

The main duty of a township board member is to serve on the township board. But the statutes assign various administrative (non-policy-making) duties to the four township board offices.

The word "duty" is not used lightly.

MCL 750.478 provides that any public officer who willfully neglects to perform a statutory duty, "where no special provision shall have been made for the punishment of such delinquency," is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for not more than one year or a fine of not more than \$1,000.

When a township board office has a statutory duty to perform an administrative function for a township, the officeholder does not "own" the duty—you "owe" the duty to see that the function is performed properly for the township.

At the very least, the officeholder has a responsibility to see that the duties of his or her office get done, and that may include working with the board to have the job done by others, including the official's deputy, other township staff or outsourcing, under the officeholder's oversight. Depending on the statute that assigns the duty, there may be limitations on who may perform it. For example, mandated financial internal controls would prevent the treasurer from performing the clerk's accounting functions.

In reality, the trustees' statutory duties are those of **all** township board members—you are all trustees when you are sitting at the head table as the "board of trustees." No one board member has more or less authority than the others at the head table.

But as the name implies, a trustee is an individual placed in a position of public trust with fiduciary responsibilities to manage the affairs of the township for the best interests of the public. The trustee has the responsibility to attend township board meetings and participate in decisions and deliberations. Trustees should be given an opportunity to investigate and study important decisions before voting. They should insist upon this opportunity if it has not been afforded them, unless they feel qualified to make a decision without such study and investigation.

Statutory Duties

(duties of all four township board offices)

- Serving as township legislators, setting policy and direction for the township
- Ensuring mandated governmental functions are funded and provided (assessing, tax collecting, elections, board administration, financial compliance and reporting, and Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act compliance)
- Adopting/amending ordinances and providing their enforcement
- Deciding and budgeting for optional governmental programs and services, determining township ownership and use of property and facilities, ensuring township complies with all mandated financial laws, rules and procedures, including providing the audit, and setting internal policies, hiring and creating job descriptions
- Responsible for township's fiduciary health through maintaining sufficient finances, avoiding unnecessary risks and avoiding "waste" (deterioration or loss of public assets)
- Determining staffing needs and complying with applicable employment laws
- Required to attend board meetings and vote on all issues