early as possible. Supervisors must take into consideration a number of issues before approving any request for time off, including departmental staffing needs, urgency of the situation, and timeliness of the request. While Supervisors will make every effort to approve requests for time off, a request may be denied based on the Library's operational needs.

Employees are responsible for monitoring their available leave balances to ensure they have enough accrued hours to cover a requested absence; if they do not, the request will be denied (or any advance approval will be withdrawn and the leave will be canceled). There will be no advance on annual or sick leave.

For requests involving more than two (2) weeks of time off, employees should also refer to [Section I-5](#) (Personal Leave of Absence).

Time Off for Medical Reasons – Additional requirements apply when an absence involves a medical situation, whether due to the employee's medical condition or that of a family member.

1. **Reporting Status** – An employee who is absent for medical reasons should advise his or her Supervisor on a daily basis of the employee's status and estimated date-of-return. *(Once an employee has provided medical documentation that supports absence for a specific timeframe, the employee is not expected to make daily contact with the Supervisor, but should keep the Supervisor informed of any change in status.)*
2. **Communicating with Human Resources** – If a medical absence involves more than 3 workdays (whether consecutive or intermittent), the employee must also notify the Business Manager's Office. Although no further action may be involved, Human Resources must look at issues such as notification of Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) status, availability of leave or disability benefits, the employee's ability to safely return to work, and other considerations. Human Resources can also help the employee to maintain confidentiality of the medical situation.
3. **Documentation** – Medical absences may require documentation from a physician to support the absence, or to confirm that the employee can safely return to work. Such documentation may be required in the following situations:

- Any period of absence due to illness consisting of more than three (3) consecutive or intermittent workdays.
- Any absence that would warrant confirmation of the employee's ability to safely resume work, or confirmation that there is no risk to the health or safety of others.
- A request for time off for medical reasons when taken before or after a holiday or other scheduled day off.
- Time off of any duration if absence recurs frequently or habitually, or when it is suspected that an employee is abusing time off, provided the employee has been notified or warned that a medical certificate will be required.
- Time off used to care for a family member, in a situation similar to that described in [Section H-6](#) (Sick Leave Benefits).

At the discretion of the Director, the Library may request that this verification come from a physician of the Library's choice (at the Library's expense).

Compensation During Absence – Some employees are eligible for paid leave benefits, and are expected to have accrued a sufficient amount of paid leave benefits to cover each absence. (See [Section H](#) of this Manual for details about paid leave benefits.) For employees, there is no "leave without pay," except if approved pursuant to the applicable leave policies set forth in this Manual.

Return to Work – When medical certification by a physician is deemed necessary by MRLS, the employee may not return to work until MRLS receives such certification confirming that the employee may safely return to work.

If a medical certification indicates that an employee can only return to work on a restricted basis, MRLS may do one of the following:

1. Assign the employee to work in the employee's regular position but within the specified restrictions;
2. Assign the employee to work in a different position where the duties can be performed within the restrictions; or
3. Not allow the employee to return to work at that time. In this case, if the employee has available paid leave (sick or annual leave), the paid leave will be applied to the absence. If no paid leave is available to the employee, the absence will be unpaid.

If a certification has been received and MRLS has identified an appropriate work assignment, the employee is expected to report to work promptly and assume the assigned duties. If an employee has been released to work (whether to normal duties or to restricted duty) and MRLS has notified the employee of the expectation to report to work, the employee shall report to work at the expected time. A failure to do so will be treated as an unauthorized absence and will count towards an abandonment of the position (see [Section E-4](#) – Separations).

Special circumstances apply to employees who are recovering from a work-related injury, and it is important that these employees comply with the Georgia Workers' Compensation Act as well as procedures established by the County's workers' compensation third-party administrator and the Mountain Regional Loss Prevention Program. Refer to [Section I-6](#) for details on workers' compensation procedures, including reporting injuries, compensation during absence, and returning to work.

SECTION H – EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

H-1. Overview of Benefits

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM provides a wide range of benefits to eligible employees. These benefits represent a significant part of each employee's overall compensation package. Employees are encouraged to become familiar with the benefit programs for which they are eligible, and take advantage of these valuable benefits. Contact the Business Manager's Office for additional information and answers to any specific questions.

With the exception of mandated benefit programs, the availability of each benefit option is subject to funding, and a benefit may be reduced or suspended (temporarily or permanently) if funding is not available.

Eligibility for benefits is dependent upon a variety of factors, including employee classification. The *Hiring and Classification* section ([Section D](#)) of this Manual describes each employment category and the associated eligibility for benefits. Some benefit programs require contributions from employees, and some are fully or partially paid by MRLS. A number of programs (such as Social Security, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance) cover all employees in the manner prescribed by law.

Information in this section of the Manual is intended to only summarize benefits. Terms of written plan documents or insurance policies will be the controlling documents. Wherever applicable, employees should refer to official plan documents or policies for detailed plan information.

H-2. Group Health Plans

MRLS offers through the State Health Benefit Plan and GaBreeze Flexible Plan a variety of group health insurance options for eligible employees. Each year the specific benefit plans offered may vary, and may include options such as medical insurance, dental insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, or flexible spending accounts. (The State Health Benefit Plan and GaBreeze Flexible Plan reserves the right to discontinue or change a plan at any time, and employees cannot expect each option to be offered from one year to another.)

Details regarding available benefit plans, eligibility criteria, rates, enrollment procedures, and enrollment deadlines will be provided at hire, during scheduled enrollment periods, and when new plans are introduced. Annual enrollment sessions are typically conducted at a designated time each year, and employees may elect to change coverages only at that time (unless an employee should experience a qualifying event as defined by plan documents during the plan year, in which case the employee may change enrollment within thirty days of the qualifying event, consistent with applicable plan provisions). Eligible employees must submit appropriate enrollment forms within the designated timeframe.

State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) – Eligible employees (30+ hours) may choose to enroll in the group health insurance plans offered through the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP), which provides health insurance coverage to state employees, school system employees, and certain other groups (including public library employees). All details relating to plan options, eligibility, premiums, benefits, or other aspects of the plan are determined by SHBP. Information about group health insurance is available from the Business Manager's Office.

Continuation of Insurance Benefits – Group insurance benefits will terminate upon termination of employment. However, the Federal Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) gives employees and their qualified dependents the opportunity to continue health insurance coverage under MRLS's health plan when a "qualifying event" would normally result in loss of eligibility. Examples of qualifying events include termination of employment (excluding gross misconduct), divorce or legal separation, leave of absence, a dependent child no longer meeting eligibility requirements, or retirement. Under COBRA, the employee or dependent pays the full cost of coverage at MRLS's group rates (which includes MRLS's portion of the premium) plus an administration fee. MRLS will provide a written notice describing rights granted under COBRA when the employee becomes eligible for coverage under the health plan. In addition, a loss of group health coverage may qualify the employee or dependent to enroll in an individual plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Employees should contact the Business Manager's Office to report any change in personal status (or qualifying event) which might affect their benefits, or for any questions about MRLS's health plans.

H-3. Retirement Programs

Employment with MRLS provides involuntary and voluntary opportunities for eligible employees to participate in retirement programs.

Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS) – All personnel employed in a permanent status position not less than half-time (20 hours) by a TRS reporting employer (MRLS) are required to participate in and contribute to the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia (TRS) in accordance with Georgia law. MRLS also makes contributions to TRS on behalf of its employees. All details relating to plan participation, contribution levels, eligibility for retirement, retirement options, or other aspects of the plan are determined by TRS. Information about the retirement plan is available from the Business Manager's Office.

Optional Retirement Plans – Employees may be eligible to contribute through payroll deduction to optional retirement plans offered by MRLS, such as a tax-deferred 403(b) plan, an after-tax Roth 403(b) plan, or a tax-deferred 457(b) plan. Information about these options is available from the Business Manager's Office.

H-4. Holiday Benefits

MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM will close on certain holidays during the year. The approved holiday schedule is published at the beginning of each calendar year. Changes to the designated list of holidays may be made at MRLS's discretion. The availability of each year's holiday benefits will be subject to funding.

Paid Holidays for Staff – The Library will be closed and eligible employees, within established guidelines, will receive holiday pay for the following holidays:

New Year's Day (January 1 st)	Wednesday Before Thanksgiving
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (3 rd Monday in January)	Thanksgiving Day (4 th Thursday in November)
Memorial Day (Last Monday in May)	Day after Thanksgiving (4 th Friday in November)
Independence Day (July 4 th)	Christmas Eve (December 24 th)
Labor Day (1 st Monday in September)	Christmas Day (December 25 th)
Veterans Day (November 11)	Additional Christmas Holiday (December 26 th)

40 hour employees receive 8 hours of holiday pay for each holiday. 30 to 39.5 hour employees receive 6 hours holiday pay and 20 to 29.5 hour employees receive 4 hours of holiday pay. Holiday hours do not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime. Employees who are scheduled to work less than 20 hours per week are not eligible for Holiday benefits.

H-5. Annual Leave Benefits

General – MRLS recognizes that employees need time away from work for rest and recreation and to manage personal business, which in turn promotes a healthier and more productive work force. As such, MRLS provides paid Annual Leave benefits to eligible employees, within established guidelines.

Eligibility – Employees 20 hours and over are eligible to earn and accrue annual leave benefits. Eligible employees begin accruing annual leave benefits when hired, and are not required to complete an initial training period before using annual leave.

Rate of Accrual – Accrual rates are based on (a) the employee’s years of service, and (b) the number of hours the employee is regularly scheduled to work (30 to 40 hours and 20 to 29.5 hours), as described below:

Table H.5-1. **Annual Leave Accruals**

	Annual Leave Earned Years 1-5	Annual Leave Earned Years 6-10	Annual Leave Earned Years 11+	Maximum Annual Carryover
Work 30 hours or more a week	10 hours/ month	12 hours/ month	14 hours/ month	240 hours
Work 20-29.5 Hours a week	5 hours/ month	6 hours/ month	7 hours/ month	120 hours

The Director shall accrue a minimum of 16 hours/month annual leave and the Assistant Director shall accrue 14 hours/month annual leave. Additional leave time may be granted by the MRLS Regional Board.

Part time employees who are scheduled to work less than 20 hours per week will no longer accrue leave after February 2020; however, if they were employed at the time this policy goes into effect, they will retain leave that was previously accrued to be used until depleted.

Calculation and Use of Annual Leave

- Annual leave must be earned (or accrued) before it can be taken, and is available for use in the pay period *after* it is accrued.
- Annual leave is paid at the employee’s regular pay rate at the time the leave is taken. Annual leave does not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime.
- Overtime or additional hours are not included in the computation of annual leave accrual.
- Annual leave must be used in increments of 15 minutes (or 0.25 hour).
- Annual leave does not accumulate while an employee is on unpaid leave. For pay periods involving both paid and unpaid leave, employees will receive a prorated accrual of annual leave if they receive pay for at least 20% of their scheduled hours. No accrual will occur when less than 20% of scheduled hours is paid.

Procedure to Request Use of Annual Leave – The procedure to request use of annual leave is described in [Section G-9](#) (Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off), and involves submitting to the Supervisor a request form (available at the staff website). Use of annual leave is not automatic, but is a privilege that requires Supervisor approval before the leave is taken.

Before approving any request for time off, Supervisors must take into consideration a number of issues, including departmental staffing needs, urgency of the situation, and timeliness of the request. While Supervisors will make every effort to approve requests, a request may be denied based on the Library’s operational needs. Employees are responsible for monitoring their available leave balances to ensure they have enough accrued hours to cover a requested absence. If they do not, the request will be denied (or any advance approval will be withdrawn and the leave will be canceled). There will be no advance on annual leave.

For requests involving time off for a medical situation (whether that of the employee or of a family member), employees should also be aware of the additional requirements explained in [Section G-9](#) (Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off). For requests involving more than two (2) weeks of time off, the employee should also refer to [Section I-5](#) (Personal Leave of Absence).

Maximum Allowable Accumulation – Annual leave balances may carry over from year to year, up to a maximum of 240 hours for 30+ per hour employees and 120 for 20– 29.5 per hour employees. No additional leave will be earned after reaching 240 or 120 hours until leave time is used and the balance falls below that maximum. Employees should take advantage of this valuable benefit and plan their use of leave time in advance to avoid forfeiting annual leave time. (Note: Supervisors may not be able to approve time-off requests that are made without adequate notice, regardless of whether the employee's annual leave balance is at or near the maximum accrual.)

Status of Annual Leave at Separation or Rehire – All unused accrued annual leave will be paid upon termination of employment, and will be paid at the employee's regular pay rate. A previous employee who is rehired will begin accruing annual leave from a zero balance. For purposes of calculating annual leave accrual rates, the rehired employee will receive credit for prior years of service.

H-6. Sick Leave Benefits

General – MRLS provides paid Sick Leave benefits to eligible employees, within established guidelines, to ease the financial burden when employees are required to be absent from their jobs because of illness or injury. Sick leave is a type of paid leave benefit, which is accrued by an eligible employee and utilized in restricted situations. It is a benefit provided by the Library, but is only available for legitimate illness or injury of the employee or a family member as defined below.

The fact that hours of paid sick leave are accrued and added to an employee's sick leave balance each pay period should not be interpreted as entitlement to use such paid sick leave without an acceptable reason or in an excessive manner. Employees are expected to act responsibly when using sick leave and not abuse this privilege. Frequent absences, excessive use of sick leave, patterned absences, failure to follow established reporting requirements, or failure to provide requested supporting documentation will result in an unsatisfactory attendance record that will be considered in the employee's performance evaluation and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

While annual leave may be used for a variety of purposes, sick leave is limited to medical absences and may not be used for other annual leave purposes. It may be granted for the following purposes:

- Personal illness or injury.
- Personal medical, dental, or optical appointment, examination, or treatment, which is necessary during working hours.
- To prevent exposing others to a contagious disease.
- Pregnancy, related conditions, and childbirth.
- To take a family member (see definition below) to a doctor or dentist when medically necessary.
- To provide physical or psychological care for a family member who is ill or incapacitated. This may include activities such as bedside care, visitation at a hospital, or providing emotional support in times of a serious medical situation, surgery, or death.
 - Note: It is recognized that the definition of "care" may be viewed differently by different individuals. This benefit is intended for serious situations where the employee's care is legitimately needed, and employees are expected to use good judgment in requesting time off. Any patterns of frequent or questionable requests will be addressed, and a physician's certificate may be requested to verify illness of individuals under the employee's care.
- For the death of a family member (refer to definition in [Section H-7](#)) when circumstances require more than three days of funeral leave (e.g., for out of state travel, to coordinate funeral arrangements).

Eligibility – Employees scheduled for 20+ hours per week are eligible to earn and accrue sick leave benefits. Eligible employees begin accruing sick leave benefits when hired.

Family Members – For purposes of this sick leave policy, a "family member" may be defined as a person who lives in the employee's household or any other person who plays a significant role in the life of the employee.

Rate of Accrual – Accrual rates are based on the number of hours the employee is regularly scheduled to as described below:

Table H.6-1. Sick Leave Accruals

Sick Leave Earned		Maximum Annual Carryover
Work 30 hours or More a week	8 hours/month	480 hours
Work 20-29.5 Hours a week	4 hours/month	240 hours

Calculation and Use of Sick Leave

- Sick leave must be earned (or accrued) before it can be taken, and is available for use in the pay period *after* it is accrued.
- Sick leave is paid at the employee's regular pay rate at the time the leave is taken. Sick leave does not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime.
- Overtime or additional hours are not included in the computation of sick leave accrual.
- Sick leave must be used in increments of 15 minutes (or 0.25 hour).
- Sick leave does not accumulate while an employee is on unpaid leave. For pay periods involving both paid and unpaid leave, employees will receive a prorated accrual of sick leave if they receive pay for at least 20% of their scheduled hours. No accrual will occur when less than 20% of scheduled hours is paid.

Requesting Use of Sick Leave – The procedure to request use of sick leave is described in [Section G-9](#) (Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off), and involves submitting a request form to the Supervisor. An employee who knows in advance of an upcoming medical situation (such as a doctor's appointment, surgery, or medical procedure) should submit the request form to the Supervisor as early as possible.

Before approving any request for time off, Supervisors must take into consideration a number of issues, including departmental staffing needs, urgency of the situation, and timeliness of the request. While Supervisors will make every effort to approve requests to use sick leave, if a request involving a non-emergency medical situation cannot be readily approved, the employee may be asked to reschedule.

Reporting an Absence – To report an unexpected absence, employees should follow the procedures outlined in [Section G-9](#) (Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off), which require the employee to notify the Supervisor as early as possible. If the employee cannot personally talk with the Supervisor, the employee should have someone else make the notification, then personally call and talk with the Supervisor as soon as circumstances permit. In addition, an employee who is absent for medical reasons should advise his or her Supervisor on a regular basis of the employee's status and estimated date-of-return. Medical absences may require verification from a physician.

For absences involving more than one (1) week, the employee should refer to [Section I-3](#) (Leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, or FMLA). If the absence involves more than two (2) weeks of time off, or if the employee is not eligible for coverage under the FMLA, the employee should also refer to [Section I-5](#) (Personal Leave of Absence).

Absences of More Than 3 Days – If a medical absence involves more than 3 workdays (whether consecutive or intermittent), the employee should also notify the Business Manager's Office. Although no further action may be involved, Human Resources must look at issues such as notification of FMLA status, availability of leave or disability benefits, the employee's ability to safely return to work, and other considerations. Human Resources can also help the employee to maintain confidentiality of the medical situation.

- Additional information pertaining to medical absences of more than one (1) week can be found in [Section I-3](#) (Leave under the FMLA).

An employee who has been absent but failed to contact the Supervisor, Director, or Business Manager's Office may be considered as having abandoned the position and resigned without notice. See [Section E-4](#) (Separations) for information on abandonment of position.

Certification by Physician – A medical certificate signed by a licensed physician may be required to substantiate a request for sick leave to support the following.

- Any period of absence due to illness consisting of more than three (3) consecutive or intermittent workdays.
- Any absence that would warrant confirmation of the employee's ability to safely resume work, or confirmation that there is no risk to the health or safety of others.
- A request for sick leave during a period when the employee is on annual leave, or when taken before or after a holiday or other scheduled day off.
- Leave of any duration if absence recurs frequently or habitually, or when it is suspected that an employee is abusing sick leave, provided the employee has been notified or warned that a medical certificate will be required.
- Sick leave used to care for a family member, as described in this section.

At the discretion of the Director, the Library may request that this verification come from a physician of the Library's choice (at the Library's expense). An employee who has been released to work is expected to report to work promptly as assigned.

Compensation and Benefits During Medical Absence – Employees must have enough accrued sick leave (or annual leave) hours to cover an absence. If they do not, the Business Manager's Office will assess the situation to determine whether the employee may qualify for an unpaid absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act or other legislation. Employees are encouraged to accumulate and maintain sufficient balances of sick leave time to be prepared for unexpected illness, injuries, or other emergencies.

Maximum Allowable Accumulation – Sick leave balances may carry over from year to year, up to a maximum of 480 hours. After reaching this maximum as described above, no additional leave will be credited until leave time is used and the balance falls below the maximum. Any leave above the maximum will be forfeited for retirement purposes. Upon retirement, any forfeited sick leave will be reported to the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) for use in calculating potential sick leave credit.

Status of Sick Leave at Separation or Rehire – There is no compensation for unused sick leave for any type of separation. However, upon retirement (as defined by the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia), any unused or forfeited sick leave will be reported to TRS for use in calculating potential service credit. For other separating employees, MRLS will hold accrued sick leave for a period of one year so that, if employees should be re-employed in a position with MRLS within one year after separation, they may retain the amount of sick leave accrued upon separation. This reinstatement of accrued sick leave will be allowed only once. Upon a second separation from MRLS employment, all sick leave credit is forfeited. If an employee separates from service and is not re-employed within one year of separation, all sick leave credit is forfeited.

Minimizing Exposure to Sickness – MRLS depends on its employees to be present and performing their duties each scheduled workday. However, it is understood that illnesses will occur. To promote quick recuperation and prevent spread of illness (such as a cold or flu) to other employees or to patrons, sick employees are encouraged to use their sick leave benefits to stay home and rest, and to visit a healthcare provider if needed. In the work environment, employees are encouraged to regularly clean surfaces that may come in contact with others (e.g., doorknobs, telephones, copiers, and computers).

H-6.1 Personal Leave Option

General – If an eligible employee, within the established guidelines, needs to take leave that does not appropriately fall in the Sick or Annual Leave category, MRLS will allow this employee the option of taking

personal days. This time will be deducted from their sick day balance and will not have the option of “carry over” to the next year. In order to be eligible for this option, an employee must notify the business manager at the beginning of the calendar year in order to arrange for these personal days.

Table H.6-1. Personal Leave Accruals

	Personal Leave	Carryover
Work 30 hours or more a week	Up to 3 days (24 hours)/year	0 hours
Work 20-29.5 hours a week	Up to 1.5 days (12 hours)/year	0 hours

This benefit is optional.

Approval for this time off for personal reasons must be approved by the employee’s supervisor and if the shift cannot be covered sufficiently, the time off can be postponed.

H-6.2 Birthday Leave

General – MRLS provides paid Birthday Leave to all employees, within established guidelines. Leave must be taken within the month of the employee’s birthday.

Birthday Leave	
Work 30 hours or more per week	8 hours
Work 20-29.5 hours per week	6 hours
Work less than 20 hours per week	4 hours

H-7. Funeral Leave Benefits

Upon approval by the Supervisor, MRLS will grant employees up to three (3) workdays of paid Funeral Leave for the employee’s absence in the event of death of a family member, within established guidelines.

Family Member – For purposes of this section, a “family member” includes the employee’s spouse, parent, child, sibling, aunt, uncle, niece, or nephew (including any “step,” “foster,” “half,” “grand,” “in-law,” or adoptive relationship), or any person who lives in the employee’s household. Special consideration may be given to any other person whose association with the employee was similar to any of the above relationships.

Eligibility – Employees are eligible to receive up to three (3) workdays of Funeral Leave benefits per occurrence or as otherwise approved. The value of each “day” is based on the number of hours the employee was scheduled to work on each of the days taken off.

Funeral leave typically involves consecutive days that are used immediately following a death. However, a leave may be postponed to a later date or taken at different times if (a) the reason for the later date is appropriate in relation to the death, (b) the leave is taken within a reasonable amount of time after the death, and (c) the later date is approved by the Supervisor. For example, an employee might request 1 day of leave to attend a relative’s funeral this week and a 2nd day of leave to attend a memorial service for the relative next month.

It is recognized that in some cases 3 days of funeral leave may not be sufficient time off. In such cases, employees may request use of other types of leave (such as annual or sick leave), in accordance with guidelines of such leave programs.

Procedure to Request Funeral Leave – Employees are responsible for requesting funeral leave from their Supervisor (either verbally or in writing) and for providing information that supports the request (e.g., dates of funeral arrangements, funeral location).

Payment of Funeral Leave Benefits – Funeral leave is paid at the employee's regular pay rate at the time the leave is taken. Funeral leave does not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime. Funeral Leave compensation will not be advanced to any employee.

Funeral Leave benefits are available only at the time of a death in the family. If an employee does not use any or all funeral leave at the time of the death (or within an approved timeframe), the time will be forfeited.

Funeral leave may not carry over from year to year, and is not payable at termination of employment.

H-8. Civil Leave Benefits

MRLS encourages employees to fulfill their civic responsibilities, such as jury duty, voting, or Library-related court appearances. Employees may be eligible for leave time with pay or without pay to perform required civic duties.

All employees who are required to perform jury duty or subpoenaed to appear in a legal proceeding must make every effort to minimize the time spent away from work, to request an on-call arrangement for appearance when possible, and to continually update their Supervisor (or designee) with their status and expected timeframe for return to work.

No employee will be discharged, disciplined, threatened, or otherwise penalized because of the employee's absence for the purpose of a judicial proceeding in response to a subpoena, summons for jury duty, or other court order or process that requires the employee's attendance at the judicial proceeding.

Jury Duty – Upon receiving a summons to serve on jury duty, the employee should present a copy of the Jury Summons to the Supervisor as soon as possible so that departmental work schedules can be modified to accommodate the summons. Employees must report to work when the jury is not meeting, as well as before and after the daily tour of jury duty, as time and circumstances warrant. In all cases, employees must continually keep their Supervisor informed of their status.

All employees are eligible for civil leave with pay and may keep any compensation paid to them by the court.

Voting – MRLS encourages employees to exercise their individual right to vote by participating in elections. Employees are encouraged to take advantage of advance voting. On election days, most employees should be able to vote either before or after their regular work schedule. An employee may be eligible to receive up to two hours of Civil Leave for the purpose of voting in an election if the employee (a) is a registered voter and (b) does not have sufficient time outside regular working hours within which to vote.

MRLS-Related Court Appearances – MRLS employees who are subpoenaed or ordered to appear before a court, public body, or commission in connection with Library business will be granted civil leave with pay for such period as required by the court.

However, civil leave may **not** be used for any employee absences to appear in private litigation not associated with MRLS or for any case in which the employee is charged with a crime. In addition, any employee who files a legal action against MRLS may not use civil leave for the pursuit of such a lawsuit. In such situations, the employee may request use of annual leave, in accordance with guidelines of the leave program.

H-9. Administrative Leave Benefits

MRLS may grant administrative leave with pay for an absence involving an administrative decision or a situation for which other leaves do not apply. Use of administrative leave is strictly at the discretion of MRLS management.

Examples of situations that may warrant administrative leave include but are not limited to:

- Closure of offices due to inclement weather, adverse conditions, or emergency situations.
- Investigation into possible wrongdoing, misconduct, or violation of law.
- Pending results of a test, examination, drug screening, or other assessment relating to employee's ability to perform essential functions of the job.
- Removal of an employee from the work environment for administrative reasons.
- Any instance where it is considered to be in the interest of the employee or MRLS.

When MRLS authorizes the use of administrative leave for a situation, the employee will be paid his or her normal rate of pay for the duration of the leave. Time designated as administrative leave will not be charged to an employee's paid leave. Administrative leave time does not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime.

An employee on administrative leave is expected to be in a work-ready status at all times during his or her regularly scheduled time and must be able to report to work with short notice. A failure to return to work when the administrative leave is concluded or cancelled may result in disciplinary action.

H-10. Library Privileges and Responsibilities

Photocopying and Faxing – Library employees are allowed, within reason, to make black and white photocopies, to print black and white documents, or to fax personal items to local phone numbers (no long distance calls) free of charge. Employees are expected to use good judgment and not abuse these privileges. Any instances of excessive or inappropriate copying, printing, or faxing will be addressed as a disciplinary issue.

Staff Borrowing – Library employees are encouraged to use the Library. As an employee benefit for active staff members each employee's library card will be assigned "staff" status and staff members may keep materials for a specified period beyond the due date without fines accruing. Staff privileges expire when the employee separates from MRLS employment.

Each employee holds a position of trust as a steward of the Library's resources. Not only are employees expected to follow the same rules and regulations that apply to library patrons, but they are held to a higher standard because of their level of access to library materials, funds, and automated systems. Following are guidelines for staff use of library materials:

- Any item being used for personal purposes must be properly checked out on a personal library card. Items being used for work-related purposes should be checked out on the appropriate departmental library card, and such cards may not be used for personal use.
- Although overdue fines will be waived for a specified time, employees should make every effort to return items when due. In all cases, items must be returned within ten (10) days of the due date.
- Employees are welcome to check out or reserve new materials, but should keep in mind that other patrons may be waiting for these items and should return them on time. Employees should never use their knowledge of library operations to give themselves an advantage of access to new or popular materials.
- Renewals for staff members are subject to the same rules as for patrons (e.g., limits on number of renewals, blocks on renewing items with hold requests).
- Employees are responsible for any lost or damaged materials.
- Any fines or fees on an employee's account (e.g., lost or damaged materials, ILL fees) must be paid in the same manner as for any other patron.
- To avoid any potential conflict of interest, employees may not handle any payment transactions on their own account.
- Employees are expected to take responsibility for notifying their Supervisor (or a Public Services Supervisor) whenever a situation exists that may be considered inappropriate use of their staff library privileges.

Abuse of Staff Privileges – It is unacceptable and unethical for staff members to give themselves (or family members or friends) privileges that other patrons do not have, particularly when their actions prevent other patrons from having access to materials. Staff “perks” are limited to exemption from fines (for a specified time). Staff members are not exempt from adhering to renewal limits, returning items within 10 days of the due date, or paying for lost items. Staff members may not reorder a hold request queue for their benefit or override a block for their own benefit. If staff members have an exceptional situation that warrants an override that would be offered to any patron, they should ask a Public Services Supervisor to handle the transaction for them. Staff members may not handle their own payment transactions.

If an employee abuses his or her staff borrowing privileges, inappropriately uses his or her access to library materials, or manipulates the Library’s automated system for personal benefit, the employee’s staff privileges will be revoked. The library card will revert to “patron” status, and any outstanding fees may result in the account being sent to a collection agency. The employee may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination. If applicable, the employee may be subject to criminal prosecution.

H-11. Librarian Certification

A State of Georgia License of Librarianship is required for MRLS’s professional librarian positions. Librarian certificates are issued by the Georgia State Board for the Certification of Librarians, and can be obtained and renewed through the Secretary of State’s Office at <http://sos.georgia.gov/plb/librarians>. Certificates expire on June 30 of each even-numbered year.

Upon receiving a new certification, the employee should submit a copy of the document to the Business Manager’s Office, to be placed in the employee’s personnel file.

H-12. Direct Deposit of Paychecks

MRLS employees are required to enroll for direct deposit of their paychecks.

H-13. Workers’ Compensation Insurance

All MRLS employees are covered under the provisions of the Georgia’s Workers’ Compensation Act. Workers’ compensation is an accident insurance program provided by MRLS (currently under the umbrella of Mountain Regional Government) which provides medical, rehabilitation, and income benefits to employees who are injured on the job. This is an employer-paid insurance coverage, and there is no employee contribution. All workers’ compensation issues are governed by rules and regulations of the Workers’ Compensation Act, as well as by procedures established by the County’s workers’ compensation third-party administrator and the Mountain Regional Loss Prevention Program. Employee rights and responsibilities are explained on the pink Workers’ Compensation notices posted on staff bulletin boards. Refer to [Section I-6](#) for details on workers’ compensation procedures, including reporting injuries, use of designated physicians, and compensation during absence, and return to work.

H-14. Social Security and Medicare

MRLS matches each employee’s payment of Social Security and Medicare taxes, as required by the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). Amounts withheld from each employee’s taxable wages are calculated by applying a fixed rate, which is determined annually by the federal government. The Social Security tax is applied only on wages up to a taxable wage base limit, which is adjusted annually. There is no Medicare wage limit.

H-15. Unemployment Insurance

MRLS employees are covered under the Employment Security Law of Georgia. This law provides unemployment insurance benefits as temporary income for workers who are unemployed through no fault of

their own. Eligibility for benefits is determined through information requested by the Georgia Department of Labor. MRLS pays the entire cost of unemployment insurance benefits.

H-16. Staff Development and Training

The Library strongly believes that staff participation in continuing education and professional organizations will benefit each individual professionally as well as benefiting the Library. To this end, staff members are mandated to participate in job-related training opportunities and in activities of professional organizations, as library duties and funding permit.

With approval of the Supervisor, and the Director, a limited amount of time and funding may be allowed for training, professional activities, library conferences and workshops, or other events, based on job relevance and the cost of the event.

Attendance at any event is not automatic, and consideration will be given to issues such as: nature of event, relevance of event to employee's job, number of employees interested in attending, cost of event, availability of funds, impact on department operations and work schedules, or other issues. Attendance at such events may be rotated among staff members. Required job training will take precedence over other staff development opportunities. To maximize the value of the Library's training funds, employees who attend conferences and training events are asked to share the information acquired at the event with their Supervisor and other staff members.

Employees who are interested in attending a specific conference or workshop, or feel that they could benefit from a specific training opportunity, should discuss the situation with their Supervisor. Information on staff training and development guidelines and procedures can be found at the staff website.

Continuing Education for Librarians – Employees who are professional librarians are required to maintain records of their continuing education. Although MRLS may pay for some or all continuing education and may maintain training records for internal purposes, MRLS does not provide documentation to external agencies. Each librarian is personally responsible for being aware of the rules of the Georgia State Board for the Certification of Librarians in terms of educational requirements and for maintenance of records required to maintain his or her individual librarian certification.

SECTION I – LEAVES OF ABSENCE

I-1. Types of Leave

MRLS recognizes several types of leave that are available to employees. The nature of the leave and the availability of leave benefits will determine whether a leave will be paid or unpaid.

Paid Leave Benefits – One definition of “leave” is paid time off provided by MRLS as an employee benefit. Eligible employees earn leave during their employment and may use accrued leave as compensation during an absence. Types of paid leave benefits include, but are not limited to,

- Annual Leave Benefits
- Sick Leave Benefits
- Funeral Leave Benefits
- Civil Leave Benefits
- Administrative Leave Benefits

Leave benefits can be used to compensate routine absences (e.g., vacation, medical appointments, brief illnesses) as well as longer leaves of absence (described below). See [Section H](#) of this Manual for a description of each of the above paid leave benefits.

Leaves of Absence – Another definition of “leave” is a period of absence from work, whether short-term or long-term, paid or unpaid. This section of the Manual describes the following leaves of absence:

- Leave of Absence Under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) includes several types of leave:
 - Family Leave for Birth and Care of Newborn Child
 - Family Leave for Adoption or Foster Care
 - Family Leave to Care for Employee’s Spouse, Child, or Parent with a Serious Health Condition
 - Medical Leave when Employee cannot work because of a Serious Health Condition
 - Military Family Leave for a Qualifying Exigency
 - Military Family Leave as a Military Caregiver
- Military Leave of Absence
- Personal Leave of Absence
- Workers’ Compensation Leave for On-The-Job Injury
- Furlough Leave

I-2. General Guidelines Governing Any Leave

Any employee taking leave under a specific leave provision must comply with the following:

1. Follow appropriate procedures to request a leave and return from a leave.
2. Communicate regularly with the Supervisor or the [Business Manager’s Office](#) regarding the status of the leave.
3. Submit any required documentation related to the absence and the return to work.
4. Make any required payments for benefits to be continued during the leave.

Employees are expected to have accrued a sufficient amount of paid leave benefits to cover each absence. A “leave without pay” is not generally available to employees, except if approved pursuant to the applicable leave policies set forth in this manual. If an employee seeks an absence as leave without pay, or fails to specify the type of leave benefits to be used during an absence, MRLS will generally charge the absence to any paid leave benefits accrued by the employee, as appropriate to the nature of the absence.

Some employees are not eligible for paid leave benefits, so all absences are without pay. Short-term absences can be requested by submitting a request for time off to the supervisor. For requests involving more than two (2) weeks of time off, refer to Section I-5.

When to Contact Business Office – Other than for routine vacation, when an absence involves more than 3 days, or unusual circumstances (such as medical accommodation, work restrictions, or intermittent absences), it is important for all employees to contact the Business Office to review their unique situations. Absences involve a number of considerations, such as compensation during the absence, documentation to substantiate the absence, ability to safely return to work, availability of benefits, eligibility for disability, payment of premiums during absence, eligibility for coverage under FMLA or other laws, or other details. The Business Manager will explain what is available to the employee and what is required of the employee, and can help in maintaining confidentiality about an employee's medical situation.

Status of Benefits During Leave – During the paid portion of a leave, benefits such as accruable leave, holidays, and insurances will continue. During any unpaid portion of a leave, benefits such as accruable leave and holidays will be discontinued, and the status of benefits such as insurances will vary depending on the type of leave and any laws governing that leave. (Refer to other sections of this manual for details on specific types of leave.)

Duplicate Use of Benefits – Employees are not allowed to use two different types of paid benefits for the same time off. For example, if a holiday occurs while an employee is on paid medical leave, the employee cannot receive both holiday pay and sick leave pay for the day in question. (In this example, the employee would receive holiday pay for the holiday, and his or her sick leave benefits would not be reduced by the number of holiday hours occurring during the absence.) This rule applies to all types of leaves, except for workers compensation absences.

I-3. Leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take job-protected leave (i.e., time off) in a defined 12-month period for specified family and medical reasons (for either 12 or 26 weeks, based on the type of leave). As a covered employer, MRLS complies with all provisions of the FMLA. If the policies set forth in this Manual conflict or come into conflict with the FMLA as it presently exists or is amended from time to time, the provisions contained in the FMLA shall control. Use of FMLA leave will not be used as a negative factor in employment actions such as hiring, promotions, or disciplinary actions.

Leave under FMLA does not replace other authorized leaves. MRLS requires that any leave under FMLA be taken concurrently with use of available paid leave benefits (except for workers' compensation absences; see [Section I-6](#)). Employees should contact the [Business Manager's Office](#) for questions relating to FMLA.

Definitions – For purposes of the FMLA, the following definitions apply:

- **Contingency Operation** – A military operation or action in which members of the armed forces are (or may become) involved, or that results in the call to, order to, or retention on active duty of members of the uniformed services.
- **Covered Active Duty** – For members of the Regular Armed Forces, duty during deployment with the Armed Forces to a foreign country. For members of the Reserve components of the Armed Forces (members of the National Guard and Reserves), duty during deployment with the Armed Forces to a foreign country under a call or order to active duty in support of a contingency operation. Deployment to a foreign country includes deployment to international waters.
- **Covered Service Member** – (a) A current member of the Armed Forces (including the National Guard or Reserves) who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy, or is in outpatient status, or is on the temporary disability retired list for a serious injury or illness; or (b) A veteran of the Armed Forces (including the National Guard or Reserves) who is undergoing medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy for a serious injury or illness and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable within the five-year period before the eligible employee first takes FMLA military caregiver leave to care for the covered veteran.
- **Immediate Family Member** – An employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent. The term "parent" does not include a parent "in-law". The terms "son" or "daughter" do not include individuals age 18 or over unless they are "incapable of self-care" because of mental or physical disability that limits one or more of the "major life activities" as defined under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

- **Intermittent or Reduced-Schedule Leave** – Taking leave in blocks of time or by reducing the normal weekly or daily work schedule. If the need for intermittent leave is foreseeable based upon planned medical treatment, the Library may require the employee to transfer temporarily to an alternative position with equivalent pay and benefits, so as to better accommodate the recurring periods of leave.
- **Military Member** – An employee’s spouse, child, or parent who is on active duty or called to active duty status.
- **Next of Kin** – The nearest blood relative of an individual.
- **Parent** – the biological, adoptive, step or foster parent of an employee, or any other individual who stood in loco parentis to an employee when the employee was a child (but does not include “in-law”).
- **Rolling 12-Month Period** – A 12-month period measured backwards from the date an employee uses any leave under the FMLA. Under the “rolling” 12-month period, each time an employee takes FMLA leave, the remaining leave entitlement would be the balance of the 12 weeks (or 26 weeks, if applicable) which has not been used during the immediately preceding 12 months.
- **Serious Health Condition** – An illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves: (a) an overnight stay in a medical care facility; or (b) continued treatment by a health care provider for a condition that either prevents the employee from performing the employee’s job functions or prevents the qualified family member from participating in school or other daily activities.
- **Serious Injury or Illness** – (a) In the case of an injury or illness incurred by a member of the Armed Forces, National Guard, or Reserves in line of duty on active duty in the Armed Forces (or existed before the beginning of the member’s active duty and was aggravated by service in line of duty on active duty in the Armed Forces) and that may render the member medically unfit to perform the duties of the member’s office, grade, rank, or rating. (b) In the case of a veteran who was a member of the Armed Forces, National Guard, or Reserves at any time during the period of 5 years preceding the date on which the veteran undergoes that medical treatment, recuperation, or therapy, a qualifying injury or illness that was incurred by the member in line of duty on active duty in the Armed Forces (or existed before the beginning of the member’s active duty and was aggravated by service in line of duty on active duty in the Armed Forces) and that manifested itself before or after the member became a veteran.
- **Son or Daughter** – A biological, adopted, or foster child, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child of a person standing in loco parentis. In the case of a Family leave described in Items 1 through 3 of this section (below), the son or daughter must be either (a) under 18 years of age, or (b) 18 years of age or older and incapable of self-care because of a mental or physical disability at the time the leave would commence.
- **Spouse** – A husband or wife, as recognized under the law of the place in which the marriage was entered into (or the “place of celebration”), and not the law of the state in which the employee resides. This definition applies to all legally married couples, whether opposite-sex or same-sex, or married under common law. It also includes a husband or wife in a marriage that was validly entered into outside of the United States if it could have been entered into in at least one state.
- **Veteran** – A person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.

Eligibility – To be eligible for FMLA benefits, an employee must have worked for MRLS for at least 12 months (not necessarily consecutive) and must have worked at least 1,250 hours in the rolling 12-month period preceding the leave. (Employees working fewer than 25 hours per week will generally not meet FMLA eligibility requirements. However, for absences involving more than two weeks, refer to [Section I-5](#), Personal Leave of Absence.) Time in the military service covered under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) will count towards fulfilling FMLA eligibility requirements, and MRLS will count the months and hours that employees would have worked if not for their military service.

Types of Leave Under FMLA – During a rolling 12-month period, MRLS will grant eligible employees up to 12 workweeks of job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons, and up to 26 workweeks of job-protected leave for servicemember care. Such leaves may be paid, unpaid, or a combination of paid and unpaid leave, depending on the circumstances of the leave and availability of paid leave benefits. Qualifying reasons for leave under FMLA include the following:

1. **Family Leave** – Up to 12 workweeks for **birth and care** of the employee's newborn son or daughter.
 - Leave for birth or care of a newborn may not be taken on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis. (Note: MRLS may consider a request for intermittent or reduced schedule leave if it involves a regular or predictable schedule and if department operations can accommodate the absence.)
 - Entitlement to this leave expires at the end of the 12-month period beginning on the date of birth; therefore, this leave must conclude within 12 months of the date of birth.
2. **Family Leave** – Up to 12 workweeks for placement of a son or daughter with the employee for **adoption or foster care**.
 - Leave for adoption or foster care may not be taken on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis. (Note: MRLS may consider a request for intermittent or reduced schedule leave if it involves a regular or predictable schedule and if department operations can accommodate the absence.)
 - Entitlement to this leave expires at the end of the 12-month period beginning on the date of placement for adoption or foster care; therefore, this leave must conclude within 12 months of the date of placement.
3. **Family Leave** – Up to 12 workweeks **to care for the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent** (but not a parent in-law) **with a serious health condition**.
 - Intermittent or reduced-schedule leave may not be taken unless medically necessary. Any employee who requests intermittent leave for planned medical treatment must try to schedule treatment so as not to unduly disrupt work operations.
4. **Medical Leave** – Up to 12 workweeks when the **employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition**.
 - Intermittent or reduced-schedule leave may not be taken unless medically necessary. Any employee who requests intermittent leave for planned medical treatment must try to schedule treatment so as not to unduly disrupt work operations.
5. **Military Family Leave: Qualifying Exigency** – Up to 12 workweeks for any **qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, child, or parent is on covered active duty** (or has been notified of an impending call or order to covered active duty) in the Armed Forces in support of a contingency operation.
 - Examples of qualifying exigencies include: Addressing issues arising from short notice deployment (up to 7 days prior to deployment); attending military events or related activities; making childcare arrangements; making financial or legal arrangements; attending counseling; spending time with a military member on short-term rest and recuperation leave (up to 15 days); attending post-deployment activities; addressing issues arising from death of a military member; arranging care for a military member's parent who is incapable of self-care when the care is necessitated by the member's covered active duty; or other events as agreed upon by the employee and employer.
 - Intermittent or reduced-schedule leave may be taken.
6. **Military Family Leave: Military Caregiver** – Up to 26 workweeks **to care for a covered (injured or ill) servicemember** who is the employee's spouse, child, parent, or next of kin.
 - This type of leave is only available during a single 12-month period. The "single 12-month period" begins on the first day the employee takes military caregiver leave and ends 12 months after that date, regardless of the method used by the employer to determine the employee's 12 workweeks of leave entitlement for other FMLA-qualifying reasons.
 - During a single 12-month period, an employee is limited to a combined total of 26 workweeks of leave for any FMLA-qualifying reasons. Up to 12 of the 26 weeks can be for FMLA-qualifying reasons other than military caregiver leave.
 - Military caregiver leave is available to an employee once per veteran, per serious injury or illness. The employee may take an additional 26 weeks of leave in a different 12-month period for the same veteran if the veteran has another serious injury or illness.

- Intermittent or reduced-schedule leave may not be taken unless medically necessary. Any employee who requests intermittent leave for planned medical treatment must try to schedule treatment so as not to unduly disrupt work operations.

Procedure to Request Leave under FMLA – For foreseeable leave, employees must provide 30-day advance notice of the need to take FMLA leave by submitting a request for time off to their Supervisor. For unforeseeable leave, notice must be given as soon as possible (generally within one or two days of learning of the need for leave) and may be given to the Supervisor or [Business Manager's Office](#). All requests should reflect the reason for the requested leave (with sufficient details to determine applicability of FMLA), as well as the anticipated start date and duration of the leave. Employees are responsible for ensuring that all required forms and documentation are submitted to the Business Manager's Office on a timely basis.

MRLS is responsible for designating whether a leave is FMLA-qualifying, based on information provided by the employee. Once MRLS knows that a leave is for an FMLA-qualifying reason, MRLS will notify the employee within five business days that the leave is designated as FMLA leave and will count against the employee's leave entitlement. If an employee fails to explain the reasons for a leave, the leave may be denied. If MRLS learns after a leave has begun that the leave is for an FMLA purpose (e.g., a serious injury occurs during a vacation, or a minor illness turns into a serious health condition), the applicable portion of the leave may be retroactively counted as FMLA leave.

While on leave, the employee is expected to follow normal call-in procedures to report to the Supervisor or the Business Manager's Office on his or her status (such as progress in recovery from a health condition) and anticipated date of return to work. If circumstances should change so that the employee may need a longer or shorter absence than originally requested, the employee must provide reasonable notice (i.e., within 2 days) of the changed circumstances.

Intermittent Leave or Reduced Schedule Leave – Leave for childbirth, adoption, or foster care may not be taken intermittently or on a reduced schedule (unless specifically approved by MRLS). Leave for a serious health condition of a qualifying family member or of the employee may not be taken on an intermittent basis or on a reduced leave schedule unless medically necessary. The taking of any leave intermittently or on a reduced schedule basis shall reduce the total amount of FMLA leave that has been approved for the eligible employee according to the actual hours of leave taken. (For example, if an eligible employee takes 10 hours of leave intermittently over 20 business days, the employee's bank of available FMLA leave will be reduced only by 10 hours and not by 20 days.)

Compensation During Leave – A leave under FMLA may be a paid leave, an unpaid leave, or a combination of both, depending on the nature of the absence and the availability of paid leave benefits. MRLS requires that any leave under FMLA be taken concurrently with use of available paid leave benefits (except for workers' compensation absences; see [Section I-6](#)). The type of paid leave benefits used (i.e., sick, annual, or a combination thereof) will be based on the nature of the absence. Employees must use their accrued paid leave benefits until the benefits are exhausted or the leave is concluded, whichever occurs first. If paid leave benefits are exhausted before the leave is concluded, the employee will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence for the remainder of the leave period.

Reporting Leave Time – Employees should continue to use time sheets to report their status on a daily basis, with worked time recorded as usual, and non-worked time recorded in the appropriate columns (e.g., annual leave, sick leave). As with annual leave and sick leave, leave time under FMLA is used in increments of 0.25 hour). All time taken off in relation to the FMLA-qualifying event (whether paid or unpaid) should be reflected by noting "FMLA" in the explanatory column at right. Time off should be recorded on each day the employee misses a scheduled work shift (unless the employee makes up missed work time later in the week), with available leave benefits applied in the order that workdays were missed.

Status of Benefits During Leave – During the paid portion of any leave, employees will continue to accrue paid leave benefits (such as annual and sick leave) and receive holiday pay for holidays that occur during the paid portion of the leave. During any unpaid portion of a leave, employees will no longer accrue paid leave benefits and will not receive holiday pay for any holidays occurring during the unpaid leave.

During any leave under FMLA (paid or unpaid), the employee's group health and dental insurance will be maintained at the same level and under the same conditions as if the employee had continued to work. MRLS will continue to pay the employer's portion of such insurance premiums. Employees must continue to pay their portion of premiums (if any), through payroll deduction or by submitting payment to MRLS in a timely manner. If a payment is more than 30 days late, the employee's coverage may be dropped for the duration of the leave. If an employee fails to return to work for reasons other than (a) continuation, recurrence, or onset of a serious health condition of the employee or immediate family, (b) care for a covered servicemember, or (c) other conditions beyond the control of the employee, MRLS will require the employee to reimburse any amount paid by MRLS for the employee's health insurance premium during the unpaid leave period.

If an employee contributes to life insurance, disability insurance, or any other benefit plan, MRLS will continue to make payroll deductions while the employee is on paid leave. To continue coverage during unpaid leave, the employee must make arrangements to pay the employee's portion of premiums to MRLS. If the employee fails to continue payments, MRLS may discontinue coverage during the unpaid leave. MRLS may recover any costs incurred for paying the employee's share of premiums, whether or not the employee returns to work.

Leave time under FMLA (whether paid or unpaid) will be treated as continuous service for the purpose of determining eligibility for longevity pay, service awards, and accrual of annual leave. Treatment of leave time under other benefit programs (such as for calculating retirement service credit or insurance waiting periods) will be determined by the respective benefit provider or plan administrator.

Certification of Serious Health Conditions – An eligible employee who requests leave for a serious health condition of the employee or a qualifying family member shall submit certification from an appropriate health care provider to the Business Manager's Office when requesting Leave. Certification shall be sufficient if it states:

- The date on which the serious health condition commenced;
- The probable duration of the treatment or condition;
- The estimated amount of time the employee needs to care for the qualifying family member or a statement of the extent to which the employee is unable to perform the essential functions of the employee's position.

Certification of Serious Health Conditions – Intermittent Leave – An eligible employee who requests intermittent leave for a serious health condition of the employee or a qualifying family member shall submit certification from an appropriate health care provider to the [Business Manager's Office](#) when requesting Leave. Certification shall be sufficient if it states:

- For leave on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis for planned medical treatment of the employee's or a covered family member's serious health condition, information sufficient to establish the medical necessity for such intermittent or reduced schedule Leave and an estimate of the dates and duration of such treatments and any periods of recovery;
- For leave on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis for the employee's serious health condition, including pregnancy, that may result in unforeseeable episodes of incapacity, information sufficient to establish the medical necessity for such intermittent or reduced schedule Leave and an estimate of the frequency and duration of the episodes of incapacity; and

For leave on an intermittent or reduced schedule basis to care for a covered family member with a serious health condition, a statement that such Leave is medically necessary to care for the family member, as described in 29 C.F.R. §§ 825.124 and 825.203(b), which can include assisting in the family member's recovery, and an estimate of the frequency and duration of the required Leave.

Certification of Qualifying Exigency for Military Family Leave – MRLS requires certification of the qualifying exigency for Military Family Leave. The employee must respond to such a request within fifteen days of the request or provide a reasonable explanation for the delay. Failure to provide certification may result in a denial of continuation of Leave. This certification will be provided using the United States Department of Labor Certification of Qualifying Exigency for Military Family Leave.

Certification for Serious Injury or Illness of Covered Servicemember for Military Family Leave – MRLS requires certification for the serious injury or illness of a covered servicemember. The employee must respond to such a request within fifteen days of the request or provide a reasonable explanation for the delay. Failure to provide certification may result in a denial of continuation of leave. This certification will be provided using the United States Department of Labor Certification for Serious Injury or Illness of Covered Servicemember.

In any case in which MRLS has reasonable doubt as to the validity of the certification, MRLS may require the employee to obtain the opinion of a second health care provider at the expense of MRLS. If the second opinion differs from the original certification, MRLS may require the employee to obtain the opinion of a third health care provider designated or approved jointly by MRLS and the employee, at the expense of MRLS. The opinion of the third health care provider shall be final and binding on MRLS and the employee.

MRLS may also require that an employee obtain subsequent recertifications on a reasonable basis.

Failure to Provide Certification or Recertification – For foreseeable leave, if an employee fails to provide timely certification as requested (i.e., within 15 days, if practicable), MRLS may delay the taking of FMLA leave until the required certification is provided. For unforeseeable leave or for recertification, if an employee fails to provide timely certification (within 15 days of request, or as soon as reasonably possible), MRLS may delay continuation of FMLA leave. If the employee never produces certification, the leave is not FMLA.

Return to Work – An employee who returns to work within the 12-week (or 26-week) time period specified will be returned to his or her former position (or a position of equal pay, benefits, and other employment terms and conditions), provided that the employee has complied with the terms of the leave and reported for return to duty at the appropriate time. Use of leave under FMLA will not result in the loss of any employment benefit that the employee earned or was entitled to before using (but not necessarily during) FMLA leave.

An employee returning from leave due to his or her serious health condition must provide medical certification that the employee is fit for duty and able to return to work. Unless the employee provides either a fitness-for-duty certification or a new medical certification for a serious health condition at the time FMLA leave is concluded, the employee may be terminated.

If an employee is unable to perform an essential function of the position because of a physical or mental condition, including the continuation of a serious health condition, the employee has no right to restoration to another position under the FMLA; however, terms of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) may apply. (Refer to [Section A-4](#) for details on the ADA.)

Failure to Return to Work – Employees who have exhausted their FMLA leave but are unable to return to work will no longer have FMLA protections of leave or of job restoration.

An employee who fails to return to duty for three (3) consecutive days following expiration of an approved leave of absence will be deemed to have abandoned his or her position and to have resigned without notice as of the end of the third day (unless an acceptable reason is given or an extended leave is approved).

In certain cases where an employee is unable to return from leave when scheduled, MRLS may consider a request for an extended leave of absence that is not covered under FMLA (See [Section I-5](#) for details regarding personal leave of absence). Extensions are not automatic, and employees should not assume that every request will be approved. Each employee's leave situation is unique, and the library must take a number of issues into consideration (e.g., likelihood of employee returning to work shortly, operational needs of the department). Employees should contact the Business Managers office to discuss the options available to them.

Concurrent Workers' Compensation Leave and FMLA Leave – If an employee qualifies for workers' compensation benefits, and the workers' compensation leave is for an FMLA-qualifying reason, the employee's workers' compensation leave and the FMLA leave will run concurrently. Refer to [Section I-6](#) for details relating to workers' compensation leave.

Spouses Employed by Same Employer – For spouses who are eligible for leave under the FMLA and are both employed by MRLS, the aggregate number of work weeks of leave to which both may be entitled may be limited to twelve (12) work weeks during any 12-month rolling period, in the case where leave is taken for childbirth, adoption, foster care, or to care for a sick parent (as "parent" is defined at 29 C.F.R. § 825.122(c)). The aggregate number of workweeks of leave to which both may be entitled will be limited to twenty-six (26) work weeks during any 12-month rolling period, in the case where leave is taken to care for a covered injured or ill servicemember.

Summary of Employee Responsibilities – The list below summarizes employee responsibilities in relation to leave under FMLA.

- Notify MRLS of the need for leave (30 days notice if leave is foreseeable, or as soon as possible if unforeseeable). Comply with guidelines for requesting leave.
- Advise MRLS if leave is being requested on an intermittent or reduced leave schedule basis.
- Provide medical certification for leave taken as a result of a serious health condition.
- Coordinate and comply with arrangements to pay group health benefit premiums.
- Periodically advise MRLS of the employee's status (such as progress in medical recovery) and intent to return to work at the conclusion of leave.
- Notify MRLS of any change in the circumstances for which leave is being taken.
- Provide MRLS with fitness for duty certification to return to work (when leave is for the employee's serious health condition).

Additional Information – FMLA makes it unlawful for any employer to (a) interfere with, restrain, or deny the exercise of any right provided under FMLA, or (b) discharge or discriminate against any person for opposing any practice made unlawful by FMLA or for involvement in any proceeding under or relating to FMLA. An employee may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Labor or may bring a private lawsuit against an employer. Additional information about the FMLA is available from the following:

- MRLS Business Managers Office
- The United States Department of Labor's FMLA poster (Employee Rights and responsibilities Under the Family and Medical Leave Act) posted (a) on staff bulletin boards at all MRLS locations,
- The website of the United States Department of Labor, Wage & Hour Division, at www.dol.gov/whd/fmla or 1-866-487-9243.

I-4. Military Leave

MRLS shall comply with the applicable State of Georgia law (O.C.G.A. § 38-2-279) and federal law (Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, or USERRA) for public employees. Any employee who is called up to active duty in any branch of the military service of the United States will be allowed leaves of absence and maintenance of rights and benefits consistent with state and federal law upon presentation of orders pursuant to such active duty.

An employee who is a member of the National Guard, an organized military reserve of the United States, or any employee who is otherwise engaged in the performance of military duty, and while going to and/or returning from such duty, shall be paid his or her salary or other compensation and will be allowed leaves of absence with pay for periods not to exceed eighteen (18) working days during any federal fiscal year (October 1 to September 30). This shall include attendance at training or service schools conducted by the armed forces training camps upon presentation of orders pursuant to such training.

Emergency Leave of Absence – Notwithstanding the foregoing leave limitation of eighteen (18) days, in the event the Governor of Georgia declares an emergency and orders an employee to State active duty as a member of the National Guard, such employee while performing such duty shall be paid his or her salary or other compensation as an employee for a period not exceeding thirty (30) days in any one federal fiscal year.

Compensation During Military Leave – When an employee is ordered to be on military duty or attend a service school in excess of the amount of paid leave time (as described above), the employee may use accrued annual leave toward such absence or may take a military leave without pay.

Status of Benefits During Military leave – Military leave time shall be considered as continuous employment with the library and will count towards all seniority rights and towards eligibility for FMLA leave. A returning employee shall also be entitled to any increase in salary (including market adjustment increases) or any advancement in grade, which would normally be accorded to the incumbent of the position, with the exception of any increases, or advancement in grade, which would normally be dependent on the meritorious performance of the duties of the position. Military leave time does not count as hours worked for the purpose of determining overtime.

Reinstatement After Military Leave – An employee reinstated after military service lasting 91 days or more will be promptly reemployed in the following order of priority:

1. In the job the employee would have held had he or she remained continuously employed, or in a position of equivalent seniority, status, and pay so long as the person is qualified for the job, or can become qualified after reasonable efforts by MRLS to qualify the person; or,
2. If the employee cannot become qualified for the position described in (1) above, in the employee's preservice position so long as he or she is qualified for the job or could become qualified after reasonable efforts by MRLS; or
3. If the employee cannot become qualified for the position in either (1) or (2), in any other position which is the nearest approximation of (1) for which the employee is qualified.

Procedure to Request Military Leave – Employees should submit a written request for military leave as soon in advance as is reasonable practical. The request should include the reason for leave, requested date to commence leave, and expected date of return. The written request should be accompanied by the official written orders or instructions requiring the military leave. If the period of absence is expected to exceed the maximum length of paid leave time (as described above), the employee should indicate whether accrued annual leave (if any) should be applied to the remaining absence.

Reemployment Procedure – An employee who has engaged in military service must, in order to be entitled to the reemployment rights set forth in federal and state law, submit an application for reemployment according to the following schedule:

1. If service is less than 31 days (or for the purpose of taking an examination to determine fitness for service) – The employee must report for reemployment at the beginning of the first full regularly scheduled working period on the first calendar day following completion of service and the expiration of eight (8) hours after a time for safe transportation back to the employee's residence.
2. If service is for 31 days to 180 days – The employee must submit an application for reemployment to the Business Manager no later than fourteen (14) days following the completion of service.
3. If service is more than 180 days – The employee must submit an application for reemployment to the Business Manager no later than ninety (90) days following the completion of service.
4. If the employee is hospitalized or convalescing from a service-connected injury – the employee must submit an application for reemployment to the Business Manager no later than two (2) years following completion of service.

I-5. Workers' Compensation Leave for On-The-Job Injury

All MRLS employees are covered by workers' compensation, an accident insurance program paid by MRLS (currently under the umbrella of Mountain Regional Government) which provides medical, rehabilitation, and income benefits to employees who are injured on the job. All workers' compensation issues are governed by rules and regulations of the Workers' Compensation Act, as well as by procedures established by the workers' compensation third-party administrator and the Mountain Regional Loss Prevention Program. Employee rights and responsibilities are explained on the pink Workers' Compensation notices posted on staff bulletin boards.

Reporting an Accident or Injury – Any employee who is injured on the job must immediately report such injury to the Supervisor, Director, or [Business Manager's Office](#), no matter how minor the injury may appear to be. A worker may lose the right to receive compensation if an accident is not reported promptly.

Post-Accident Drug Testing for Accidents or Injuries – All employees involved in work-related accidents or injuries are subject to post-accident drug screening. If an employee unjustifiably refuses to submit to a drug test following an on-the-job injury, there will be a presumption that the accident and injury were caused by alcohol or drugs; if the presumption is not overcome by other evidence, any claim for workers' compensation benefits would be denied.

Use of Designated Physicians – If medical attention by a physician is needed, the employee must select a doctor from the approved panel of physicians listed on the pink Workers' Compensation notice posted on staff bulletin boards. In an emergency, the employee may get temporary medical care from any doctor until the emergency is over, then the employee must get treatment from a doctor on the posted list. If the injury will prevent the employee from working, the employee must submit a physician's statement to that effect. MRLS reserves the right to refuse payment of medical services for any employee examined by a physician not listed on the approved panel of physicians. The panel physician may arrange for appropriate consultations, referrals, and other specialized services as the nature of the injury requires. If the employee is dissatisfied with the physician selected, he or she may request a one-time change of physician to a different physician on the panel. Further changes require advance approval of the employer/self-insurer or the State Board of Workers' Compensation.

Compensation During Workers' Compensation Absence – If the injury necessitates the employee's absence from work, MRLS will pay the employee his or her regular rate of pay for a maximum of seven (7) calendar days. Thereafter, MRLS's workers' compensation third-party administrator will determine if further compensation is warranted.

If an employee qualifies for workers' compensation benefits, and the workers' compensation leave is for an FMLA-qualifying reason, the employee's workers' compensation leave and the FMLA leave will run concurrently. (See [Section I-3](#) for information on leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, or FMLA).

Employees who are receiving workers' compensation benefits may also choose to use their paid sick or annual leave benefits during the absence, which would allow them to supplement the workers' compensation benefits and/or make payroll deductions during the absence. Employees who are in a non-pay status due to an injury will not accrue annual or sick leave, will not be eligible for holiday pay, and will need to make arrangements to pay any benefits premiums that would normally have been paid through payroll deduction. Workers' compensation leave is not considered worked time for the purpose of determining overtime.

An employee on workers' compensation who is working on a light-duty basis will be paid time-off for physician visits. The employee must provide a medical note from the employee's physician.

Return to Work – Any employee who has lost time due to a work-related injury or illness must obtain a doctor's statement for the time missed and a fitness-for-duty certification to return to work. Doctor's notes that specify work restrictions must be adhered to by both the employee and the Supervisor. An employee who has been released to work is expected to report to work promptly as assigned. (Refer to the "Return to Work" paragraph in [Section G-9](#)—Procedures for Reporting Absences and Requesting Time Off.) Special circumstances apply to employees who are recovering from a work-related injury, and it is important that these employees comply with the Georgia Workers' Compensation Act as well as the procedures established by the County's workers' compensation third-party administrator and the Mountain Regional Loss Prevention Program.

A workers' compensation leave may not exceed six (6) months. If an employee does not return to work by the end of six (6) months, employment will be terminated. If an employee has not already used all accrued paid leave by this time, the remaining paid leave will be handled the same as with any separation, with annual leave being paid out on a final paycheck and sick leave being forfeited. (For employees with ten or more years of service under the Teachers Retirement System of Georgia, unused sick leave will be reported for potential service credit.)

Off-Duty Activities – Neither MRLS nor its workers' compensation insurance carrier will be liable for payment of workers' compensation benefits for injuries that occur during an employee's voluntary participation in any off-duty recreational, social, or athletic activity sponsored by MRLS.

I-6. Furlough Leave

A furlough is a voluntary or involuntary temporary, unpaid leave of absence from employment. While a leave without pay is not a normal practice, MRLS may choose to implement voluntary or involuntary furloughs due to economic conditions or for other operational reasons.

- Involuntary furloughs involve employees being required to take a day off without pay. MRLS may choose to close on a day of involuntary furlough, or may designate a holiday to be an unpaid furlough day.
- Voluntary furloughs are only available during timeframes specified by MRLS, and are not allowed outside of such timeframes. Voluntary furlough should not be confused with “leave without pay,” which is not generally available to employees, except if approved pursuant to the applicable leave policies set forth in this Manual.

Because the purpose of a furlough is to reduce the employer’s operating costs, employees will receive no compensation and cannot use any paid leave benefits during a furlough. However, each employee’s paid leave benefits would continue to accrue as if the employee were on paid status, and there would be no break in service. MRLS would continue to pay its share of any benefit costs, and payroll deductions would continue to be made to cover the employee portion of applicable benefits. Since a furlough results in employees working fewer than their normally scheduled hours, employees should be aware that a furlough could negatively impact their eligibility for certain benefits. Before requesting a voluntary furlough, employees should contact the Business Manager’s Office to discuss the status of their benefits during the furlough.

The placement of an employee on involuntary furlough does not constitute grounds for complaint or appeal.

Exempt Employees – When an exempt employee takes an involuntary day of furlough, the employee is considered non-exempt for the week, and should not perform work on the furlough date. However, when an exempt employee voluntarily takes a day of furlough, the employee’s exempt status is not affected.

SECTION J – OTHER EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

J-1. Dress Code

Public image plays an important role in maintaining public support for MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM. A professional appearance goes far in inspiring confidence, a sense of trust, and an expectation of quality service. Everything an employee does reflects on the public's image of the Library, including the employee's choice of attire. Since all MRLS employees may encounter the public on any given workday, all employees are expected to follow this dress code. The dress code applies to all on-site and off-site functions at which the individual is representing MRLS.

Dress Standards – To maintain a public image consistent with a professional organization, MRLS has adopted a business casual dress code that calls for modest clothing in keeping with traditional standards for business attire. When away from work, an employee's choice of attire is a matter of personal preference. However, when the employee is working, attire must be within parameters that reflect the professional, neutral environment that MRLS strives to provide. If an employee must conduct personal business that involves non-professional apparel before or after work, the employee should plan to change clothes.

Guidelines for Attire – The goal is for each employee to present a neat, clean, modest, well-groomed, and businesslike appearance while at work. Rather than focusing on individual items of clothing, the employee should consider the overall image that he or she presents. It is possible for one aspect of an outfit to be considered somewhat casual, but when paired with professional clothing the overall appearance may be professional. (For example, a pair of twill slacks paired with a faded T-shirt would not be acceptable, but the same pair of pants paired with a blazer would be acceptable.)

Guidelines for Director and Supervisors– Under normal working days, the Director and Supervisors will be expected to adhere to the normal dress code. However, on days where either the Director or Supervisor is expected to meet with the Board of Trustees, Civic organizations, or anyone representing a funding agency, the dress should be more professional.

No dress code can address all contingencies, and this policy does not attempt to itemize all current and future clothing options. Employees are expected to use judgment in selecting work attire, keeping in mind that the physical activity involved in library work can cause clothing to shift. Following are guidelines to assist employees in determining whether attire is acceptable.

- Casual clothing should not be worn to work. Clothing that works well for the beach, yard work, exercise sessions, or sports events is typically not appropriate for work.
- Clothing that is tight, low-cut, or see-through is unacceptable. Cleavage should be minimal and conservative.
- Clothing should cover the chest, back, and midriff (including when standing, sitting, stooping, while arms are extended over the head, or while bending over), and should not reveal undergarments.
- Skirts should come to the top of the knee when standing. Keeping in mind one's appearance when sitting, skirts with deep slits or skirts that are short or tight should be avoided.
- All styles of pants or trousers must be below the knee when standing. Shorts and yoga pants are not allowed.
- Solid T-Shirts and library-related T-Shirts are preferable to those with other sayings, excessive graphics or logos. T-Shirts should not advocate a political or religious stance of any sort as we are tasked with being neutral and unbiased. T-Shirts should remain neat and tidy when visible to the public.
- Name badges should be worn at all times during work hours by anyone who deals directly with the public. Badges should be worn and positioned so they are easily visible.

Shoes and Footwear – For safety reasons, employees should wear shoes that are supportive and protect the feet from falling books or moving book carts. MRLS recommends wearing closed-toe, low-heel styles. Open-toe shoes or sandals are permissible, but offer less protection. Clean athletic shoes are acceptable.

Personal Grooming, Accessories, and Use of Fragrances – Good personal hygiene is expected at all times. Clothing should be clean, neat, and well kept (no holes, tears, patches, fading, stained, or frayed areas). All

hairstyles should be neat and professional. Facial hair should be clean and neatly trimmed. Jewelry, makeup, accessories, and other aspects of appearance should be subtle. There should be no excessive body piercing (other than ears). Fragrances, if used, must be mild; patrons and other employees may be allergic or sensitive to perfumes, colognes, or other fragrant products.

Compliance – Dressing appropriately is a condition of employment with MRLS. Failure to adhere to the dress code will be addressed as a policy violation. Repeated or obvious violations of this policy will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. In extreme cases, MRLS reserves the right to require an employee to leave work to change into appropriate clothing. Any time spent away from work would be without pay.

Employees are expected to comply with the above standards, and should not put their Supervisors in the position of having to police attire. If there is any doubt as to whether an aspect of attire is appropriate, the employee should assume it is not. Employees with questions about what is appropriate for their positions should contact their Supervisor. The Director may approve dress code exceptions in certain circumstances, and will consider such instances on a case-by-case basis. Exceptions may also be made to accommodate an individual's disability, ethnicity, or sincerely held religious belief if such accommodation does not pose an undue hardship for MRLS.

As stated above, no dress code can address all contingencies. MRLS reserves the right to interpret what is acceptable in the matter of overall appearance, and to interpret and apply this policy to other aspects of appearance not specifically covered in this policy.

J-2. Authorized Drivers and Use of Library Vehicles

The Library has established guidelines to authorize employees to operate a vehicle in connection with their Library responsibilities. These guidelines apply to any MRLS employee who drives an MRLS vehicle as well as any MRLS employees who drive their personal vehicles in the course of their employment (referred to in this document as an "MRLS driver").

License and Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) Requirements – All employees who drive an MRLS vehicle or who drive a personal vehicle in the course of their employment must possess and maintain a valid Georgia Driver's License for the class of vehicle being driven, and must maintain an MVR record that is within the guidelines described below.

1. Positions Involving Periodic Driving – Employees who periodically drive a vehicle while conducting MRLS business, but whose positions do not require driving as a regular duty, may request to become an authorized MRLS driver by providing a valid driver's license. Employees who have not been approved as an authorized MRLS driver may not drive an MRLS vehicle, and may not drive a personal vehicle in conducting MRLS business.
2. MVR Standards – All drivers must have a valid driver's license issued by the State of Georgia. Newly hired out-of-state employees must obtain a Georgia license within thirty (30) days of employment, and submit a copy of the new license to the Business Manager's Office. MRLS will evaluate MVRs based on the Georgia Department of Driver's Services Point System. (Points are issued for each driving offense and accumulate over a 24-month period, and licenses are suspended upon accumulating 15 points or upon committing certain offenses.)

Driver Responsibilities – All employees who drive an MRLS vehicle or who drive a personal vehicle while acting within the scope of their MRLS duties must adhere to the following responsibilities:

1. Immediately report any change in the status of the employee's driver's license.
2. Know and obey all traffic laws of the State of Georgia (and any jurisdiction in which the vehicle is being operated).
3. Practice safe and courteous driving at all times, and avoid traffic accidents.
4. Wear safety belts when the vehicle is being driven, and ensure that all passengers are wearing safety belts when the vehicle is being driven.

5. While operating a vehicle, may not use cell phones (or similar devices) and refrain from reading or sending text or email messages.
6. Never drive while intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled or illegal substance.
7. Immediately report any traffic citation received for any driving offense while using a company vehicle. Accept legal responsibility for citations, violations, and fines resulting from actions of the driver (to include promptly paying any speeding and illegal parking tickets).
8. Immediately report any accident or incident that involves an MRLS vehicle or that occurs when the employee is operating a personal vehicle while conducting MRLS business.
9. Submit to a drug and alcohol screening immediately following any accident that occurs while operating an MRLS vehicle or driving on Library business.
10. Report any vehicle damage or operational problems immediately; keep vehicle clean and neat.
11. Ensure that MRLS vehicles are used only for authorized purposes (as described in these guidelines).
12. Leave MRLS vehicles on site at assigned location unless approved by Director. (Transportation to or from site is the responsibility of the employee.)
13. Never use (or allow the use of) any form of tobacco or vaping products (i.e., electronic cigarettes) inside an MRLS vehicle, whether by driver or passengers.

Any employee who violates any of the responsibilities or requirements described herein will lose the right to operate an MRLS vehicle or to operate a personal vehicle to conduct MRLS business, and will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, including dismissal, as deemed appropriate.

Personal Vehicle – Employees who must drive to perform MRLS business should use an MRLS vehicle whenever possible. If an MRLS vehicle is not available, a personal vehicle may be used for official travel. To be approved as an authorized driver, employees must possess and maintain a valid Georgia Driver's License.

Approved employees who use a personal vehicle for authorized MRLS business may be reimbursed for mileage at current rates established by the State of Georgia. The reimbursement rate will be based on whether a Library vehicle is available for use, and is intended to reimburse employees for all vehicle expenses. Mileage for the normal commute between home and the assigned work location does not qualify for reimbursement. There are two rates of reimbursement depending on the availability of the company van. Please ask the Business Manager about current rates.

Authorized Use of MRLS Vehicle – The following constitutes authorized use of MRLS vehicles (unless specifically excepted by the applicable Director).

1. Transport of MRLS employees in conducting MRLS business activities.
2. Transport of MRLS visitors, consultants, contractors, vendors, or representatives of state, federal, or local government or of other libraries when in the direct interest of MRLS.
3. Transport of an employee on official travel status to or from authorized destinations (e.g., conferences, training facilities, hotels, restaurants, vendor establishments).

Unauthorized Use of MRLS Vehicle – The following are unauthorized uses of MRLS vehicles (unless specifically excepted by the applicable Director).

1. Operation of MRLS vehicle by a person not approved by MRLS to operate the vehicle.
2. Travel or tasks of a personal nature, not connected with accomplishment of official MRLS business.
3. Transport of family members, friends, associates, or other persons who are not employees of MRLS or serving the interest of MRLS.
4. Transport of hitchhikers.
5. Transport of items or materials that are unrelated to the conduct of official MRLS business; transport of unsafe materials such as acids, explosives, weapons, ammunition or highly flammable material; transport of any cargo that projects from the side, front, or rear of the vehicle in such a manner as to constitute an unsafe delivery.

6. Loan of vehicle for use in non-MRLS authorized functions or to persons not employed by MRLS.

J-3. Smokefree Workplace Policy

The use or inhalation of e-cigarettes or electronic cigarettes (“vaping”) is prohibited in library buildings and library vehicles. Smoking, tobacco use, and vaping are prohibited within 20 feet of any library entrance or exit, on loading docks, in courtyards, or in any of the demonstration gardens on library grounds. This policy applies to the use of any tobacco or vaping product, including smokeless tobacco, and applies to both employees and visitors of the Library.

Further, smoking (which means inhaling, exhaling, or burning any tobacco product) and vaping are strictly prohibited in all privately-owned vehicles while used in the course of MRLS work whenever other MRLS employees or persons are present in the vehicle, regardless of whether the vehicle’s windows are open.

MRLS understands that tobacco and electronic cigarettes are legal products and further recognizes that, as an employer, MRLS may not require that employees or prospective employees refrain from tobacco use when not at work, and will not discriminate against employees who use tobacco outside of employment. The success of this policy will depend on the courtesy and cooperation of both users and nonusers. All MRLS employees are responsible for following and helping to enforce this policy, and should report any problems or violations to a Supervisor. Violations of this policy will subject an employee to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

J-4. Solicitation Policy

MRLS prohibits solicitation, distribution, or posting of materials at or in MRLS work areas or public areas by any employee or non-employee, except as may be permitted by this policy. “Solicitation” means, but is not limited to, requesting or urging anyone to obligate himself or herself to pay, provide, or devote money, opinion, time, or any other quantifiable thing of value to any cause, organization, or event, or for any product or service. Solicitation also includes, but is not limited to, requesting anyone to sign any document, petition, or pledge, or to take part in any pool, organization, association, or group, or indicating or providing support for or a pledge to any cause, organization, association, or circumstance. This policy pertains to any form of solicitation, including verbal, written, electronic, telephone, or other means of communication.

1. Non-Employees – Persons not employed by MRLS may not solicit or distribute literature on MRLS property at any time, for any purpose, except as allowed herein.
2. Employees – MRLS employees may not solicit or distribute literature for any purpose during working time or in work areas. Working time includes the working time of either the employee doing the soliciting or distributing or the employee to whom the soliciting or distributing is being directed. Working time includes all times when employees’ duties require that they be engaged in work tasks, but does not include meal breaks or scheduled breaks. Work areas include all areas of MRLS property except break rooms and parking areas.

From time to time, and with approval of the Library Director or Supervisor, exceptions to this policy may be allowed for activities such as MRLS-sponsored programs related to library services, fund-raising activities supported by MRLS Friends & Advocates, Non-Profit events, events sponsored by MRLS partners, and MRLS-supported community or charitable activities. However, such approval when given shall not be considered or deemed to be a waiver or revocation of this policy.

J-5. Inclement Weather and Emergency Closings

MRLS makes every effort to maintain regular operating hours. However, when situations such as inclement weather, utility disruptions, or other emergency conditions require the Library to close during regular hours, the guidelines discussed below will apply. (Note: For purposes of this section, references to “open” and “closed” status mean the times *employees* are expected to arrive at work or leave work, not the times the Library will open or close to the public.)

Communication of Open/Closed Status – The Director will make any decision to open late, close early, or close for the day. A decision to close one library branch or work site does not necessarily mean that another site will be closed. An established procedure will be followed (such as use of a call tree or call-in hotline) for communication of the opening/closing status. Employees should become familiar with the proper procedure to learn the status of their assigned location, and should keep their Supervisor informed as to their status and ability to get to work.

Essential Staff Reporting – Any employee designated in advance as essential to dealing with emergency situations is expected to be prepared to report to work as assigned. Other employees may also be called to work for an emergency situation, even if not designated in advance.

Reporting to Work – If a library site is officially closed, employees should not report to work. If a site opens late, employees who were scheduled to be at work at the time of late opening are expected to report to work at that time. If a site closes early, employees who were working at the early closure time will be sent home. Remaining on site is not an option because the decision to close is a safety measure regardless of how close an employee may live to the library. Employees scheduled to start a shift after the closure time should not report to work.

Be Safe! MRLS values the safety of its staff and does not advise employees to take unwarranted risks when traveling to work during inclement weather. Road conditions can vary from one area to another, and employees must make individual decisions about their ability to safely travel. Any employees who do not feel they can safely get to work should notify their Supervisor as soon as possible.

If a closing has not been declared, or if safety is not a concern, employees are expected to work any part of their assigned shift that coincides with open hours, and failure to do so may be considered an unexcused absence. Sometimes the overlap may be so small that employees feel it is not worth coming to work. Employees should discuss the situation with their Supervisor, as the Library may be counting on every scheduled employee in order to successfully open, and may even need additional hours from available staff.

Compensation & Reporting –MRLS will compensate employees for hours they were scheduled to work during the period of closure (to be reported as administrative leave). When the work site is open, employees who do not work their scheduled hours must use annual leave. (At the discretion of the Director, an employee may be allowed to make up time lost from work, at a time scheduled by the Director.) Employees who were on a pre-arranged absence (e.g., scheduled off-day, sick, vacation, leave of absence, etc.) when a closure occurs will not be affected by the closure, and their absence will be charged as originally planned. Questions about schedule and compensation should be directed to the immediate Supervisor.

For **exempt** (salaried) employees, MRLS will compensate employees for an entire day if the work site is closed all day or if the employee reports to work for part of the day. If the work site opens but the employee does not report to work, the employee must use annual leave for the day. Employees who were on a pre-arranged absence when a closure occurs will not be affected by the closure, and the absence will be charged as originally arranged. (Note: Exempt employees are often in a Supervisor or key role that involves coordination of site openings/closings, staffing, communications, or other issues during emergencies and may require the employee to work during a period when their work site is officially closed. In such instances, the employee should discuss with their Supervisor issues such as their availability, the time they work, and how to report that time.)

J-6. Communication of Information

Successful communication is key to the success of each employee, as well as to that of the Library as a whole. Employees are responsible for checking their mailbox, email, and voicemail (if applicable) on a regular basis. Depending on the subject and level of urgency, all of these methods will be used to communicate important information. Employees are expected to read the website, which contains official communications about matters that affect employees, including important information about benefits, policy changes, organizational changes, new services, departmental news, and a variety of other topics.

Employees can also expect to receive information verbally from supervisors and other staff members. Individual departments may have additional methods of communicating procedural changes or other

information. Employees should become familiar with the communication expectations for their assigned department.

Communication often occurs up or down the Supervisors chain. Employees should keep their Supervisors informed of any questions, concerns, suggestions, or other issues. Supervisors should be able to advise employees of the best person to contact regarding various issues. If the information needed by an employee is not directly related to the job (such as a salary or benefits question), it may be more appropriate for the employee to contact another person or department.

J-7. Travel and Reimbursement

MRLS has established a policy and procedures governing employee travel and reimbursement. The policy allows travel on a limited basis provided that (a) funding is available; (b) travel is duly authorized; (c) travel is within the scope of the employee's employment and discharge of his or her official duties; and (d) travel is conducted in a cost-effective manner. MRLS's travel policy, procedures, forms, current travel allowances, and other resources are available through the Business Manager.

J-8. Housekeeping and Office Décor

Each employee is responsible for assisting to uphold a level of professionalism in the workplace, and is requested to assist in maintaining work areas. Desks, offices, and immediate work areas should be kept neat and free from clutter. Any food or beverage containers in work areas should be removed each workday, and accidental spills should be cleaned immediately. Employees are also asked to assist in keeping common areas (such as break rooms, supply rooms, conference rooms, etc.) clean and orderly.

Break Rooms – Break room facilities are provided as a convenience to all employees. Each employee is responsible for cleaning any dishware, silverware, or other items used. All employees who use break room areas are expected to help in cleaning tables, countertops, refrigerators, and microwaves. Any food stored in refrigerators or cabinets must be in covered containers and should be labeled with the employee's name and date. Food must be removed or discarded within a reasonable period of time. Employees should be aware that food or personal items left in the break room for any length of time may be thrown away (including containers). Employees are expected to respect the property of others, and should not use (or consume) items belonging to other employees.

J-9. Personal Items

MRLS cannot be responsible for the safety, loss, or damage of personal belongings brought to work by an employee. Any personal item that may present a safety hazard in the workplace, or that (in the opinion of management) may be considered offensive, profane, hostile, sexually suggestive, or demeaning of an individual or class of individuals, is not permitted. In addition, employees should only bring into the library items that are absolutely necessary and do not take up much room. If you bring in what the Supervisor deems to be too much, you may be asked to store those materials in your car or asked to leave them at home in the future.

Further, employees should keep in mind that all Library equipment, property, and facilities (including, but not limited to, desks, workstations, file cabinets, lockers, computers and computer-stored information, email, voicemail, business records, vehicles, or any other property or equipment owned or provided by the Library) are subject to inspection at any time and for any reason. No employee shall have any privacy interest whatsoever in any Library equipment, property, or facilities.

J-10. Contact with the Media

All media inquiries regarding the Library and its operations must be referred to the Director or Supervisor. These are the only personnel authorized to make or approve public statements pertaining to the Library or its operations. No employees are authorized to make statements on behalf of the Library, unless specifically designated by the Director.

J-11. Children and Visitors in the Workplace

The Library is unlike most workplaces in that Library facilities are open to the public. This can present a challenge when friends or relatives of employees come to the Library. This section of the Manual is intended to provide guidelines regarding employees' children or visitors in the Library while the employee is at work.

Children or Other Family Members at Work – In order for the Library to maintain a professional and productive work environment, employees should only bring children to work when no other option is available. This is only allowed with Supervisor or Director approval. However, the Library workplace should not be used in lieu of childcare or adult daycare services. Parents should plan accordingly for the care of their children on days when children may be sick, on snow days, during school holidays, or other occasions. Standards for "child" or "children" also apply to any person who is in the care of the employee (e.g., disabled parent).

Employees are allowed to have children at the Library during their work hours only if:

- The child does not require the employee's care or attention during work hours;
- The child does not distract the employee from his or her work;
- The child does not distract other Library employees from their work

An example of an acceptable situation would be an employee bringing an older child to the Library and the child independently reading or completing homework while the employee is working.

Since the age at which a child can work independently without a caregiver's attention varies from child to child, a specific age requirement is not provided by this policy. Supervisors may disallow an employee from having a child at work if, in the judgment of the Supervisor, the child is disruptive, distracting, or in need of care or attention.

In all cases, children are not allowed behind circulation desks, and are not allowed to be unattended in staff areas.

Visitors in the Workplace – Employees should limit their personal conversations with family members or acquaintances who visit the Library. Visits are permissible, but should be infrequent and brief in order to maintain a productive work environment. This rule applies to conversations on the phone as well.

Restricted Access to Non-Public Areas of the Library – Access to non-public areas of the Library is limited to current employees and scheduled maintenance or service workers. (For purposes of this section, non-public areas refers to areas behind the public service desks, employee workrooms, employee offices, hallways, storage areas, computer equipment rooms, and break rooms.) Other persons with business-related reasons to be in these areas (such as vendors or consultants) must be accompanied by an employee at all times.

Persons visiting employees for reasons other than library business (e.g., family members, friends, previous MRLS employees) may be allowed in non-public areas for brief periods of time. However, all visitors must be accompanied by an employee at all times. Employees will be held responsible for the actions of their guests and of anyone to whom they allow access. Visitors are not permitted to use staff computers or other equipment intended for staff use.

Any exceptions to this policy must be approved by the Director. (For example, an exception would be considered for "Take Your Child to Work Day.")

SECTION K –MRLS PROPERTY AND ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

K-1. Overview

The purpose of this section is to provide a broad overview of guidelines for the use of MRLS property, including property related to information technology. Information more specific to issues of information security and privacy can be found in the Operations Manual, the Information Security Policy, and in the information technology practices, standards, guidelines, and procedures documents, which are accessible from the

Information Technology Department home page on the staff website. In the event that the policies set forth in this Section conflict with those policies, practices, standards, guidelines, and procedures set forth in the Operations Manual, the Information Security Policy, and/or in the information accessible from the Information Technology Department home page on the staff website, then the more stringent provision shall control.

K-2. MRLS Property

All buildings, furniture, vehicles, computers, office equipment, communication systems, electronic equipment, non-electronic equipment, and/or any other material or property provided by MRLS and used in the course of employment is property that is exclusively owned, leased, borrowed, and/or held by MRLS. Such property is, or for the purposes of this Policy shall be deemed and considered, exclusively the property of MRLS. MRLS employees should have no expectation of privacy with respect to same.

Treatment of Property – All MRLS property, including and not limited to, all electronic property (such as computers, telephones, fax machines, copiers, communication systems, mailing systems, and electronic equipment) and non-electronic property (such as vehicles, buildings, furnishings, fixtures, furniture, books, magazines, supplies, and materials), shall be used in the manner for which it is intended and treated by MRLS employees with care and due regard. MRLS employees should keep in mind that they are the trustees, caretakers, and beneficiaries of such property, which has primarily been purchased, leased, or provided via public funding. No MRLS employee shall abuse or misuse MRLS property. Employees must return all MRLS property that is in their possession or use upon separation of employment, or immediately upon request. Violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Further, MRLS may also take all action lawful and deemed appropriate to recover or protect its property.

Use of Communication Systems – MRLS provides a variety of channels for communication to promote the efficient operation of Library business. These communication systems include, and are not limited to, voicemail, email, fax, computer networks, Internet connections, public and staff websites, social media sites, online services, computer files, telephone systems, cell phones, and similar devices. All information transmitted by, received from, or stored in these systems is the sole property of MRLS, and an employee should have no expectation of privacy related thereto.

All employees are responsible for the content of all text, audio, or images that they place or send via email or over the Internet. Fraudulent, harassing, or obscene messages are prohibited. Information published on the Internet should not violate or infringe upon the rights of others. No abusive, profane, or offensive language may be transmitted through the system. Notwithstanding MRLS's right to read and retrieve any electronic mail messages, such messages should be treated as confidential by other employees and accessed only by the intended recipient. Employees are not authorized to retrieve or read any email messages that are not sent to them. Employees should not attempt to gain access to another employee's messages without the employee's permission, except as expressly authorized elsewhere.

Use of Telephones – MRLS telephones are provided for purposes of conducting MRLS business. Personal calls should be avoided unless there is an immediate concern. When making or receiving personal local telephone calls in the workplace, and/or using an MRLS cell phone or similar device, employees must use judgment and discretion to limit the number and/or length of any calls. Personal long-distance calls are not permitted on MRLS telephones. Excessive or unauthorized telephone use may subject an employee to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

K-3. Information Access and Security

MRLS provides access to email, the Internet, and social media sites for the benefit of MRLS employees and patrons, and as valuable sources of information to allow for the provision of better and more efficient Library services. It allows employees to connect to information resources around the state, the country, and the world. Every employee has a responsibility to maintain and enhance MRLS's public image, to use the Internet in a productive manner, and to safeguard MRLS equipment from improper access or use.

Software Downloads – To prevent software compatibility issues, licensing infractions, and security or privacy concerns (such as computer viruses being transmitted through the system), there will be no unauthorized installations of any software. All software downloads must first be authorized by the MRLS Information

Technology Department. Employees with any questions should contact their Supervisor or the Information Technology Department. MRLS reserves the right to remove any programs that have been installed or downloaded without authorization.

Passwords – Access to computers, email, voicemail, and select applications shall be password protected. Such passwords, access, and accounts, and any other types of authorization employed by MRLS, are confidentially assigned to individual employees and may not be shared with others. Each employee is responsible for any access to and use of his or her assigned computer, email, voicemail, and applications.

All messages created, sent, or retrieved via email or over the Internet are the property of MRLS. MRLS reserves the right to access and monitor all messages and files on the computer system as deemed necessary and appropriate. The confidentiality of any messages should not be assumed. Even when a message is erased, it is possible to retrieve and read that message. Further, the use of passwords for security does not guarantee confidentiality. All communications may be disclosed by MRLS to law enforcement or other third parties without the prior consent of the sender or the receiver.

No Right to Privacy – As set forth herein, all MRLS computer systems, including email, Internet connections, and similar protocols, are the property of MRLS. All documents, information, and data created in, stored in, and/or copied to MRLS's computer systems are the property of MRLS and may not be copied or in any form transmitted to any third party other than in the ordinary course of business on behalf of MRLS.

Employees using MRLS's computer systems are cautioned that email and Internet systems do not provide complete confidentiality and employees have no right to privacy when using same. MRLS has the right to access, monitor, and disclose the contents of any file or electronic message composed, sent, received, or viewed on MRLS computer systems, for any business purpose, including but not limited to investigating potential security breaches, policy violations, or misuse of computer systems or email. Employees should be aware and understand that the use of personal email accounts to engage in MRLS business may result in those personal accounts being subject to the provisions of the Georgia Open Records Act and/or other statutes pertaining to access to government records.

Employees should be aware that MRLS may utilize security cameras to monitor parking lots, building entrances, hallways, public areas, staff work areas, or other common areas on MRLS property. Employees should not expect privacy in such areas. Cameras will not be utilized in areas where staff and patrons have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as restrooms.

K-4. Use of Personal Devices

Use of personal cell phones, smartphones, portable computers, tablets, digital audio players, and other electronic devices in the workplace or during working hours must be kept to a minimum. Employees may carry personal devices on their person while working, provided they are silenced and are not readily visible; however, personal calls, texting, posting on social media sites, or similar personal activities should only occur during break times, outside of work areas, and away from the public's view. Personal devices should not be used when working at the public desk or interacting with a patron. (Exceptions are made for employees who are required to perform such activities or use such devices for work-related purposes.) Employees are expected to follow any additional guidelines set within their respective departments.

K-5. Copyright Issues

MRLS recognizes that federal and state law make it illegal to duplicate, distribute, display, exhibit, or perform copyrighted works and materials without authorization of the holder of the copyright, except for certain exempt purposes. Any employee who is uncertain as to whether reproducing or using copyrighted material is permissible should direct such question to the Supervisor. MRLS may assist in obtaining proper authorization to copy or use protected material when such authorization is required.

Work Product Ownership – MRLS retains legal ownership of the work product of all employees. Work product includes: written and electronic documents, audio and video recordings, system code, and any concepts, ideas, or other intellectual property developed for MRLS, during MRLS business hours, or via use of MRLS communication systems, regardless of whether the intellectual property is actually used by MRLS.

No work product created while an employee is employed by MRLS may be claimed, construed, or presented as the employee's property, even after employment with MRLS is terminated or the relevant project is completed.

K-6. Use of Cameras and Audio or Video Recording Devices

This section serves to describe the use of cameras, camera-equipped devices, or other recording devices in the workplace. While MRLS does not wish to unreasonably constrain the use of such devices, it has a broader responsibility to ensure that they are used in an appropriate manner. As a general rule, any use of cameras and audio or video recording devices must be conducted in a manner consistent with all applicable laws and regulatory guidelines. Photography, filming, videotaping, and/or audio or video recording while on MRLS property may be performed by an employee as part of their assigned duties or in the course of conducting MRLS business, such as the recording of a library program. If taking pictures or otherwise recording events and participants is not related to assigned duties or MRLS business, employees may take pictures of coworkers, patrons, or visitors only with their permission.

K-7. Social Media and Networking

Social media websites provide an opportunity for individuals to interact with people throughout the world. Given the multitude of concerns raised with social networking (including legal, political, and ethical concerns), this policy establishes prudent and acceptable practices regarding use of social networking by employees of the MOUNTAIN REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM.

Social media refers to forms of electronic communications through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, videos, and other content. It can include (a) social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn; (b) microblogging sites such as Twitter; (c) video and photo-sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram and Periscope; (d) blogs, forums, and chat rooms; (e) personal and professional websites; and (f) other online communication sites, to include new sites and new technology.

Employees may use social media on their own time and using their own equipment, and may use them to express their thoughts or ideas as long as they do not conflict with MRLS policies or business. Whether on or off duty, certain activities on the part of its staff may become a problem if they have the effect of (a) harassing, demeaning, or creating a hostile working environment; (b) impairing the work of any employee; (c) disrupting the smooth and orderly flow of work; (d) harming the goodwill and reputation of MRLS among the community or its citizens; or (e) violating MRLS policies or federal, state, or local laws. For these reasons, the following guidelines apply in employees' use of social media, both on and off duty.

General Guidelines – Following are general guidelines governing use of social media.

1. Social media activities must never interfere with work commitments.
2. No employee may post online content as a representative of MRLS or on MRLS's behalf without approval of the Library Director or designee, and any content to be posted on MRLS-sanctioned social media sites must meet the approval of the Library Director or designee before it is posted. In addition, all MRLS-sanctioned social media sites and all employees who engage in social media activities on MRLS's behalf shall adhere to MRLS policies and procedures and to applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

Under this policy, MRLS disavows and is not responsible for any sites, posts, opinions, or content not coordinated through and approved by the Library Director or designee. If MRLS personnel should post data purporting to be on behalf of MRLS while using a social media site without the approval of the Library Director or designee, MRLS is not responsible for that content, such content is not to be construed as reflecting the views or opinions of MRLS, and MRLS is not responsible for archiving such content in accordance with applicable records retention schedules or providing copies in accordance with the Georgia Open Records Act. Any employee who is uncertain as to the propriety of a post, opinion, or other content should consult the Supervisor or Director before proceeding.

3. While off duty, employees who choose to maintain or participate in social media or social networking platforms shall conduct themselves with professionalism and in such a manner that will not reflect

negatively upon MRLS or its staff. Employees should maintain an awareness of their MRLS association on online social networks. Employees who identify themselves as an MRLS employee, or who have a public-facing position for which their MRLS association is known to the general public, must ensure that their online profiles and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how they wish to present themselves as an MRLS professional, appropriate to the public trust associated with their positions.

4. Any content posted as representative of MRLS, or content posted to an MRLS-sanctioned social media site, containing any of the following shall not be allowed:
 - a. Comments not topically related to the particular site or blog article being commented upon;
 - b. Profane language or content;
 - c. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race; color; religion; gender; national origin; age; disability; genetic information; uniformed service status; pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; or any other legally protected category;
 - d. Sexual content or links to sexual content;
 - e. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - f. Threats or information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
 - g. Content that violates a legal ownership interest (i.e., copyright) of any other party.
5. Employees are not permitted to present personal opinions on social media in ways that imply endorsement by MRLS. If discussing MRLS-related issues, but not posting online content as an approved representative of MRLS or on MRLS's behalf, employees must make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of MRLS by displaying a disclaimer that states: "This is my own opinion and not necessarily an opinion or position held by MRLS." However, employees must keep in mind that if they post information that is in violation of MRLS policies and/or federal, state, or local law, the disclaimer will not shield them from disciplinary action.
6. Use of social media sites (and links on those sites) can present certain risks to users, as it can expose the computer or network to spyware and viruses that may capture data, damage the operating system, or otherwise compromise privacy of the computer, the network, and others with whom the individual communicates. Social networking sites can also collect profile information for advertising purposes and result in increased spam or junk mail. Employees must maintain an awareness of these risks and be alert to potential problems, and must follow MRLS policies and procedures governing use and protection of MRLS property, as described in [Section K-3](#) (Information Access and Security) of this Manual.
7. While using social media, employees are expected to avoid any behavior or conduct that could reasonably be interpreted as harassment or lead to the creation of a hostile work environment (including cyberbullying). Violation of MRLS policies against discrimination and harassment will be grounds for disciplinary action, as discussed in [Section A-5](#) of this Manual (Discrimination and Harassment).
8. Employees must follow guidelines concerning respect for copyrighted works. (See [Section K-5](#).)
9. All MRLS employees must maintain confidentiality of information regarding MRLS patrons, staff, or business operations, as described in MRLS's policy on Confidential Information (see [Section B-9](#)). This applies to any activity, including use of social media, whether an employee is on duty or off duty.
10. Any information posted on social media sites is considered public information. Employees can have no expectation of privacy with regards to any posted information. In addition, any information transmitted by, received from, or stored in MRLS equipment or communication systems is the property of MRLS, and employees have no right to privacy. (See [Section K-3](#).)

In addition to the guidelines listed above, employees are expected to comply with all MRLS policies and procedures in their use of social media, including but not limited to policies on discrimination and harassment (see [Section A-5](#)), workplace violence (see [Section A-9](#)), public/open records (see [Section B-10](#)), and use of MRLS property (see [Section K-2](#)).

Nothing in this policy shall be construed as restricting an employee's right to discuss the terms, status, or conditions of the employee's employment position.

K-8. Prohibited Activities

MRLS employees are strictly prohibited from using MRLS email, Internet, communication systems, public and staff websites, social media sites, computers, electronic equipment, or other MRLS property to engage in the following activities (except where expressly authorized elsewhere):

1. Sending, retrieving, or storing offensive, obscene, or defamatory material;
2. Engaging in illegal, fraudulent, or malicious conduct;
3. Transmitting or receiving messages containing derogatory, harassing, or inflammatory remarks about an individual's or a group's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, uniformed service status, pregnancy or related condition, or any other legally protected category;
4. Cyberbullying. For purposes of this policy, cyberbullying is "bullying" (as defined in [Section A-5](#)) that takes place using electronic technology;
5. Working for or on behalf of another employer, business, association, or organization, without obtaining prior Supervisor approval;
6. Sending uninvited email of a personal nature;
7. Personal activities that incur additional costs to MRLS or interfere with an employee's performance;
8. Sending MRLS proprietary or confidential information and/or materials to anyone not entitled to know or receive same;
9. Monitoring or intercepting the files or electronic communications of other employees or of third parties;
10. Obtaining illegal or unauthorized access to another person's or entity's computer system;
11. Using another individual's account or identity without authorization;
12. Attempting to test, circumvent, or defeat the security or auditing systems of MRLS or any other person or organization;
13. Distributing or storing chain letters, jokes, solicitations, or offers to buy or sell goods; or
14. Downloading files or programs not authorized by MRLS.

Violations of any guidelines listed above may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. If deemed necessary or appropriate, MRLS may advise appropriate legal officials of any perceived illegal activities or violations via use of MRLS communication systems.