**Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.**

**ETHICS**

Ethics refers to a well-founded standard of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do. These standards shall be approved by the board of directors and membership. This usually covers terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics Complaints are not to be used for personal issues.

The Gold Star Wives of America, Inc (GSW) eleven ethical standards are:

Honesty and Integrity –Tell the truth and avoid any wrongdoing.

Objectivity—Unbiased assessment without favoritism for one side or the other.

Competence—Include analytical skills, interpersonal relationships skills to execute information processing and capacity for change

Due Care—Engaging in just, proper, and sufficient care to show the absence of negligence.

Critical thinking—Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions and find innovative solutions.

Professionalism--Demonstrate integrity through work ethic, personal accountability, professional image and ethical behavior.

Confidentiality--All information supplied will be treated confidentially. It is described by law as the duty of an individual to refrain from sharing confidential information with others without the express consent of the other party(ies).

Behavior –Principles that govern the behavior of a person or group in a business environment. It is a form of etiquette that is linked primarily to respectful and courteous conduct.

Peer Respect--Accepting the other person and not trying to change them. All people are due respect for the simple fact of being people. Treat people as you want to be treated.

Data Confidentiality-Protection of data from unauthorized access and disclosure including personal privacy and proprietary information.

Lawfulness—Know and follow the law.

**PROCEDURE FOR FILING AN ETHICS COMPLAINT**

If you have a personal issue with another Gold Star Wife, it is your responsibility to address the issue with the person involved. Any ethic complaint must be filed within forty-five (45) days of the incident. If you need help, speak with your Chapter President to assist you with conflict resolution. If you are a Member-at-Large (MAL) contact your Region President. An allegation of an alleged ethical violation shall remain confidential until there is final determination of the matter.

**Procedure for filing an ethics complaint is as follows:**

* Complete Ethics Complaint form found on Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. website.
* Gather any documentation that supports the complaint to submit with form.
* Make copies of complaint and documentation for your file.
* Complaints against another chapter member are filed with the Chapter President with the supporting documentation.
* Complaints against a Member-At-Large are filed with the Regional President with the supporting documentation.
* Complaints between two Regions are filed with GSW National Ethics Committee with the supporting documentation.

**CHAPTER REVIEW:**

Ethics Complaints are to be submitted on an Ethic Complaint form which can be found on the GSW website. When submitting this form, the complainant **SHALL** include the specific By Law or Standing Rule, which the complainant alleges the respondent violated and all factual information, including all documents and other information to include the names and contact information for individuals whom the complainant alleges supports their allegations. After completing the form, the complainant shall send two copies to the Chapter President.

The Chapter President shall provide the respondent with one copy of the allegations and all documentation no later than ten (10) calendar days after receiving it. One copy shall be maintained in the Chapter records.

The respondent has fifteen (15) calendar days in which to provide a written reply to the complaint and Chapter President with all factual information including all documents and including the names and contact information for individuals whom the respondent seeks to rely upon in their response or to refute any allegation in the complaint.

The Chapter President reviews the matter with both parties and any person which either the complainant or respondent wishes to offer in support of their position. The Chapter review seeks to resolve the matter within ten (10) calendar days at the chapter level. Failing to resolve the matter, the Chapter review shall create a complete factual basis for the allegations and response to them. If the issue cannot be resolved by the Chapter President, the Chapter President certifies in writing the efforts at resolving the matter and that the matter was not resolved at the chapter level.

The Chapter President then refers the matter to the Region President for review and resolution. Copies of the original documentation and all related documents shall be sent to the Region President.

If there is a problem between two Chapters it automatically goes to the Region President.

**REGION REVIEW:**

Upon receiving a complaint signed off by a Chapter President with all documentation from the complainant and the respondent submitted during the Chapter review, the Region President will seek to resolve the matter using the same guidelines as is outlined in the Chapter Review.

If the issue cannot be resolved by the Region President, the matter is referred to the National Ethics Committee for review and resolution. The Region President certifies in writing the efforts at resolving the matter and recommendations that the matter was not resolved at the Region level. The Region President then refers the matter to the National Ethics Committee for review and resolution. Copies of the original documentation and all related documents shall be sent to the National Ethics Committee.

Neither the complainant nor the respondent may submit additional information at the Region review unless it is based solely on factual evidence which clearly and unequivocally occurs after the date of the Chapter President’s certification letter.

If there is a problem within two Regions, it automatically goes to the National Ethics Committee.

**NATIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE REVIEW:**

Upon receiving the Region President’s letter, the National Ethics Committee will complete a comprehensive review of the complaint and all related documentation. Should the National Ethics Committee require additional information, they may request any party involved in the complaint and its review to provide additional written information. After completing their review, the National Ethics Committee shall provide their written findings. If an ethics violation has occurred, the Committee’s recommendations will be sent to the Board of Directors. If no ethics violations are supported by the documentation, the Committee will inform all parties involved: complainant, respondent, Chapter President and Region President.

**NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

Upon receiving the National Ethics Committee’s report and recommendations of an ethic violation, the Board of Directors may accept, reject, or modify any recommendation. A letter from the Ethics Committee as approved by the Board will be sent to all parties involved. The Board decision is final and shall be binding upon the complainant and respondent for all purposes.

The actions of censure or suspension upon a finding of an ethical violation may be instituted at the Chapter, Region, or the National GSW Board of Directors. Only the GSW National Board of Directors may institute expulsion from the organization and/or a leadership position. A finding prompting censure, suspension, or expulsion shall be published in the national newsletter.

**Findings:**

 No ethical violation occurred--No information related to complaint will be published.

Censure—public or private defined by the Board of Directors

Suspension—with a determination of the duration of the membership suspension and/ or eligibility to serve in a leadership position at any level in GSW, as well as any conditions for consideration for an earlier reinstatement to membership or leadership.

Expulsion – permanent expulsion from membership and/or leadership position.

**CODE OF CONDUCT/ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MEMBERS**

Gold Star Wives of America, Inc is a volunteer organization. We do NOT make money for ourselves, everything we do is to the benefit of our Organization. Our behavior is to reflect positively on our Organization. With this in mind, we must have Rules to follow:

We do not make any money from our service to the Organization. You cannot keep any money, in kind benefits, residual benefits, fund-raisers, commissions, hotel points or any perk due to your service to GSW. All these MUST be returned to the GSW Organization. We do not charge for our services to other people or organizations. All fund-raising events must have the approval of the Chapter, Region and/or Board with steps to ensure that all proceeds go to the advertised/intended purpose for enhancement of GSW.

We DO NOT post anything negative online about any GSW member or the GSW Organization. Everything online lives forever somewhere, and this Organization will not tolerate this type of behavior; this behavior will result in disciplinary actions. If you have an opinion regarding anyone, keep it to yourself, do not publicize it. You do not walk in that persons’ shoes, so do not judge.

ALWAYS behave appropriately when representing GSW. Hold the GSW Organization in high esteem. If you have an issue, try to solve the issue personally. Not everyone needs or wants to hear gossip, etc. It only serves to reflect badly on the Organization. If the issue remains unresolved, follow the Ethics Complaint Policy as defined in the Bylaws.

These policies and procedures will be reviewed and approved by the Board yearly and/or as needed.

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