

## Ethics: The Spouse Is Political

**Q.** The county manager is concerned that some of the county's department directors are lending political support to certain members of the governing body. The public works director's wife has put up yard signs supporting one of the candidates for office, and it is an embarrassment both to the public works director and to the county manager. When the public works director asked his wife to remove the sign, she made it clear that she was exercising her constitutional rights and would not remove it.

Because the county is updating its personnel rules and regulations, the county manager wants to change the rules to address the problem of spouses' getting involved in political activity. He asked for advice.

**A.** While this is a difficult situation for the public works director and the county manager, it is unlikely that the county could come up with any rules prohibiting the political activities of family members that would survive a First Amendment challenge. The best strategy is for the department director to persuade his wife to exercise her rights in ways that do not put his own political neutrality into question.

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