

Code of Conduct for Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus

The Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus (“The Caucus”) is committed to creating an inclusive and respectful environment for all members and guests. This code establishes guidelines that promote respect, discourage discrimination, and prevent disruptions during our activities.

While an overwhelming majority of our members and guests exhibit exemplary conduct, rare instances of poor behavior have recently reminded us of the importance of setting clear expectations. Our code of conduct allows us to address issues such as misgendering, racism, violence, harassment, and disruptions, promptly and fairly.

By adhering to this code, we demonstrate our commitment to ethical conduct and fostering a welcoming space where all can participate and contribute effectively.

The following Code of Conduct (“Code”) applies to all Caucus spaces, including but not limited to social media channels, group messages, Caucus meetings, and other public and private Caucus events. In the event of a conflict between this Code and the Bylaws, the Bylaws shall govern.

For purposes of this Code, “members” include Caucus members, volunteers, officers, staff, and guests in Caucus spaces.

1. Respectful Conduct:

All Members must conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner towards one another. Discrimination, harassment, or bullying of any kind, including that related to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability status, physical appearance, body size, age, or any other personal characteristic will not be tolerated.

2. Closed Meeting Confidentiality:

While The Caucus’ general meetings are typically open to the public, meetings that have been designated as “Closed” and/or “Confidential” may discuss information that is not meant for public consumption. Members should not disclose any such information and should seek appropriate authorization from The Caucus Board before disclosure.

3. Conflict of Interest:

Members are expected to resolve any conflicts of interest that may arise between their personal interests and the interests of The Caucus by declaring these conflicts of interest and recusing themselves from any discussions or decisions pertaining to these conflicts. Members should declare any conflicts of interest that arise and recuse themselves from any discussions or decisions where they may have a personal interest.

4. Compliance with the Law:

Members must comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including, but not limited to campaign finance laws, election laws, and lobbying laws.

5. Political Activity:

To prevent unauthorized engagements and maintain consistency within the organization, Members may not claim to represent The Caucus in political activity, including endorsements, without prior written approval from The Caucus Board authorizing the specific Member as a representative of The Caucus.

6. Ethical Conduct:

Members should conduct themselves with the utmost ethical standards and adhere to the highest standards of integrity. Members should avoid engaging in any behavior that may bring The Caucus into disrepute or reflect negatively on its reputation.

7. Communication:

Members should communicate in a respectful and professional manner. Members should refrain from engaging in any form of abusive, threatening, or harassing behavior, whether in person, over the phone, or online.

8. Misgendering and Discrimination:

Members are expected to treat each other with respect and avoid discriminatory or derogatory language. Blatant misgendering, deliberate misuse of pronouns, deadnaming, or discriminatory comments based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, or any other personal characteristic will not be tolerated.

9. Violence and Threats:

Any physical violence, threats of violence, or behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as intending to cause harm or intimidation will not be tolerated.

10. Sexual Harassment:

The Caucus will not tolerate any form of sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, physical contact without consent (including hugs) or after a request to stop, or any other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

11. Time Limitations:

Members are expected to abide by time limitations set by The Caucus during meetings or events. Exceeding these limitations may disrupt the flow of the meeting and hinder progress.

12. Meeting Disruptions and Heckling:

Members are expected to engage in constructive dialogue during Caucus meetings or events. Disruptive behavior or heckling will not be tolerated and may result in removal from the meeting or event.

“Disruptive behavior” includes but is not limited to:

- Chanting a candidate’s name from the audience while another candidate is speaking;
- Inappropriately interrupting a speaker without being recognized by the Chair;
- Shouting over a speaker;
- Deliberately disparaging, harassing, disconcerting and/or taunting a candidate, speaker, and/or meeting attendee(s);
- Sharing negative comments, posts, and/or any information with the purpose of devaluing another person; or
- Failing to comply with the decisions of the meeting Chair.

13. Other Rules and Customs:

Members are expected to abide by all other rules and customs set forth by The Caucus, including, but not limited to, respecting the confidentiality of Caucus discussions and adhering to The Caucus' policies and procedures.

14. Enforcement of Appropriate Conduct:

Violations of this Code may constitute grounds for censure, expulsion, or other disciplinary proceedings as follow:

14.1. Removal from a Meeting or Other Proceeding:

- (a) If the presiding officer determines that an individual has violated the Code of Conduct during a proceeding and their conduct;
1. Threatens the safety or well-being of other attendees; or,
 2. Constitutes "disruptive behavior" as defined in the Code of Conduct, which the presiding officer determines will impede the function or progress of the proceedings

the presiding officer shall direct the individual to leave or to be removed.

- (b) If a Member present at such proceeding believes that an individual's conduct at that proceeding is conduct described in (1) or (2), above, but the presiding officer does not act under this Section 14.1(a), a Member may make a motion immediately for the removal of such individual, which motion will take precedence in order over all other proceedings, and which may be passed and enforced by a vote of 2/3 of those Members present at the meeting.

14.2. Censure:

- (a) Censure for Member Violation of Code of Conduct: A Member may initiate censure of any other Member whom they assert has violated a provision of the Code of Conduct of The Caucus.
1. No limitation on other actions with respect to non-Members. This procedure for the discipline of Members does not amend, reduce or otherwise affect the authority of The Caucus and its Members to adopt resolutions, issue declarations or statements, or otherwise take action in response to events, publications, actions, failures to act, statements or other matters in the public realm or by elected officials, candidates for office, or other public figures who are not Members.
- (b) Initiation by Complaint: A Member may initiate censure by presenting to the President a Complaint containing all allegations of the violations of the Code of Conduct and any supporting evidence. Upon receipt, the President shall send the Complaint to the Board. The Board may investigate the Complaint, or the Board may appoint a special committee of Members who are not participants or witnesses to the allegations in the Complaint to carry out the Investigation under the Board's supervision. The Investigation must include contacting the accused in the Complaint in writing (electronically or otherwise), which writing must include a copy of the Complaint. Within 7 days of such notification, the accused must respond in writing to the Board. The Board may in its discretion extend the response time for good cause. Within 21 days of receipt of the Complaint (plus any extension for response granted by the Board), the Board will determine whether or not to present a motion for censure to Members.
- (c) Notification: The Secretary shall notify the accused Member and the complaining Member in writing of the Board's decision of whether to pursue a motion to censure.
1. If, following the investigation, the Board determines to proceed with a Motion to Censure, the notification will provide the date, time and place of the next regular meeting where such motion will be presented to the Members. The Board must also notify all Members by email and posting on The Caucus' web page meeting notice that the Motion to Censure will be considered at the next regular meeting. The notice to Members must include a means by which Members may obtain a copy of the Complaint and Motion to Censure, redacted of all personal identification information of all parties except each person's name.
 2. If the Board determines not to proceed with the Motion to Censure, the complaining Member may appeal the decision of the Board to a panel composed of three Members, with one such Member appointed by each of the President, the Chair of the Rules Committee and the Chair of the Membership committee. The duly appointed Appeal Panel will review the Complaint, all evidence and responses submitted by the parties, and the report of the reasons for decision by the Board, as well as any other evidence or documents the Appeal Panel permits to be submitted after prior notice to the complaining and the accused Member. The Appeal Panel will be bound by all obligations of confidentiality with regard to all

aspects of the investigation and its review as if each member of the Appeal Panel were a member of the Board. The Appeal Panel will determine whether to uphold the Board's decision within 30 days of appointment. If the Appeal Panel overturns the Board's decision not to proceed with the Motion for Censure, the President will place the Complaint and a Motion to Censure on the agenda for a regular meeting in accordance with Paragraph (c)(1). If the Appeal Panel upholds the Board's decision not to proceed, the decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

- (d) Adjudication: At the meeting for which notice has been provided as described in 14.2(c)(1), the Presiding Officer will present the Motion to Censure, the specific provisions of the Code of Conduct violated, the Board's findings of fact, and evidence that the accused Member committed the alleged violations of the Code of Conduct. Any Member may request the opportunity to view or hear any such evidence at the meeting. The complaining Member may make a statement in support of the motion, subject to time limitations imposed by the Presiding Officer. The accused Member may make a statement and present other evidence, whether in writing, recording, or by live witnesses, subject to time limitations imposed by the Presiding Officer. Upon motion and second by any Member, a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of Members present at such meeting may vote to approve the Motion to Censure.
- (e) Censure: If the Members approve a Motion to Censure, the Minutes of the proceeding must reflect that the Members have determined that the accused Member has violated the specific Code of Conduct provisions set forth in the Motion to Censure and that the Members hereby censure the accused Member for such conduct.

14.3. Expulsion:

- (a) Complaint: A Member may initiate expulsion of another Member who has violated the Code of Conduct in a manner and to an extent that justifies expelling the other Member. The complaining Member may initiate such proceedings by presenting to the President a Complaint containing all allegations of violations of the Code of Conduct, all supporting evidence, and a statement explaining why the highest penalty of expulsion is justified by the alleged conduct. Upon receipt, the President shall send the Complaint to the Board. The Board may investigate the Complaint, or the Board may appoint a special committee of Members who are not participants or witnesses to the allegations in the Complaint to carry out the Investigation under the Board's supervision. The Investigation must include contacting the Member accused in the Complaint in writing (electronically or otherwise), which writing must include a copy of the Complaint. Within 30 days of such notification, the accused must respond in writing to the Board. The Board may extend the time for response for good cause. Within 60 days of receipt of the Complaint (plus any extension granted by the Board), the Board will determine whether or not to present a motion to members to expel the accused member.
- (b) Notification: The Secretary shall notify the accused Member and the complaining Member in writing of the Board's decision of whether to pursue a motion to expel the accused Member.

1. If, following the investigation, the Board determines to proceed with a motion to expel the accused Member, the notification will provide the date, time and place of the next regular meeting where such motion will be presented to the Members. The Board must also notify all Members by email and posting on The Caucus' web page meeting notice that the motion to expel will be considered at the next regular meeting. The notice to Members must include a means by which the Members may review a copy of the Complaint, the response thereto, and any evidence provided, redacted of all personal identification information except the names of each person.
2. If, following the investigation, the Board determines that the Complaint and the evidence reviewed justify a motion to censure but not a motion to expel the accused Member, the Board may elect to proceed under the Code of Conduct, Section 14.2(c)-(e).
3. If the Board determines not to proceed with either a motion to censure or a motion to expel, the complaining Member may appeal the decision of the Board to a panel composed of three Members, with one such Member appointed by each of the President, the Chair of the Rules Committee and the Chair of the Membership committee. The duly appointed Appeal Panel will review the Complaint, all evidence and responses submitted by the parties, and the report of the reasons for decision by the Board, as well as any other evidence or documents the Appeal Panel permits to be submitted after prior notice to the complaining and the accused Member. The Appeal Panel will be bound by all obligations of confidentiality with regard to all aspects of the investigation and its review as if each member of the Appeal Panel were a member of the Board. The Appeal Panel will determine whether to uphold the Board's decision within 30 days of appointment. If the Appeal Panel overturns the Board's decision, the Appeal Panel will notify the Board that it has determined that either a motion to censure or a motion to expel should be presented to the Members. The President will place the Complaint and the motion so ordered by the Appeal Panel on the agenda for a regular meeting in accordance with Section 14.2(c)(1) or 14.3(b)(1), as appropriate. If the Appeal Panel upholds the Board's decision not to proceed, the decision of the Appeal Panel is final.

(c) Adjudication: At the regular meeting for which notice has been provided as described in 14.3(b)(1), the Presiding Officer will present the motion to expel, the specific provisions of the Code of Conduct violated, the Board's findings of fact, evidence of violations of the Code of Conduct, and the Board's recommendation concerning expulsion to the Members, stating with particularity why the severe penalty of expulsion is justified. Any Member may request the opportunity to view or hear any such evidence at the meeting, subject to limitations on the manner in which such evidence may be presented as determined by the Presiding Officer. The complaining Member may make a statement in support of the motion, subject to time limitations imposed by the Presiding Officer. The accused Member may make a statement and present other evidence, whether in writing, recording, or by live witnesses, subject to time limitations imposed by the Presiding Officer. Upon motion and second by any Member, a $\frac{2}{3}$ vote of Members present at such meeting may vote to approve the Motion to Expel, which, upon such vote, shall be effective immediately.

(d) Readmission to Membership: Any Member expelled pursuant to this Section 14.3(c) may apply to the Board for readmission to membership by submitting such application in writing. Such application must contain justification for readmission, including, but not limited to, any actions the expelled Member has taken to rectify the expelled Member's prior conduct that formed the basis of the Motion to Expel. The expelled Member may present such application no sooner than one (1) year after the date of expulsion. If the Board, in its discretion, decides that readmission is justified, the President will make a motion for readmission of the expelled Member at the next regularly scheduled meeting. Notification of such motion for readmission must be provided in writing (electronic or otherwise) prior to such regularly scheduled meeting to the former Member seeking readmission and the complaining Member (if the Complaining Member remains a Member) and by electronic notification (email, posting on website or social media) to all other Members. A motion to readmit may be approved by simple majority vote (50%+1) of those Members present at the meeting for which such notice has been provided.

14.4. Recusal:

Unless there are extraordinary circumstances, Board members called on to participate in investigations or decisions concerning a Complaint under either 14.2(b)-(c) (Censure) or 14.3(a) (b) (Expulsion), and any Member asked to serve on a special investigation committee or an Appeal Panel under 14.2 or 14.3, should consider recusing themselves from such participation if (i) they were a witness to or a participant in the conduct on which the Complaint is based, (ii) they have a personal, professional or other important relationship with either the Member filing the Complaint or the accused Member that would reasonably raise questions concerning impartiality, or (iii) they otherwise could receive some material benefit or suffer some adverse consequence from the outcome of the proceedings. Whether there are "extraordinary circumstances" must depend on the particular facts of each case and cannot be defined with specificity in advance. "Extraordinary circumstances" could exist, for example, where the conduct on which the Complaint is based took place at a Caucus meeting at which all or a majority of Board members witnessed the alleged conduct.

The Caucus is dedicated to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all members and guests. We expect our members to uphold the values and principles outlined in this Code of Conduct and to work together to advance LGBTQ+ issues in the Houston/Harris County region.