What is the USG?

The University System of Georgia (USG) is composed of 26 higher education institutions throughout the State of Georgia, the Georgia Public Library Service, and the Georgia Archives. Each USG institution has its own Ethics & Compliance Reporting Hotline.

About the USG Ethics & Compliance Reporting Hotline

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About the Ethics & Compliance Reporting Hotline (Ethics Line)

Q: What is the Ethics & Compliance Reporting Hotline (Ethics Line)?

A: The Ethics Line is a confidential reporting system for use by members of the USG community and third parties to inquire about or report possible unethical, unsafe or unlawful behavior or violations of policy or state and federal law. The Ethics Line enables management and employees to work together to address fraud, waste, abuse, and other misconduct in the workplace while cultivating a positive work environment.

Q: Why do we need an Ethics Line?

A: The Ethics Line is one component of the USG's Comprehensive Ethics and Compliance Program. The Ethics Line has been in use since 2008 and has been an important part of our commitment to maintain an ethical culture and reinforce our commitment to our Core Values of Integrity, Excellence, Accountability and Respect. The Ethics Line has been particularly useful in identifying instance of fraud, waste and abuse.

Q: Shouldn't I just report problems to my supervisor?

A: The Ethics Line is not intended to replace existing channels of communication and reporting systems on campus. It is available as an additional platform if you do not feel comfortable telling your supervisor or the designated offices about your concerns.

Q: Should I make reports on the USG Ethics Line or my institution's Ethics Line?

A: Each USG institution and the University System Office has an Ethics Line. The USG Office of Ethics and Compliance oversees all USG Ethics Lines and is copied on each report submitted. A link to all USG Ethics Lines may be accessed by clicking here. The USG Ethics Line is primarily designed for use by employees of the University System Office which includes the Shared Services Center, the Georgia Public Library System, State Archives, and the Information Technology Service located in Athens, Georgia. You may confidentially report on the USG Ethics Line or your institution's Ethics line and have confidence that your report will be properly reviewed.

Reporting – General

Q: **How do I make a report**?

A: Reports can be made by phone or online. To facilitate a thorough investigation, please provide as much information about your concern as possible.

Q: **What should be reported?**

A: You should report violations of USG policies, state or federal laws, violations of ethical and professional standards of conduct and fraud, waste or abuse. Examples of what should be reported include but are not limited to: USG Ethics Policy violations, discrimination, harassment, research misconduct, theft, forgery, academic misconduct, and privacy violations. Additional information regarding reporting wrongdoing is contained in the **Business Procedures Manual Section 16 Reporting Wrongdoing**.

Q: **Who can make reports?**

A: Reports can be made by anyone in the USG community and third parties to include visitors, vendors, contractors, patients, and volunteers.

Q: **When can I use the Ethics Line?**

A: The Ethics Line is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by trained professionals who take calls and ensure reports are forwarded to appropriate officials for follow-up. Reports can also be made online 24 hours a day.

Q: **Why should I report what I know?**

A: Employees have an affirmative duty to report wrongdoing in a timely manner and to refrain from retaliating against those who report violations or assist with authorized investigations.

Q: **Does management really want me to report?**

A: We certainly do. In fact, we *need* you to report. You may have initial knowledge of an activity that may be cause for concern. Your reporting can minimize the potential negative impact on your institution and the USG. Also, offering positive input may help identify issues that can improve organizational culture and performance.

Q: **Where do these reports go?**

A: The USG has contracted with a third-party vendor to help ensure the confidentiality of all reports made on the Ethics Line. Reports made on the Ethics Line are available only to specific individuals within the organization who are charged with overseeing the concerns raised on the Ethics Line. All reports will be maintained in confidence to the extent allowed by law and consistent with Georgia Open Records Act. Complainants may elect to make reports anonymously and thereby further increasing the confidential nature of the report.

Q: What should I expect after I file a report?

A: Your report will be reviewed for any and all appropriate follow-up by the designated officials. Within 2 business days, a response will be posted for you to view. You may use the Report Key and Password you are assigned to follow-up on your report.

Q: Are there protections for whistleblowers?

A: Yes. Employees may not interfere with the right of another employee to report concerns or wrongdoing, and may not retaliate against an employee who has reported concerns or wrongdoing, has cooperated with an authorized investigation, has participated in a grievance or appeal procedure, or otherwise objected to actions that are reasonably believed to be unlawful, unethical or a violation of USG policy. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, which may include the termination of employment.

Reporting Security & Confidentiality

Q: It is my understanding that any report I send from a work computer generates a server log that shows every website that my PC connects with. Won't this log identify me as the report originator?

A: Reports are received by a third-party vendor that <u>does not generate or maintain</u> any internal connection logs with IP addresses, so no information linking your PC to Ethics Line is available. You may also make a report by telephone. No call logs are maintained or provided to the USG.

Q: Can I file a report from home and still remain anonymous?

A: A report from home, a neighbor's computer, or any Internet portal will remain secure and anonymous. An Internet portal never identifies a visitor by screen name and the Ethics Line system strips away Internet addresses so that anonymity is totally maintained.

Q: I am concerned that the information I provide will ultimately reveal my identity.

A: The Ethics Line system protects your anonymity. However, if you wish to remain anonymous, you - as a reporting party - need to ensure that the body of the report does not reveal your identity by accident. For example, "From my cube next to Jan Smith…" or "In my 33 years…".

Q: Is the telephone toll-free hot line confidential and anonymous too?

A: Yes. You will be asked to provide the same information that you would provide in an Internet-based report and an interviewer will type your responses into an Ethics Line report. These reports have the same security and confidentiality measures applied to them during delivery.

Q: What if I want to be identified with my report?

A: There is a section in the report to identify yourself, if you wish.

Q: **What if my boss or other managers are involved in a violation? Won't they get the report and start a cover-up?**

A: The Ethics Line system and report distribution are designed so that implicated parties are not notified or granted access to reports in which they have been named.

Q: **What if I remember something important about the incident after I file the report? Or what if officials have further questions for me concerning my report?**

When you file a report, you receive a unique, randomized number called a "Report Key" and are asked to choose a password. You can return to the Ethics Line system again either by Internet or telephone and access the original report to add more detail or answer questions posed by investigators.

Q: **What if I lose my Report Key or forget the Password I created?**

A: To ensure that security and confidentiality is maintained, if you lose your report key or password, you will need to file a new report. Mention in the new report that it is related to a report or question you previously submitted.