Should I Blow the Whistle?

King County

King County encourages employees to report significant wrongdoing, called "*improper governmental action*," so that problems can be identified and corrected. King County's Whistleblower Protection Code creates a reporting process for employees, and protects employees from retaliation for reporting improper governmental action or cooperating in investigations of it.

Still, the decision to blow the whistle is personal and could affect your life in ways you don't anticipate, so it's best to make your decision carefully.

BEFORE blowing the whistle…

- ***Talk to the Ombuds Office.*** Talk to us before you file a complaint. We can help figure out whether your complaint is covered by the Whistleblower Protection Code, to whom you should report the wrongdoing, whether you realistically can or should try to conceal your identity, and how to protect yourself from retaliation. In some cases, we can suggest ways to fix problems without a formal whistleblower complaint.

- ***Talk to your family and close friends.*** You will need their support. You and they need to be ready for the emotional roller coaster that whistleblowing can be.

- ***Don't burn bridges.*** It can be frustrating when others don't see the problems you see, or don't think they are as important as you do. Remain civil and polite with co-workers and managers, even if you feel they aren't.

- ***Think about whether you can change things within the chain of command.*** Managers may not know about problems on the job. If given a chance, many managers will be grateful for the information and may fix things without a dispute.

- ***Think about whether and how you can prove your allegations.*** Are there documents, emails, photos? How will the agency respond to these? Are there witnesses who can vouch for what you're saying? Do the witnesses see the problem the same way you do? You may want to consider getting the advice of a lawyer who specializes in employment law.

- ***Write it down!*** Keep careful records of your conversations with co-workers and managers concerning the wrongdoing, every step of the way. Use email to confirm your understandings. If you think you are facing or are about to face retaliation, document the details and call the Ombuds Office.

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