

## CITY OF JONESBORO

# JONESBORO YOUTH CITY GOVERNMENT

## IMMEDIATE YOUTH PROTECTION, ETHICS, CONDUCT & ACCOUNTABILITY DIRECTIVE

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TO     | All JYCG Scholars, Parents/Guardians, Advisors, Volunteers, Chaperones, Interns, City Staff, Elected Officials, Contractors, Guests and Other Adults Participating in JYCG Activities |
| FROM   | Jonesboro Youth City Government Leadership                                                                                                                                            |
| DATE   | August 21, 2026                                                                                                                                                                       |
| RE     | Immediate Standards for Youth Protection, Adult Protection, Professional Boundaries, Communication, Travel, Ethics, Reporting and Documentation                                       |
| STATUS | EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY                                                                                                                                                                 |

The Jonesboro Youth City Government exists to develop young leaders in an environment that is safe, professional, ethical, inclusive and worthy of the trust placed in us by scholars, families and the community. The safety of our scholars is non-negotiable, and the protection of responsible adults serving our scholars is equally important. Effective immediately, these standards apply to every person participating in, supervising, supporting, traveling with, communicating through, volunteering with or otherwise representing JYCG. No elected official, employee, advisor, volunteer, intern, parent, chaperone, contractor, guest or scholar is exempt.

This directive establishes immediate operational expectations while a comprehensive JYCG Youth Protection and Safe Program Manual is finalized and reviewed through the appropriate City process. Where applicable law or existing City policy imposes a stricter requirement, that requirement controls.

### 1. DEFINITIONS & INTERPRETATION

**Student / Scholar / Youth Participant.** Any individual enrolled, appointed, selected, participating, applying, traveling, training, attending, serving or otherwise affiliated as a youth participant in JYCG or a JYCG-sponsored or affiliated activity. Consistent with the protective principle reflected in the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Code of Ethics for Educators, reaching age eighteen does not by itself end the student/scholar status for JYCG professional-boundary purposes. A JYCG scholar who is eighteen but remains enrolled in high school or participating in JYCG continues to be treated as a student/scholar for adult-student boundaries, romantic and sexual relationship prohibitions, communication standards, travel supervision, ethics and professional conduct. Graduation, withdrawal, resignation, removal or completion of participation shall not be used to circumvent a relationship, boundary or course of conduct that originated while the individual was a JYCG student or scholar.

**Minor.** A person under eighteen years of age. Nothing in this Directive means that JYCG professional-boundary protections apply only to minors. Certain legal duties may depend on age, while JYCG may impose professional and ethical standards that are more protective than minimum legal requirements.

**Adult.** Any person eighteen years of age or older. For purposes of this Directive, reaching eighteen does not automatically transform a JYCG student or scholar into a Program Adult. A scholar who turns eighteen while participating remains a Student/Scholar for professional-boundary purposes.

**JYCG Adult / Program Adult.** An adult who, by employment, appointment, election, contract, volunteer service, invitation, assignment or authorization, has responsibility for, authority over, access to, supervision of, mentorship of, transportation of, communication with or interaction with JYCG scholars through the program. This may include elected officials, City employees, advisors, program leadership, volunteers, adult interns serving in supervisory roles, chaperones, drivers, contractors, consultants, presenters and other authorized adults. A parent or guardian serving in an

official supervisory, chaperone or volunteer capacity is a Program Adult while acting in that capacity.

**Position of Trust or Authority.** A relationship in which a person possesses actual or perceived authority, influence, supervisory or mentoring responsibility, decision-making power, control over opportunities, transportation responsibility or other influence over a scholar. A scholar's willingness to participate in an interaction does not eliminate the Program Adult's responsibility to maintain professional boundaries.

**Professional Relationship.** The relationship created between a scholar and a Program Adult because of the adult's role, position, responsibilities, access or affiliation with JYCG or the City. It applies during and outside official meetings whenever the interaction arises from, is facilitated by or is reasonably connected to the individual's JYCG role.

**Inappropriate Relationship.** Any romantic, sexual, exploitative, coercive, secretive or otherwise improper relationship between a Program Adult and a JYCG scholar, including inappropriate written, verbal, electronic, photographic, physical or in-person conduct. A Program Adult shall not solicit, encourage, initiate, pursue, facilitate or consummate a romantic or sexual relationship or sexual contact with a JYCG scholar, including a scholar who is eighteen or older but remains a JYCG participant or high-school student. A scholar's initiation, encouragement, welcome or purported consent does not relieve the Program Adult of responsibility for maintaining professional boundaries.

**Grooming.** A pattern or course of conduct that may be used to gain a student's trust, create secrecy, establish emotional dependency, test or erode boundaries, isolate the student from protective adults or peers, normalize inappropriate behavior, or facilitate exploitation or sexual or other misconduct. It may occur in person or electronically and may involve gifts, money, excessive attention, secrecy, favoritism, unnecessary private communication, repeated private transportation, sexualized conversation, boundary testing or efforts to create an exclusive relationship. One behavior alone does not necessarily establish grooming; context and patterns matter.

**Program Activity.** Any meeting, training, conference, trip, transportation, hotel stay, meal, community-service project, fundraiser, ceremony, social gathering, electronic communication, mentoring interaction or other activity sponsored, authorized, organized or reasonably connected to JYCG.

**Electronic Communication.** Text messages, calls, email, social-media messages, direct messages, group chats, video calls, photographs, videos, disappearing messages and communications through any other electronic platform.

**Incident / Allegation.** An Incident is an event, allegation, disclosure, observation, complaint, injury, boundary concern, policy violation, suspected misconduct, emergency or other circumstance that may reasonably implicate safety, welfare, rights, appropriate treatment or program integrity. An Allegation is a report or assertion that misconduct may have occurred. An allegation is not a finding of guilt. JYCG shall distinguish an allegation, reasonable suspicion requiring action or reporting, an investigation, a substantiated finding, and an unsubstantiated or otherwise resolved matter. Nothing in this distinction delays or eliminates a legally required report.

**Interpretation.** These standards establish minimum JYCG expectations. Where law, City policy or another controlling requirement establishes a higher or more specific standard, that requirement controls. JYCG may impose ethical and professional-boundary requirements more protective than conduct minimally prohibited by criminal law. Compliance with the minimum requirements of criminal law does not, by itself, establish compliance with JYCG professional, ethical or youth-protection standards.

## 2. ZERO-TOLERANCE STANDARD

JYCG prohibits sexual abuse, exploitation or misconduct; physical, emotional or psychological abuse; neglect; grooming behavior; sexual harassment; inappropriate sexual comments, jokes, images or conversations; romantic or sexual relationships between scholars and Program Adults; bullying, cyberbullying, intimidation, hazing, discrimination, retaliation, threats, coercion, stalking, inappropriate touching, secret meetings or relationships, misuse of alcohol or illegal drugs during youth activities, and any conduct that jeopardizes the physical or emotional safety of a scholar or adult.

## 3. APPROPRIATE ADULT-YOUTH BOUNDARIES

Adults must maintain professional boundaries with scholars at all times. Adults should use observable and interruptible settings whenever practicable, maintain appropriate physical, emotional and digital boundaries, use approved communication methods, and document unusual or sensitive circumstances. Adults must not create secret relationships, ask scholars to conceal conversations or gifts, flirt, engage in sexualized conversation, exchange sexual material, engage in inappropriate touching, use favoritism to create dependency, unnecessarily isolate a scholar, share a bed with a scholar, or use position, money, influence or access to manipulate a scholar. The Program Adult remains responsible for the boundary even when a scholar is eighteen or initiates the interaction.

#### **4. OBSERVABLE AND INTERRUPTIBLE INTERACTIONS**

Whenever reasonably possible, JYCG activities involving scholars should have at least two authorized adults present or occur where interactions are observable and interruptible. Necessary one-on-one interactions should use an observable setting when possible, be limited to legitimate program needs, be disclosed to another responsible adult when circumstances warrant, and be documented when unusual or sensitive. These safeguards protect both scholars and adults.

#### **5. COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

JYCG-related communication must remain professional and should occur through approved channels whenever available. Disappearing messages, secret accounts, sexual or suggestive messages, inappropriate photographs or videos, deliberate deletion intended to conceal an interaction, instructions to scholars to delete communications, secret communications intentionally hidden from responsible adults, and electronic harassment or bullying are prohibited. Group communication should be used when practical.

#### **6. RECOGNIZING AND PREVENTING GROOMING**

Potential warning signs may include excessive individual attention, frequent unnecessary private messages, special gifts or money, creating secrets, isolation, repeated unscheduled transportation, testing physical boundaries, sexual jokes or conversations, increasing physical contact, undermining parents or guardians, emotional dependency, favoritism or efforts to move communication away from monitored channels. Concerns should be reported through appropriate channels rather than personally investigated.

#### **7. SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION PREVENTION**

No Program Adult may engage in sexual contact, sexual exploitation, sexual grooming or other prohibited sexual conduct involving a JYCG scholar. No person may request, possess, produce, transmit or distribute unlawful sexual images involving a minor. Such material must not be forwarded or duplicated; appropriate authorities should be contacted and legal instructions followed regarding preservation.

#### **8. MANDATED REPORTING**

Every person covered by Georgia mandated-reporting law must comply with those duties. JYCG will not require permission from a supervisor, elected official, advisor or other person before a legally required report is made. Reasonable suspicion is not proof, and the reporter is not responsible for determining guilt or conducting an investigation. Immediate safety, appropriate reporting, factual documentation, evidence preservation and confidentiality are required. Internal notification never substitutes for a report required by law.

#### **9. RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE**

When a scholar discloses abuse or misconduct, remain calm, listen, thank the scholar for speaking up, explain that appropriate help will be obtained, and do not promise secrecy. Do not blame, interrogate, ask leading or repetitive questions, contact the accused, tell other scholars, post about the matter or privately mediate it. Record the scholar's statements as accurately and objectively as possible.

#### **10. INCIDENT RESPONSE AND DOCUMENTATION**

A written Incident Report is required for significant injuries, medical emergencies, missing scholars, threats, violence, harassment, bullying, hazing, boundary concerns, inappropriate communications, transportation or hotel violations, suspected abuse, sexual misconduct concerns, law-enforcement involvement and other serious safety incidents. Internal documentation never replaces emergency or legally required external reporting. Records must be factual, objective, timely, dated and attributable.

## **11. PROTECTING RESPONSIBLE ADULTS**

Strong youth-protection rules also protect responsible adults. Adults should avoid unnecessary isolation, retain professional communications, follow transportation and travel procedures, document unusual circumstances, preserve relevant communications, avoid favoritism and report concerns. An allegation is not automatically a finding of wrongdoing. No complainant, accused person, witness or participant may retaliate, influence witnesses, destroy evidence or interfere with an investigation.

## **12. BACKGROUND CHECKS, TRAINING AND ADULT AUTHORIZATION**

Adults who regularly supervise, mentor, transport or travel overnight with scholars may be required to complete role-appropriate screening and training before serving, including as authorized or required by the City: background screening, sex-offender registry review, identity verification, references, driving-record review, youth-protection training, mandated-reporter training, Code of Conduct and confidentiality acknowledgment.

## **13. HARASSMENT, BULLYING AND HAZING**

Harassment, bullying and hazing are prohibited adult-to-youth, youth-to-youth and adult-to-adult. Rank, seniority, elected position, leadership title, popularity or social influence may not be used to humiliate, intimidate, coerce or retaliate. No initiation, tradition, joke or team-building exercise excuses hazing.

## **14. CODE OF CONDUCT, ETHICS AND CONFLICTS**

Everyone representing JYCG must act with integrity and disclose conflicts when appropriate. Program positions must not be used for personal financial gain, political coercion, sexual or romantic access, favoritism, retaliation, preferential treatment, inappropriate gifts, misuse of City resources or concealment of misconduct. Applicable City ethics policies and law remain controlling.

## **15. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Medical information, emergency contacts, family circumstances, addresses, telephone numbers, school information, disciplinary matters, incident reports, abuse allegations and investigations must be handled responsibly and shared only with persons having a legitimate need or legal right to receive them. Confidentiality never prevents legally required reporting.

## **16. TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION SAFETY**

All JYCG standards remain in effect during travel. JYCG should maintain participant rosters, parent authorization, emergency contacts, appropriate medical information, transportation plans, authorized-driver information, chaperone assignments, itineraries, lodging information, room assignments and emergency procedures. Seatbelts are required; unauthorized transportation is prohibited; headcounts and buddy systems should be used; and unusual or emergency individual transportation should be documented.

## **17. HOTEL AND OVERNIGHT SAFETY**

Overnight travel requires heightened supervision, clear boundaries and respect for personal privacy. Rooming arrangements must align with the following safeguards: scholars shall remain in their assigned rooms unless an authorized change is approved; scholars should not enter a Program Adult's private sleeping room except during a genuine emergency or another specifically authorized circumstance in which appropriate safeguards are maintained; and Program Adults should avoid entering a scholar's room alone except when immediate safety or another legitimate circumstance requires action. Curfews and approved room assignments are mandatory. Room checks must be

conducted in a manner that respects scholars' privacy and maintains appropriate adult-youth boundaries. Unauthorized guests are prohibited, and alcohol and illegal drugs are prohibited during JYCG youth travel. Scholars must be informed of the authorized adult or adults they may contact during overnight hours in the event of an emergency, safety concern or other need.

## **18. EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND STUDENT MEDICAL INFORMATION**

Immediate danger requires a call to 911. Life safety takes priority over schedules, reputation, convenience or embarrassment. JYCG will maintain an emergency information document for participating scholars that identifies parent or guardian emergency contacts and disclosed allergies, medical conditions and other relevant emergency information provided to the program. This information shall be maintained securely, made available only to authorized persons with a legitimate need for access, and used to assist appropriate emergency responders when necessary. Before travel and major activities, responsible JYCG personnel should know how to access the emergency information and understand the applicable emergency plan. Emergency procedures should address medical emergencies, allergic reactions, fire, severe weather, missing scholars, vehicle accidents, active threats, violence, suspected abuse, evacuation and hospitalization. Parents or guardians and appropriate City leadership should be notified as appropriate after immediate safety needs are addressed.

## **19. FIRST AID, CPR, AED AND MEDICATION**

JYCG will maintain a readily accessible first aid kit for meetings, major activities and travel as appropriate. The kit should contain basic first aid supplies and feminine hygiene products to support scholars' routine health and personal-care needs. JYCG should identify adults with current First Aid, CPR and AED certification for major events and travel whenever practicable. Individuals should act only within their training and authorization and should contact emergency medical services when circumstances warrant. **JYCG will not provide, prescribe, dispense, distribute or administer medication to scholars.** JYCG personnel, advisors, volunteers, chaperones and other Program Adults shall not disburse prescription medication, over-the-counter medication or other medicinal products to a scholar on behalf of the program. Parents and guardians remain responsible for making any necessary medication arrangements for their scholar consistent with applicable law, medical instructions, travel requirements and any future City-approved procedures. In a medical emergency, JYCG personnel shall contact 911 or appropriate emergency medical services rather than attempting to provide medication outside their training or authorization.

## **20. TRAUMA-INFORMED RESPONSE**

Remain calm, prioritize immediate safety, avoid blame and forced disclosure, avoid repeated recounting of traumatic details, respect privacy, connect individuals with appropriate professionals or responsible adults, document objectively and follow reporting requirements. JYCG mentors and leaders are not substitutes for licensed mental-health or medical professionals.

## **21. DISABILITY AND INCLUSION AWARENESS**

JYCG is committed to a safe, respectful and inclusive environment. No scholar should be mocked, isolated or mistreated because of a disability or accommodation need. Safety planning should consider mobility, communication, sensory needs, medical considerations, evacuation, transportation and travel accommodations, while protecting confidentiality.

## **22. REQUIRED COMPLIANCE AND DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM**

JYCG will maintain a secure Youth Protection and Program Compliance system. Adult records should track role, screening status, driving status where required, Youth Protection Training, Mandated Reporter Training, First Aid/CPR/AED status where appropriate, signed Code of Conduct, confidentiality acknowledgment, travel authorization and renewal dates. Incident tracking should use a unique number and track date/time, location, activity, category, reporter, involved persons, immediate safety action, external authorities contacted where applicable, appropriate parent and City notifications, report receipt, evidence preservation, follow-up, status and closure. Detailed confidential narratives should be stored separately with restricted access.

## **23. NON-RETALIATION**

Retaliation is prohibited against anyone who in good faith reports a concern, makes an allegation, files an incident report, makes a legally required report, participates in an investigation, provides information or refuses inappropriate conduct. Retaliation may constitute a separate violation.

## **24. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

Youth protection belongs to scholars, parents, advisors, volunteers, interns, chaperones, City staff, elected officials, contractors and guests according to their roles. Position, friendship, political office, family relationship or concern for organizational reputation must never prevent a legitimate safety concern from being addressed through proper channels.

## **25. EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY**

These standards are effective immediately as JYCG operational expectations to the extent consistent with applicable law and existing City policy. Questions concerning legal reporting requirements, investigations, personnel matters or interpretation should be referred to appropriate City officials, legal counsel, law enforcement or other competent authority. **A permanent JYCG Youth Protection and Safe Program Policy is forthcoming and will receive appropriate legal, administrative, risk-management and insurance review.**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT & RESPONSIBILITY

I acknowledge that I have received, read and understand this Directive, including its definitions of Student/Scholar, Adult, Program Adult, Position of Trust or Authority and Inappropriate Relationship. I understand specifically that a JYCG scholar who is eighteen years of age may remain a Student/Scholar for JYCG professional-boundary purposes and that reaching the age of majority does not remove the Program Adult's duty to maintain appropriate boundaries. I understand my responsibilities concerning youth and adult protection, reporting, confidentiality, documentation, ethics, travel and conduct. Signing this acknowledgment does not waive legal rights or replace duties imposed by applicable law.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

JYCG / City Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature (for minor scholars):

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_