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John Barrientos, Director of Compliance (DOC), for the Cook County Assessor's Office (AO), respectfully submits this Semi-Annual Report pursuant to Section V(B) of the [Employment Plan](#). As required, this Semi-Annual report will also be posted and made publicly available on the AO's [website](#).

## I. Introduction

This Semi-Annual Report covers compliance activities at the AO from September 1, 2025, through February 28, 2026. The DOC's role is to ensure compliance with the Employment Plan and Employee Handbook and to prevent Unlawful Political Discrimination from occurring in any employment actions or practices, except as permitted for exempt positions.<sup>1</sup>

Some activity occurred in 18 hiring sequences for *Shakman*-covered positions during this reporting period, including hiring for other *Shakman*-exempt positions. Under the current administration, there have been no findings of unlawful political discrimination. The DOC has conducted two investigations related to possible Plan violations that occurred in 2025. The investigations and their findings will be outlined below. Finally, there have been no reports from the OIIG involving AO staff in connection with any *Shakman*-related allegations.

## II. Reporting and Collaboration

### A. Periodic Reports and Standing Meetings

The DOC submits periodic reports to the Assessor and key personnel at the AO, outlining compliance activities, recommendations, and corrective actions based on monitoring. Additionally, the reports highlight staff efforts to work collaboratively with the DOC. The concerns raised in these reports involve technical, rather than substantive, violations and do not pose a risk of unlawful political considerations.

Various standing meetings are held between the DOC, Assessor, Deputy Assessor, and the Deputies of HR and Legal to address any compliance concerns or initiatives related to the Employment Plan and Handbook. Revisions to the Handbook are underway and are currently pending revisions after the unions' review. The DOC has regular meetings with Supervisors to collaborate and discuss various compliance topics that may warrant attention, respond to questions, and provide an opportunity for HR to provide guidance on these topics as well.

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<sup>1</sup>Monitoring activities were completed by the DOC and the Compliance Analyst during this reporting period.



### B. *Hiring Status*

Human Resources (“HR”) is composed of 6 Senior HR Generalists, a Director of Human Resources, and a Director of Recruitment who fulfills duties in the hiring and onboarding processes. HR also has a Director of Learning and Development who complements the hiring process with training programs, as well as additional HR staff to support these duties. This staff performs work related to hiring sequences, onboarding, discipline-related investigations, and other tasks. The Generalists provide an opportunity to conduct more simultaneous hiring sequences, as reflected by the number of active hiring sequences during this reporting period. Intake Meetings are more streamlined and provide an opportunity to discuss the minimum and preferred qualifications outlined in the position descriptions, as well as interview questions and scheduling. Familiarity with the hiring processes among all staff leads to efficient discussions of key topics during a final check between HR and the hiring department, providing an opportunity to better manage expectations throughout the process.

### C. *Performance Management*

The 2025 annual performance evaluation cycle commenced on September 1, 2025, and concluded in December 2025. In this most recent performance evaluation cycle, the DOC monitored and found no violations of the employment plan or employee handbook. The app remains a valuable tool for completing this process, as well as the 90- and 180-day evaluations; updates to the program continue to provide operational benefits. Continuing to have refresher training for evaluations has proven beneficial, as there are always staff members new to the Supervisory role. This provides an opportunity for discussion and feedback, aiming to ensure a smooth process, timely completion, and minimal technical errors. HR’s responsibility for front-line procedural performance, as well as departmental performance, continues to demonstrate the benefits of office-wide preparation.

## III. **Role of the DOC**

The DOC’s primary responsibilities are outlined in Article V of the Employment Plan and are fulfilled by meeting with the Assessor and key staff to discuss each of these duties as appropriate. The high-level responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following categories:

- A. *Understanding the Assessor’s Office’s organization, its business, operational objectives, and needs, and its staffing needs.*
- B. *Overseeing Compliance with Employee Handbook Policies, with main topics including:*
  - 1. Handbook Revisions – this task is ongoing.
  - 2. Time and Attendance – This is included in the revised Handbook.
  - 3. Discipline—enhanced processes outlined in the Handbook are designed to facilitate more



efficient operations. Of the disciplinary matters, no compliance concerns were raised.

4. Notices of Employment Action – timely receipt of documentation of employment actions.
  5. Grievances – monitored by DOC as appropriate and raised no compliance concerns.
- C. *Actively working with the Deputy of HR in developing strategies for the Employment Plan, as well as necessary Policies and Procedures to ensure compliance with the Plan.*
1. In collaboration with Learning and Development, the DOC is updating its interviewer training to replace the previous, lengthy module with a more streamlined version. The goal is to complete the new module soon, enabling both new and current employees to receive consistent training. This updated module will ensure interviewers are familiar with the Employment Plan and Handbook guidelines, supporting compliance throughout the hiring process.
- D. *Accepting, Investigating, and reporting on complaints related to the Employment Plan.*

During the previous reporting period, the DOC noted that it had initiated two investigations into possible violations of the CCAO Employment Plan. Those investigations have concluded, and their findings are outlined below.

1. During the hiring sequence for the Division Analyst I position, the DOC was notified that a panelist discussed a candidate's prior employment with CCAO employees outside the process allowed by the Employment Plan. An investigation initiated by the DOC identified two potential Employment Plan violations: (1) whether panel members improperly discussed a candidate outside of the interview or ranking meeting, and (2) whether HR improperly shared and reviewed the candidate's prior personnel file with CCAO administrators despite the candidate no longer being employed there for many years.

Interviews for the Division Analyst I position took place in June 2025, with a ranking meeting scheduled the same month but abruptly canceled by the Sr. HR Generalist. The cancellation followed a report that a panelist had discussed a candidate who was a former CCAO employee with staff outside the hiring process. The DOC found that while a potential Employment Plan violation may have occurred, it did not warrant delaying the ranking meeting. After the meeting was eventually held and before hiring approvals were submitted, the Deputy Assessor of HR convened CCAO administrators, including the DOC, to discuss the candidate's prior employment.

The DOC's investigation found that the first allegation was substantiated. A CCAO employee admitted to discussing a candidate outside the interview panel and the ranking meeting, in violation of the Employment Plan. Two additional employees also violated the plan by providing prohibited information and failing to report the misconduct, despite being trained on these requirements. The second allegation was not sustained. HR's sharing of the candidate's prior personnel file fell outside the Employment Plan's defined restrictions, which apply only to materials submitted with the application and considered by the interview panel, not the hiring Deputy. While not a technical



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violation, this action raises concerns about adherence to the spirit of the plan, as it could introduce improper considerations into the hiring decision.

As a result of the investigation, the DOC recommended suspending the employee who violated the Employment Plan from participating in hiring processes for three months and requiring them to retake relevant training. Two additional employees who discussed the candidate outside permitted channels should also retake training. The DOC further recommended adding language to the Ranking and Justification to Hire forms and requiring that any information shared beyond what the Employment Plan permits be reviewed with Compliance and, if necessary, Legal to ensure it does not violate the Employment Plan. Following the DOC's investigation, the Assessor accepted the report's findings and adopted the DOC's recommendations.

2. During the hiring sequence for Manager of Commercial Valuations, HR notified the DOC that a substitute panelist conducted online research on a ranked candidate after the ranking meeting. The DOC initiated an investigation and identified two potential Employment Plan violations: (1) whether panel members discussed a candidate outside the interviews and ranking meeting, and (2) whether the substitute panelist's outside research was improper. The DOC also examined whether information beyond required submittals was introduced or considered. The Manager of Commercial Valuations role was actively recruited, with an interview panel of three CCAO employees and one substitute panelist. Interviews took place in June 2025. In July, HR notified the DOC of issues in the hiring sequence. First, the hiring deputy declined to move forward with the sole-ranked candidate based on the candidate's resume. The second was a substitute panelist who had not interviewed the candidate and conducted online research on the candidate after the ranking meeting.

The DOC's investigation found that, based on the Employment Plan, interview panel members are prohibited from discussing candidates before the ranking meeting. Although the substitute panelist identified an issue in the candidate's resume, they were not authorized to raise concerns outside the ranking meeting, especially since they had not interviewed the candidate. An issue not clearly addressed by the Employment Plan. The second allegation in this matter was substantiated. The substitute panelist violated the Employment Plan by conducting a general online search and introducing information beyond the permitted application materials. They also improperly shared this information with another panelist and the hiring deputy. While the information may have been relevant, it should have been reported to HR or Compliance. This was particularly concerning because it occurred after the ranking meeting, when the hiring decision could still be influenced. As a trained management employee, the substitute panelist should have followed proper reporting procedures instead of conducting independent research. With respect to the interview panelist with whom the substitute panelist shared information about the candidate, the investigation found that the interview panelist failed to notify HR or Compliance after receiving the information from the substitute panelist.

As a result of the DOC's investigation, it found no evidence to support the first allegation. While the substitute panelist discussed the ranked candidate with another panelist after the ranking meeting, the Employment Plan does not explicitly prohibit post-ranking discussions. Based on the DOC's



investigation, the second allegation in this matter was sustained. The substitute panelist violated the Employment Plan by conducting outside research and introducing information beyond the candidate's submitted materials. Even though this occurred after the ranking meeting, sharing the information with the hiring deputy could influence the hiring decision.

Based on the DOC's investigation, the DOC recommended that the substitute panelist retake the Interviewer and Employment Plan training and be counseled to promptly report any potential violations to HR, Compliance, and their supervisor. The DOC also recommended that the other panelists be counseled on timely reporting once they became aware of the information that could potentially violate the Employment Plan. The DOC further recommended adding language to the Ranking and Justification to Hire forms and updating instructions for panelists to prohibit discussing or researching candidates outside the proper forums. The DOC also noted that HR had already been working on a background check policy, which has since been formally implemented to strengthen the hiring process. As a result of the DOC's investigation, the CCAO acknowledged the DOC's findings and the potential seriousness of the violations. Ultimately, the CCAO adopted the DOC's recommendations in this matter.

- E. *Reviewing Position Descriptions and Notices of Job Opportunities and taking appropriate steps to ensure their accuracy.*
  - 1. Position Descriptions reflect greater consistencies across the AO related to salary and minimum/preferred qualifications.
  - 2. HR can provide additional guidance to Deputies, particularly those new to their role, to ensure this process brings about hiring efficiencies, improved validation, and office-wide consistency before presenting them for review by the DOC.
- F. *Working with HR to implement training programs, prepare training materials, and conduct training for all employees on the Employment Plan and other policies.*
  - 1. Updated Plan training occurred during this reporting period, and no substantial compliance concerns were noted.
  - 2. Reporting on training activities remains timely.
- G. *Making recommendations to the Assessor and Department heads to eliminate and remedy instances of noncompliance with the Employment Plan and to prevent Unlawful Political Discrimination or Unlawful Political Contact.*

During this reporting period, none of the issues that came to the DOC's attention or that were reported by the DOC rose to the level of unlawful political discrimination or unlawful political contact. The standard for compliance is not perfect but constitutionally adequate, and the AO continues to meet it. The DOC provides guidance on improving compliance with the Plan and Handbook for AO staff in various employment actions.

- H. *Monitoring activities pertaining to the employment of Shakman covered positions, including*



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*but not limited to participating in validation, interviews, and candidate selection meetings.*

## **1. General Hiring Process**

The DOC monitored activity in 17 General Hiring processes, some of which began during the last reporting period or involved selecting additional Candidates from the Ranking List or the Validated Eligibility List for interviews. In addition, there was one actively recruited hiring process, and four Shakman-exempt positions were reviewed as directed by the Plan. In support of this activity, the DOC monitored over 200 interviews, reviewed the tabulation score sheets, and attended the Ranking Meetings. Several other hiring sequences involved offers to Candidates from the Ranking List. On average, hiring sequences were completed around 90 days from the job posting to the Candidate's onboarding date. Challenges related to hiring sequences highlight the need to carefully balance the obligations under the CBA alongside those under the Employment Plan. None of the comments in this report gives rise to Shakman-level concerns; instead, they reflect technical issues for which staff need to be alert, most notably in applying information from the Intake Meeting regarding the Minimum Qualifications (MQs) to the validation process. Improvements in this regard have been noted during the validation meetings between HR and the DOC, as evidenced by fewer instances where they reach different conclusions regarding MQs and PQs when reviewing submittals separately.

### **a. Programmer I**

- i. Posting Closing Date: September 1, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: November 17, 2025
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

### **b. Sr. Network Administrator**

- i. Posting Closing Date: October 28, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: N/A Hiring sequence resulted in no candidate(s) being ranked.
- iii. Compliance Notes: During the ranking meeting, three candidates were discussed for ranking; however, none of the candidates were ultimately ranked, which will result in a repost of the position. No notable employment plan issues were noted.

### **c. Assistant Manager of Commercial Data Collection**

- i. Posting Closing November 19, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: N/A Hiring sequence resulted in no candidate(s) being ranked.
- iii. Compliance Notes: During the ranking meeting, one candidate was discussed for ranking; however, the candidate was ultimately not ranked, which will result in a repost of the position. No notable employment plan issues were noted.

### **d. Certificate of Error Specialist**



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- i. Posting Closing Date: September 29, 2025
    - ii. Hiring Date: (2) December 29, 2025
    - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
  
  - e. Data Collection Coordinator
    - i. Posting Closing Date: February 24, 2026
    - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
    - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
  
  - f. Division Analyst II (Repost)
    - i. Posting Closing Date: February 24, 2026
    - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
    - iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.
  
  - g. Division Group Leader
    - i. Posting Closing Date: September 29, 2025
    - ii. Hiring Date: January 12, 2026
    - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
  
  - h. Freedom of Information Specialist III
    - i. Posting Closing Date: September 30, 2025
    - ii. Hiring Date: December 15, 2025
    - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.
  
  - i. Industrial Commercial Valuations Group Leader III
    - i. Posting Closing Date: November 19, 2025
    - ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in process.
  
  - j. Jr. Network Administrator
    - i. Posting Closing Date: November 26, 2025
    - ii. Hiring Date: (2) Hiring Date February 23, 2026
    - iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.



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k. Omitted Assessment Analyst III

- i. Posting Closing Date: November 12, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in process.
- iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.

l. Operations Analyst

- i. Posting Closing Date: November 12, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: February 23, 2026
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

m. Residential Sr. Analyst III

- i. Posting Closing Date: October 16, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: (2) January 12, 2026
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

n. Residential Sr. Field Inspector III

- i. Posting Closing Date: Hiring Sequence in Process
- ii. Hiring Date: Hiring Sequence in Process.
- iii. Compliance Notes: Hiring Sequence in Process.

o. Security Analyst

- i. Posting Closing Date: November 10, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: January 12, 2026.
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

p. Taxpayer Information Specialist II – Skokie

- i. Posting Closing Date: October 12, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: (2) January 26, 2026 & (1) February 9, 2026
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.



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q. Technical Review Residential Analyst V

- i. Posting Closing Date: October 2, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: December 29, 2025
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

**2. Actively Recruited positions:**

a. Manager of Commercial Valuations

- i. Posting Closing Date: October 2, 2025
- ii. Hiring Date: No Candidate Selected. Position will be reposted.
- iii. Compliance Notes: No notable employment plan issues were noted.

**3. Exempt Hiring**

Exempt positions and links to the position descriptions are maintained on the CCAO's website. The DOC reviews the resume and position descriptions to ensure the individual meets the minimum qualifications. One exempt position was filled during this reporting period with no substantial compliance concerns:

- 1. Director of Data Science Hire (December 29, 2025)

**IV. Requirements of this Semi-annual Report.**

Section V(B) of the Employment Plan requires that this semi-annual report include consideration of the following: (i) auditing activities as required by the Plan; (ii) discovered violations of the Employment Plan or policies in the Employee Handbook referenced in this Plan; (iii) complaints of Unlawful Political Considerations in Employment Actions referred to the OIIG; (iv) remedial actions recommended; and (v) corrective actions taken by the Assessor's Office to address the violations.

*A. Auditing activities*

The DOC is focused on monitoring real-time activities rather than auditing during this period. Overtime is audited biweekly and is substantially compliant. Additional staffing is expected to reduce overtime needs. Time and attendance are periodically reviewed, and any concerns raised are addressed and resolved. It is anticipated that the same real-time monitoring will continue, but with revisions to the Handbook, auditing for Time and Attendance, as well as Overtime, will likely be implemented.

*B. Discovered violations of the Employment Plan*

There have been no substantiated complaints of unlawful political discrimination during this reporting period. Efficiencies and improvements continue throughout the AO. The DOC remains an active monitor and identifies compliance issues; none of these have amounted to constitutional violations during this reporting period.



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The probationary evaluations (90- and 180-day) were largely completed in a timely manner, except in rare circumstances where questions or time off arose, requiring permission for the early issuance of the evaluation. Continued attention to this area is necessary to maintain an understanding of the importance of timeliness in this process.

The quality of disciplinary processes, investigations, and the imposition of discipline is generally compliant. Completion times for investigations have been reduced for the most part. This has also been reduced with the addition of another HR Generalist. However, some investigations took longer to complete based on the nature of the allegations and resources.

C. *Complaints of UPD referred to the OIIG*

Compliance or HR did not make any referrals to the OIIG during this reporting period.

D. *Remedial Actions Recommended*

Recommendations continue to be discussed when noted and implemented as appropriate.

E. *Corrective actions taken*

There were no significant remedial recommendations. Therefore, no specific corrective actions were reported.

Conclusion

The issues noted in this report do not rise to the level of unlawful political discrimination, which continues to show the Assessor's and office leadership's commitment to *Shakman* principles. There remains room for improvement in communication, as well as from a technical perspective, and the DOC continues to work with staff to streamline processes for enhanced accuracy and efficiency. This is continuously improved through open dialogue with the DOC and the Compliance Analyst, providing an opportunity to listen, discuss, and implement agreed-upon recommendations. This demonstrates a professional and effective working relationship within the CCAO, ensuring compliance with the Assessor's Employment Plan and Employee Handbook.

Respectfully submitted,

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Cook County Assessor's Office