

# OBEYING LAWS

Laws serve as the rules that govern a society or community. Laws are essential to ensure a functioning society, as chaos would result if individuals acted solely according to their own desires, disregarding the rights of others. Everyone residing in the United States, whatever their citizenship status, are required to adhere to the laws established at the national, state, and local levels. The responsibility of enforcing laws falls upon police officers and courts. When a person breaks the law, they face penalties or punishments, the severity of which is designed to match the severity of the specific law that was broken.

# PAYING TAXES

Another obligation of citizenship is paying taxes. Taxes are payments made to the government to pay for services that almost no individuals could ever afford on their own, such as roads, schools, police, fire protection, the military, and more.

Taxes can be paid on a variety of things, such as on property owned, items bought, or income earned. Taxes are collected by national, state, and local government. Federal taxes pay for things such as the military, Social Security, NASA, interstate highways, and many other things. State taxes pay for highways, universities, and public schools, among other things. Local taxes also pay for schools, in addition to police, fire departments, and more.

Sometimes you pay taxes without even realizing it. For instance, when you purchase items, sales tax is automatically added on. Likewise, when you work, your employer automatically deducts payroll taxes before giving you your paycheck. Other times taxes are a deliberate process, such as the requirement to file your income taxes every year. In either case, evading or otherwise failing to pay your taxes can carry penalties, including fines and prison time.

# JURY DUTY

The right to a trial by jury is guaranteed by the Constitution to every person in the United States, regardless of that person's citizenship status. Meeting this guarantee requires that citizens give up their time to serve as jurors. A jury is a group of people selected to hear evidence in a criminal or civil trial and empowered to decide whether the accused is guilty or innocent.

A person who serves as a juror must first be summoned for jury duty. Answering a summons for jury duty is an obligation of citizenship. To call jurors, courts will select names at random from among the lists of registered voters as well as those who hold a driver's license issued by the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Citizens who receive a jury summons in the mail must report to the courthouse at the date and time listed in the summons. Failure to do so can result in fines or jail time.

# DEFENDING THE NATION

Defending the nation when it's necessary is an obligation of citizenship for some. In past wars, such as World War II, the government drafted citizens into the military to go to war. Currently, the U.S. military is made up of volunteers. Though the United States doesn't have a military draft, all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 are required by law to register with the Selective Service System within 30 days of their 18th birthday so that the government can call them up in case their service in the military is necessary, such as in the event of war.

Were a crisis to occur and the nation needed a larger military than the amount of people who have volunteered, Congress could pass legislation calling up those who have registered for Selective Service to become active members of the military. Failure to register or serve can carry fines or prison time.

# VOTING

All levels of government, whether national, state, or local, have a direct impact on your life. Government sets policies and makes decisions that affect you, your loved ones, your community, your state, and the nation as a whole. While not required, by voting, you have the opportunity to express your priorities and opinions directly to our elected representatives and leaders.

To vote, first you must register. In order to register to vote in Florida you must be a U.S. citizen, 18 years old, and a resident of Florida.

Elections are a unique opportunity for all citizens, regardless of wealth or background, to make their voice heard. Even if your preferred candidate doesn't win, your vote matters as it makes known to the winners and losers how much support their viewpoints hold; for close elections this can signal that the winning side should look to compromise with the losing side on issues, while a big victory signals to the winners strong support for their agenda.

Failing to vote means you lose out on the chance to make your voice heard.

# ATTENDING CIVIC MEETINGS

One responsibility of citizenship is staying informed. By attending civic meetings such as school board or city council meetings you stay informed about important issues in your local community. It also gives you a chance to speak face-to-face with and express your opinions to your local government leaders. At either type of meeting, you can have a direct voice that helps shape how schools operate, or the priorities that your city council follows.

By learning about the issues facing your local community or schools, you can also inform others. Making your voice heard about what is important to you as a member of the school or city helps your elected leaders know how best to represent you.

# PETITIONING GOVERNMENT

One of the rights listed in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is the right to petition your government for a redress of your grievances.

Petitioning your government means any nonviolent and legal means of communicating support or disapproval to your elected leaders and representatives. This means that you can make your concerns known and express your approval or disapproval, your support, concern or desire for things to change.

One common way of petitioning the government is by writing a formal written request to an individual leader, such as the president or governor, or representative body such as Congress, state legislature, or city council and collecting signatures of like minded citizens who support the document. This is called a petition and allows citizens to voice their support for or opposition to an issue in larger numbers.

# RUNNING FOR OFFICE

The United States' constitutional republic is a government of, by, and for the people. Government affects many aspects of your life, whether at the national, state, or local level. Maintaining our system of government relies on caring and concerned citizens going into public service by running for office and serving in government. In the United States, citizens can run for local, state, or national office.

To run for office in Florida, you must be a registered voter, meet the residency requirements for the office you are seeking, and complete the forms necessary to become an official candidate.

By running for office, you have the chance to set priorities that are important to you, shape your community, your state, or the nation as a whole, as well as represent the people who voted you into office.

# COMMUNITY SERVICE

A responsibility of citizenship is giving back to your local community. Your community impacts your everyday life. Part of being a member of a community is helping to fix local problems or improve life for the overall community. Your community could mean your school, city, state, or nation.

Participating in civic life gives you the opportunity to play a role in helping fix the problems and challenges you see and care about. One way to do this is by giving your time and efforts to providing community service.

Examples of community service include helping to clean up parks and roads, tutoring or mentoring in schools, and helping the less fortunate. Citizens of any age can decide issues they care about and look for opportunities to be involved in fixing that issue. By giving your time and working to fix issues in your community, you help serve the common good.