

Employee Whistleblower Protection

Northwestern University strictly prohibits retaliation against any member of its community for reporting or inquiring about alleged improper or wrongful activity, or participating in any manner in an investigation or proceeding related to alleged improper or wrongful activity.

Additionally, federal law protects Northwestern employees who work on federal contracts or grants from reprisal for reporting fraud, waste, or other misconduct relating to such contracts or grants. A printable summary of federal statutory protections is available below, along with links to the text of relevant statutes and implementing regulations.

- Printable summary of whistleblower protections under federal law (see next page)
- [10 U.S.C. Section 2409](#) (applicable to Department of Defense and NASA contracts and grants)
- [41 U.S.C. Section 4712](#) (applicable to contracts or grants funded by civilian agencies)
- [Federal Acquisition Regulations Subpart 3.908](#)

Research misconduct regulations adopted by federal agencies funding sponsored research at Northwestern similarly require the University to protect the positions and reputations of community members who report misconduct in good faith or participate in good faith in misconduct proceedings.

Whistleblower Protections under Federal Law

Federal law protects employees from reprisal for engaging in certain whistleblower activities in connection with federal contracts and grants. The applicable statutes¹ provide that employers may not discharge, demote, or otherwise discriminate against an employee as a reprisal for the employee disclosing non-classified information that the employee reasonably believes is evidence of:

- gross mismanagement of a federal contract or grant;
- a gross waste of federal funds;
- an abuse of authority² relating to a federal contract or grant;
- a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety; or
- a violation of law, rule, or regulation related to a federal contract (including the competition for or negotiation of a contract) or grant.

The statutes cover disclosures to the following persons or entities:

- a member of Congress or a representative of a committee of Congress;
- an Inspector General;
- the Government Accountability Office;
- a federal employee responsible for contract or grant oversight or management at the relevant agency;
- an authorized official of the Department of Justice or other law enforcement agency;
- a court or grand jury; or
- a management official or other employee of Northwestern who has the responsibility to investigate, discover, or address misconduct.

The statutes also protect employees who initiate or provide evidence of misconduct in any judicial or administrative proceeding relating to waste, fraud, or abuse on a federal contract or grant. Note that research misconduct regulations adopted by federal agencies funding sponsored research at Northwestern similarly require the University to protect the positions and reputations of community members who report misconduct in good faith or participate in good faith in misconduct proceedings.

If you believe there has been waste, fraud, or abuse as described above, or if you believe you have been retaliated against because you reported such activity, there are a number of resources available at Northwestern for submitting a report. You may contact your immediate supervisor, department chair, administrative head, or an administrator in a University office that handles compliance matters. If you prefer to report anonymously, you may do so by utilizing [EthicsPoint](#), a phone- and web-based resource available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Finally, the statutes provide a process for whistleblowers to file complaints with federal agencies if they believe they have been retaliated against for disclosing information as described above. Such complaints may be filed with the Inspector General of the agency that issued the contract or grant in connection with which the alleged activity occurred. Such complaints must be filed within **three years** of the date when the alleged retaliation occurred. Additional details regarding investigation of complaints, available remedies, and appeals of agency determinations are set forth in the statutes, the texts of which can be accessed in footnote 1 below.

¹ [41 U.S.C. Section 4712](#) (applicable to contracts or grants funded by federal civilian agencies) and [10 U.S.C. Section 2409](#) (applicable to Department of Defense and NASA contracts or grants). The texts of the two statutes are essentially the same.

² Defined in the statutes as an “arbitrary and capricious exercise of authority that is inconsistent with the mission of” the relevant agency or with the successful performance of a contract or grant of such agency.