

EXTERNAL SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR ROCKDALE COUNTY

1. PURPOSE

Because many of our citizens and other stakeholders utilize social media for news and communications, Rockdale County has developed its own social media accounts, which help us inform the public about our work and mission. We rely on our own free speech rights to communicate our selected messages. Comments left on our social media sites reflect the views of the commenters, not the views of this agency.

Rockdale County is committed to fully complying with the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and other similar legal obligations surrounding free speech. Since we follow the law, there may be times when what some people perceive to be offensive comments left by members of the public will remain visible on our social media posts, if such comments are legally protected speech.

Rockdale County has an important interest in assuring the accuracy and consistency of information associated with our social media sites. These terms and conditions establish guidelines for the public's use of Rockdale County's social media sites in a way that balances these values.

2. DEFINITIONS

1. "Social media" means digital content created by us and communicated on platforms that allow sharing, commenting, and engagement by the public. Examples of social media accounts Rockdale County may use are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
2. "Comments" include any digital content, information, links, images, videos, or any other form of communicative content posted in reply or response to a social media account post posted by Rockdale County on one of Rockdale County's social media sites.
3. "User" means a member of the public who views or interacts with one or more of Rockdale County's social media accounts.

3. EXPECTATIONS

1. Rockdale County's current administration believes that honest, civil, and productive discussions provide the best environment for citizens and other stakeholders to understand the work of their government.
2. Rockdale County respectfully asks commenters to be mindful and considerate that Rockdale County's social media feeds may be viewed by minors, children, and other impressionable stakeholders. Please refrain from the use of profanity, racial, ethnic, or sexual orientation slurs, personal or religious attacks, bullying, or the communication of false or defamatory information, etc. (Please view the detailed prohibited content reflected in Section 5).

4. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. These terms and conditions herein apply to all Rockdale County social media sites. Where possible, a link to these terms and conditions will be made available as a hyperlink or posted as text within the framework of Rockdale County's social media accounts.
2. All social media site users should know that all social media posts, comments, and replies to those posts, as well as any direct or private messages, etc., sent to Rockdale County may be classified as public records subject to applicable public records release.
3. Rockdale County's social media accounts are not monitored 24/7; therefore, the specific use of Rockdale County's social media accounts to seek emergency services at any time should NOT be utilized. Anyone in need of emergency assistance should immediately dial 9-1-1.
4. Rockdale County does not guarantee nor stipulate that County representatives will respond to comments or messages sent on any of Rockdale County's social media accounts.

5. CONTENT MODERATION

1. **Limited Public Forum.** Rockdale County's social media accounts are created and maintained as limited public forums under the case law pertaining to the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution. We invite members of the public to view and, where possible and permitted, provide comments or other engagement on our social media posts. However, please be mindful that the law permits Rockdale County to hide and/or delete comments that are not protected speech under the First Amendment and relevant case law. As a general rule, Rockdale County will not hide and/or delete comments solely because such comments are critical of Rockdale County or its officials.
2. **Prohibited Content.** As indicated above, Rockdale County may hide or delete:
 - a. Obscene, sexual, or pornographic content; or other illegal materials
 - b. Threats to any person
 - c. Sexual comments about, or directed at, anyone.
 - d. Comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination based on race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status regarding public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability, or sexual orientation.
 - e. Spam or unrelated links to other sites.
 - f. Comments that are unrelated to the County topic that is the subject of the post.
 - g. Comments that advocate illegal activity.
 - h. Comments that promote non-County services or products or promotion of commercial activities.
 - i. Comments that infringe on copyrights or trademarks.
 - j. Comments that disclose personally identifiable information that may compromise an individual's financial or personal security, including social security numbers, passwords, or credit card information; and
 - k. Comments that contain information that may compromise the safety, security, or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.

3. **Retention.** When a comment containing any of the above content is posted to Rockdale County's social media account, a copy or electronic record of that content may be retained or archived pursuant to our records retention policy, along with a brief description of the reason the specific content was deleted. Once documented, the content will be removed, where possible, from Rockdale County's social media account.

6. APPEAL

1. If Rockdale County hides or deletes a user's comment pursuant to these terms and conditions, the user has the right to appeal that decision by sending an email or letter directly to Rockdale@mqablaw.com within five (5) business days from the date of the removal.
2. Upon receipt of an appeal, Rockdale County's attorney will determine whether the comment at issue contained content protected by law. If the appeal is successful, the comment may (if possible) be restored for public view, or the user may be permitted to repost the comment. Upon a determination that the comment was not protected by law, the user will be notified that the appeal was denied.
3. **Blocking or Banning a User.** If a Rockdale County determines that a user has violated these terms and conditions on three (3) or more occasions within a twelve-month rolling period, Rockdale County may block or ban the offending user from Rockdale County's social media account where the violations occurred.

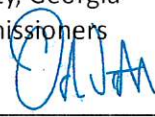
If Rockdale County blocks or bans a user, Rockdale County will (a) reasonably attempt to notify the user; (b) describe the violation(s); and (c) explain the appeal process.

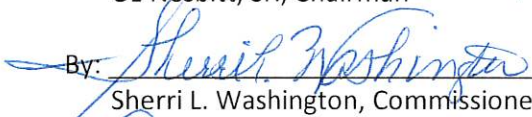
The user has the right to appeal that decision by sending an email or letter to [Rockdale County legal contact].

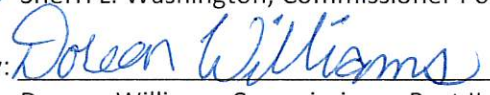
If the appeal is successful and the user has not violated this policy three (3) times within a rolling 12-month period, Rockdale County will unblock or unban the user from the Rockdale County's social media account. If the appeal is not successful, Rockdale County's decision will stand.

Approved this 24 Day of September 2024

Rockdale County, Georgia
Board of Commissioners

By: 
Oz Nesbitt, Sr., Chairman

By: 
Sherri L. Washington, Commissioner Post I

By: 
Doreen Williams, Commissioner Post II

Attest:

By: 
Jennifer Rutledge, County Clerk

Approved as to form

By: _____

M. Qader A. Baig, County Attorney