



DECEMBER 2021

# NEPOTISM IN NASSAU COUNTY

## HOW NEPOTISM CAN BE PREVENTED

**NEPOTISM** is the practice among those with power or influence of favoring relatives or friends, especially by providing jobs. This practice has a negative impact on governmental operations and can deprive County residents and taxpayers of a well-qualified workforce.

In 2018, the Office of the Nassau County Comptroller initiated the first-ever audit on **Nepotism** in Nassau County after a series of corruption allegations arose culminating in the indictments and convictions of officials related to Nassau County Government and reports surfaced of numerous "friends and families" of political figures working in taxpayer funded jobs. Our research cannot find another example of an audit of this type having ever been conducted.

## THREE AUDITS ON NEPOTISM WERE ISSUED

### PART I

### PART II

### PART III

The Nepotism Series of Reviews of Hiring Practices and Related Parties Reports focused on the administration and management of hiring in Nassau County, to identify the processes, policies, and practices embedded within the County which had allowed **favoritism** in hiring and staffing to flourish in the past and to recommend specific reforms to end abuses in the hiring processes.

## SOME OF OUR FINDINGS

### BOARD OF ETHICS:

1. Most County employees have not received the updated Code of Ethics and formal ethics training.
2. The Nassau County Code of Ethics is not promoted, such as posting in County buildings.
3. The Board has operated with less than the required five members and has consistently lacked diversity in gender and occupational backgrounds.
4. Advisory opinions, which provide guidance to public servants seeking to avoid ethical missteps, were not available to the public.

### HUMAN RESOURCES:

1. The Office lacks policies to properly ensure that Nassau County's Code of Ethics requirements concerning nepotism is being monitored & enforced by County departments.
2. The Office of Human Resources deviated from County policy by not requesting Civil Service background checks on 50% of the files sampled (39 employees out of 78).
3. Nepotism was likely involved in the hiring of a relative of the former County Executive's friend/County contractor;
4. Over 40 Ordinance employees were moved into Civil Service protected positions and placed in non-competitive job titles prior to the 2018 change in County Executive administration.

### CIVIL SERVICE:

1. The website of the Civil Service Commission lacked pertinent information that would be helpful for the public. A transparent website is a key tool in informing the public as to employment opportunities with the County and ensuring that all interested qualified people in the County are aware of such opportunities.
2. Nassau County job titles and salary ranges have not been surveyed or updated in over 24 years.
3. The Commission granted extended leaves of absence to certain exempt County and Town employees without justification, likely due to nepotism.



*These audits were guided by the standards of the Government Accountability Office, providing an objective and independent review.*





## **SPOTLIGHT ON NASSAU COUNTY'S CODE OF ETHICS**

The primary law governing nepotism in Nassau County is contained in the Nassau County Code of Ethics. A strong Code of Ethics that helps prevent ethical missteps is the cornerstone of meaningful reform.

**NO OFFICER OR  
EMPLOYEE OF THE  
COUNTY SHALL HIRE  
OR INDUCE OTHERS TO  
HIRE A RELATIVE...**

*§2218(7) - Nassau County  
Code of Ethics*

## **SPOTLIGHT ON NASSAU COUNTY'S HUMAN RESOURCES**

The County's Office of Human Resources is responsible for developing and administering of programs that directly affect all employees, such as organizational development, professional training, and recruitment. The objective of reviewing the Office of Human Resources was to identify and strengthen the processes, policies, and practices embedded within the County. The Office could use its resources to prevent favoritism in hiring and identify those processes which fail to prevent nepotism in hiring, as well as to review whether adequate internal controls are in place to avoid improper hiring and to make recommendations for the implementation of best practices.

## **SPOTLIGHT ON NASSAU COUNTY'S CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

The Nassau County Civil Service Commission's purpose is to administer New York State Civil Service Law to ensure County taxpayers a qualified public workforce pursuant to the principles of selection according to merit and fitness. The Commission operates in accordance with the New York State Constitution, New York State Civil Service Law, and the Nassau County Civil Service Commission Rules.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The merit system of hiring in New York State (Civil Service) was instituted in the late 1800s, championed by Assemblyman Theodore Roosevelt and Governor Grover Cleveland to combat the "spoils" system of doling out government jobs. In 1894, the NY State Constitution was updated to include the merit principle in Article V, Section 6.







# HOW DO WE PREVENT NEPOTISM?

## 1. DEVELOP, IMPLEMENT & ENFORCE AN ANTI-NEPOTISM POLICY

- ✓ Establish a "Nepotism" policy as other governmental agencies have done, which prohibits employees from attempting to use their positions to obtain financial gain, privilege, or personal advantage for themselves or for people or firms with whom they are associated.
- ✓ Ensure that Nassau County's Board of Ethics actively enforces the Code of Ethics and performs complete financial disclosure reviews.
- ✓ Develop a questionnaire that is completed during the hiring process, which identifies if an individual has any friends or family working for the County. Disclosure is important. Being related to someone does not prohibit an employee from being hired if it is done transparently and if the relationship is not in a direct supervisory position.

## 2. IMPLEMENT TRANSPARENCY, ACCESS & AWARENESS MEASURES

- ✓ An important anti-nepotism measure is transparency in policies and procedures and equally applying policies consistently to all employees. It assures employees that they are being treated fairly. Human Resources should have a complete and open procedures manual for County employees to access.
- ✓ Transparency in hiring is critical to workplace culture and ensuring that those hired have the necessary skills for a modern workforce so that when the County needs the Civil Service Commission to create a job specification, the focus is on the needs of the County for the position, not on which person is in mind to hire.
- ✓ Make jobs accessible to all and create community awareness of jobs by advertising job vacancies and promotional opportunities. **To that end, the Comptroller's Office is calling for all colleges in Nassau County to receive updates to the civil service website on a regular basis.**
- ✓ Detailed job descriptions that outline the skills and experience required provide accountability that those hired can effectively perform their jobs.

## 3. CREATE A CULTURE THAT DOES NOT ALLOW NEPOTISM

- ✓ Management can create a culture that does not allow nepotism by being transparent and communicative in the hiring and promotional process.
- ✓ Educating everyone about what nepotism is and how to prevent it can create an environment of fairness and equity.

## 4. TRAINING TO PROMOTE FAIRNESS AND EQUITY AS ENVISIONED BY THE MERIT SYSTEM

- ✓ Supervisory training that teaches employees about nepotism and favoritism should be provided so that people know what nepotism looks like and what to do about it.
- ✓ HR representatives should be fully trained to ensure consistency in the provision of HR functions, which is important to employees being treated fairly and equally.

## 5. ACTIVE BOARD OF ETHICS ENFORCING THE ETHICS CODE

- ✓ The Code of Ethics must be a cornerstone for ethical operations of government. The Board of Ethics should be actively engaged with Human Resources.
- ✓ The Code of Ethics should be reviewed and updated as best practices evolve.
- ✓ Advisory opinions, which provide guidance to public servants seeking to avoid ethical missteps, must be made available to the public and to employees in an easily accessible manner.

