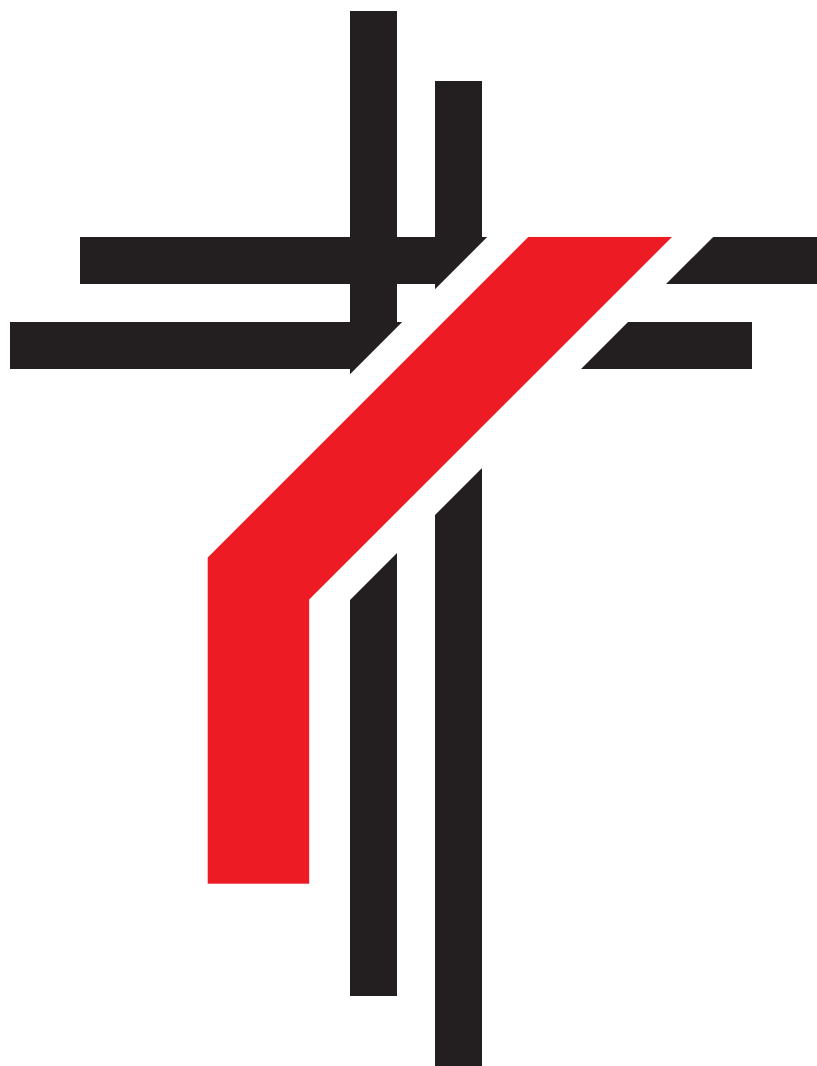


CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DEACONS



Roman Catholic Diocese of
Fall River
Southeastern MA • Cape Cod • The Islands



Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

August 8, 2025

Dear Brothers in Christ,

As ministers of God's flock, we are called to live out the Gospel with integrity, humility, holiness, and a profound sense of responsibility. The service of Deacons in the Church is not only a privilege but also a sacred duty to serve God's people with unwavering dedication and love.

This Code of Conduct has been developed to provide guidance and clarity as we navigate the moral and pastoral challenges of our ministry. It is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the traditions of the Church, which call us to uphold the highest standards of holiness, compassion, and moral behavior.

Let this document serve not as a mere set of rules, but as a reflection of our shared commitment to living as faithful disciples and striving for personal and ministerial excellence. It serves as a reminder of the profound trust that has been placed in us and the grave responsibility, we bear to care for the souls entrusted to our ministry.

I urge each one of you to embrace this Code of Conduct with openness and prayerful reflection. May it be an invitation to deepen our relationship with Christ and rekindle our dedication to the Church's sacred mission. Above all, may it stand as a solemn reminder that our calling demands the highest standard of conduct - a standard rooted in the pursuit of holiness, both in public and in private.

May the Holy Spirit guide and sustain us in our ministry, and may we always strive to be worthy of the call we have received.

With heartfelt gratitude for your service,

Yours in Christ,


Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop of Fall River

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DEACONS



DIOCESE OF FALL RIVER
450 Highland Avenue
Fall River, Massachusetts 02720

Approved and Adopted this 18 day of August, 2025.



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Fall River



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PURPOSE

The Catholic Diocese of Fall River (the Diocese) is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all people to know, love, and serve the Lord. To that end, *The Code of Conduct for Deacons* provides a mandatory set of concrete guidelines established to further the mission of the Church by protecting both those who minister as Deacons and those who encounter them with a specific focus on protecting minors and vulnerable adults, promoting personal well-being among Deacons, establishing the highest levels of professionalism, fostering positive ministerial relationships built on trust and integrity, and, above all, encouraging holiness of life.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- A. In keeping with Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterial Teachings of the Church, Deacons must bear witness to the mission of the Church through their conduct. The public and private conduct of Deacons can inspire, motivate, and sanctify, but when their actions are inappropriate or sinful, they can undermine the people's faith and cause great harm to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.
- B. Deacons must aspire to the highest ethical standards and personal integrity. At all times, they must be aware of their personal and ministerial responsibilities and the position of trust that accompanies their role as a public figure. Likewise, they must seek to maintain appropriate boundaries and protect others from harm.
- C. Deacons are primarily responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional well-being. They are also personally responsible for maintaining professional competence and for meeting the commonly recognized professional ministerial standards of their particular roles. They should seek the necessary assistance when either personal, ministerial or professional areas of their life need attention. The Bishop and Diocese of Fall River are committed to supporting its Deacons and offering opportunities for personal growth, flourishing, and ongoing formation.

KEY TERMS

Minor: *Anyone who has not reached the age of eighteen. For purposes of this policy, a high school student who is 18 but has not yet graduated from high school is still considered a minor.*

Office of Safe Environment (OSE): *The Diocesan office responsible for approving all who minister, work, or volunteer in the Diocese through the process known as "The Essential Three"(criminal background check, safe environment training, and code of conduct).*

Parish: *A church within the diocesan territory that is recognized as Catholic.*

Deacon: *An ordained man of the Catholic Church, who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders and who serves in Liturgy, Word and service.*

School: *A primary or secondary school within the diocesan territory that is recognized as Catholic.*

Social Media: *Any form of electronic communication through which a user creates, utilizes, accesses, retrieves, and/or visits online communities or systems to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.*

Vulnerable Adult: *Any individual eighteen (18) years of age or over who is in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally or temporarily, limits his/her ability to consent to or resist an act (Vos estis lux mundi, Motu Proprio, Pope Francis, 2023, I.1.2.b.).*

1. Pastoral Standards and Personal Interactions

- 1.1 In leading their lives, Deacons are bound in a special way to pursue holiness since, having been consecrated to God through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, they are dispensers of the mysteries of God in the service of His people.¹
- 1.2 Deacons must maintain appropriate emotional and physical boundaries in all relationships, especially ministerial relationships, and not misuse the power inherent in their position to exercise unreasonable

¹ "No greater gift can be given to the People of God than a priest's own resolve to grow in sanctity" (Guide to Ongoing Formation of Priests, USCCB, 2023, no. 153).

- or inappropriate authority over others. Such actions would entail an abuse of power and may constitute a canonical crime. Deacons must relate to others respectfully and pastorally and work collaboratively and cooperatively with others serving the Church.
- 1.3 Deacons will dress professionally and appropriately,² especially while ministering publicly. Deacons must not engage in physical, psychological, or sexual harassment of any person, and must not tolerate such harassment by others serving in the Church.
- 1.3.1 Harassment may be a single incident or a persistent pattern of behavior that creates a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work and/or pastoral environment.
- 1.3.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior including, but not limited to, physical or mental abuse; racial insults or discriminatory practices; derogatory slurs; persecution based on religious beliefs or practices; disparaging remarks due to disability; unwelcome sexual advances or touching; display of offensive materials.
- 1.3.3 Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously and reported immediately to the Vicar General or his designee and/or Diocesan Human Resources.
- 1.4 While performing their duties to the best of their ability, Deacons must not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications that impair stable functioning or sound judgment. In addition, Deacons must not illegally possess, use, or distribute marijuana and drugs (to include prescription medications). Privately, Deacons are not to use recreational marijuana, nor are they to drink alcohol to excess, since to willingly and knowingly deprive oneself of the use of reason, according to Saint Thomas Aquinas, is a grave sin (ST II-II, q. 150, a. 2). To do so, likewise, puts a Deacon at risk for committing additional sin.³
- 1.5 Deacons should seek help immediately whenever they notice emotional or behavioral warning signs in their own professional and/or personal lives. Deacons should seek assistance through the Co-Director of the Permanent Diaconate, the Deacon Advocate, and/or Director of Clergy Support if such situations should arise. The Bishop and Diocese are committed to helping Deacons overcome addiction and gain self-mastery. When Deacons admit or are suspected of abusing alcohol, drugs, or other substances, the Director of Clergy Support shall be notified, who will then take the necessary steps to ensure the well-being and safety of all.
- 1.6 Deacons are prohibited from personally viewing, displaying, or engaging in any pornographic material and images which constitute a grave moral offense with the possibility of public scandal. A Deacon who struggles with pornography addiction, as with any addiction, should reach out to the Co-Director of Permanent Diaconate, the Deacon Advocate and/or the Director of Clergy Support for assistance.
- 1.7 While the reasonable debate on matters of social import is valued, Deacons must conduct themselves in a manner consistent with Catholic Teaching in all public communications. Public communications are communications offered in a public forum or disseminated to a general audience and include communications whose potential for broad dissemination is reasonably foreseeable (e.g., homily, public speech, bulletin article, op-ed submission to media, social media post, or blog). As representatives of the Church, Deacons must not risk the tax-exempt status of the Church by endorsing or opposing particular candidates or parties.
- 1.8 Any communications, including electronic one-to-one messaging, by Deacons within their ministerial duties shall be for professional reasons only and must maintain appropriate boundaries. This shall include personal social media sites. (Please see Section Five for more information on electronic communications.)

² The USCCB, in a complementary norm to Canon 284, states, "In liturgical rites, clerics shall wear the vesture prescribed in the proper liturgical books.

³ "We learn that we should shun drunkenness, which prevents us from avoiding grievous sins. For the things we avoid when sober, we unknowingly commit through drunkenness" (Saint Ambrose as quoted in ST II-II, q. 150, a. 2).

- 1.9 Deacons must exercise discretion and confidentiality in handling sensitive information and may not disclose confidential information to others not entitled to such information.
- 1.10 Deacons by law in Massachusetts are mandated reporters. Deacons must follow all policies outlined in the *Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful* related to mandatory reporting and all the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws.

2. Standards for Pastoral Care⁴ and Spiritual Direction

- 2.1 Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction are vital services that Deacons offer. In such important encounters, it is imperative that Deacons take great care to respect the rights, confidentiality, and welfare of each individual. In the same way that licensed mental health workers follow strict guidelines to manage their interactions, the following standards promote integrity in Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction.
- 2.2 Deacons must recall their primary identity and mission to be spiritual men and dispensers of grace so as not to step beyond their identity and training in counseling situations and refer any individual to other professionals when appropriate. Deacons who regularly engage in Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction must participate in ongoing education to support their knowledge in these areas.
- 2.3 Providing counseling services to individuals with whom the Deacons have pre-existing relationships may create a conflict of interest. This does not preclude Deacons from providing services to members of their congregations or communities. However, the nature of the relationship must be carefully considered before initiating a counseling relationship, particularly given the inherent disparity of power that occurs in ministerial relationships.
- 2.4 Deacons should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in Pastoral Care or Spiritual Direction⁵. This includes informing the individual from the

beginning of the circumstances under which confidentiality is considered “waived” (i.e., a risk of imminent danger to the individual or others, reporting abuse as mandated by law, etc.).

- 2.5 Deacons are fully responsible for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries in all counseling and ministerial relationships. The responsibility for upholding proper boundaries always resides with the Deacon providing the counsel. Attempts by an individual to initiate an inappropriate relationship with the Deacon do not mitigate his responsibility for maintaining an appropriate, professional relationship. At times, prudence may dictate a Deacon to refer a person to another Deacon or priest for assistance if the likelihood of challenging temptation is discerned.
- 2.6 Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction should be conducted in appropriate settings at appropriate times. For the protection of all involved, it is best to have meetings take place when other personnel are on the premises.
- 2.7 Deacons must never engage in sexual intimacies with the individuals they counsel. “Sexual intimacy” means physical sexual contact as well as inappropriate conversation, communication, or body language of a sexual or perceived sexual nature. Deacons should also avoid the appearance of inappropriate contact via behavior, conversation, other forms of communication, travel, etc.
- 2.8 When teaching, writing, giving homilies, or other public presentations, Deacons must take care to safeguard the confidentiality of any information gathered during Pastoral Care or Spiritual Direction.

3. Conduct with Minors and Vulnerable Adults

- 3.1 Deacons must be aware of their own and others’ vulnerability when working alone with minors and should avoid any conduct that a reasonable person could misconstrue as improper. The **Rule of Two** is the “best practices” approach. Two Office of Safe Environment (OSE) approved adults should be present during all activities involving minors and vulnerable adults.

⁴ In this context, “Pastoral Care” refers to the non-clinical helping relationship between a Deacon and those who he advises in a ministerial setting.

⁵ These limitations on confidentiality apply to matters outside the confessional.

NOTE: *The rule of two is not intended to apply that two OSE approved adults must be in every room at all times. For example, when faith formation classes are taught, there may be one catechist teaching in a room with an open door (or window in the door) while the DRE and other OSE approved adults are in the building.*

- 3.2 Ratios of chaperones/supervisors to minors should be determined separately for each activity based on a) the age and development of the youth involved, b) the level of risk of isolation in the activity, and c) the location of the activity and ability for others to casually observe the minors and adult(s) involved.
- 3.3 Deacons shall avoid being alone with any unrelated minor, except for Pastoral Care, Spiritual Direction, or for reasonable, common-sense exceptions, such as emergency situations and circumstances where the interaction is incidental and not extended. Keeping in mind the **Rule of Two**, one-on-one meetings with an unrelated minor or vulnerable adult are best held in a common area or in an area visible to others through a window or open door. Deacons are encouraged, if possible, to install windows in all office doors to meet this criterion.
- 3.4 Physical contact with minors must be appropriate and nonsexual. Physical contact should be initiated by the minor aside from the occasional high-five, handshake, or similar appropriate gesture.
- 3.5 Any Deacon found to be using, or in possession of illegal substances, marijuana, or excessive alcohol intake when ministering or supervising minors, will be subject to disciplinary action. Deacons must use prudence when deciding whether to consume alcohol whatsoever in any ministerial context.
- 3.6 Deacons must not share private overnight accommodations (rectory, bedroom, hotel room, tent, camper, bed, etc.) with any unrelated minor. In situations in which overnight accommodations are in open spaces (gymnasiums, gathering spaces, etc.), actions should be taken to provide suitable supervision and create reasonable separation between the sexes and between adults and minors.

- 3.7 Communications by Deacons with unrelated minors must be for professional reasons only. Deacons must maintain appropriate boundaries in all communications with an unrelated minor, including through the use of electronic devices or web-based media. (See Section Five for more specific policies related to electronic communication.)
- 3.8 Because gifts have often been used in the process of grooming potential victims, for the protection of Deacons and laity alike, Deacons should not give gifts of any nature to an unrelated minor in the context of ministry unless given to a whole group (i.e., all of the Confirmation class or all of the altar servers).⁶

4. Monitoring Behavior and Reporting Misconduct

- 4.1 Deacons have a responsibility to monitor their behavior and that of other Deacons, Priests, staff, and volunteers, and a duty to report ethical or unprofessional misconduct and violations of this *Code of Conduct*. Failure to report violations known to the Deacon or that, with the exercise of due diligence, should have been known to the Deacon, which is later discovered, will result in disciplinary action as the Deacon failed morally to address sin and unsafe situations that could have prevented harm.⁷
- 4.2 Deacons should continuously observe interactions between adults and minors in the Parish and/or environment. If a concern exists regarding inappropriate behavior, consult with the Office of Safe Environment.
- 4.3 Deacons should identify situations that present risks of violating this *Code of Conduct* and the *Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful* and create proactive plans to address them in advance.
- 4.4 Deacons are required to report to the Vicar General and the Office of Safe Environment any contact they have with law enforcement involving a violation of Diocesan Policies or Massachusetts General Law.

⁶ Reasonable exceptions to this general rule include gift-giving to God children, children of family friends, and other similar relationships.

⁷ See, e.g., *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, Art 1, § 1b).

- 4.5 As mandated reporters, Deacons who have reason to believe that a minor is being physically or sexually abused or neglected must follow all reporting procedures outlined in Massachusetts General Law and the *Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful*.
- 4.6 Suspected creation, possession, or dissemination of child pornography must be referred to law enforcement immediately and the Vicar General or his designee, as well as the Office of Safe Environment.
- 4.7 When it appears that anyone ministering, working, or volunteering in the Diocese is in violation of Diocesan policies, Deacons must contact the appropriate authority: Bishop/Vicar General and the Office of Safe Environment and/or Human Resources.

5. Electronic Communications

- 5.1 In general, Deacons are advised to carefully discern their social media presence to ensure it is aligned with their ministry. If a Deacon chooses to participate in any social media applications, it shall be done in a professional and ministerial manner. These applications may include Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X (Twitter), YouTube, etc. If an official parish account, more than one individual must have oversight over the content and internal messaging, although passwords and administrative authority for such pages should be limited to the Pastor and/or administrator or their designee and kept in a confidential area for their access only.
- 5.2 Deacons should exercise sound judgment and common sense to prevent online activity or social media sites from becoming a personal or ministerial distraction. At no time shall any Deacon engage in online activity or social media sites that would violate their moral obligations as a chaste Deacon, including even the appearance of impropriety or implicit support of sinful behaviors and lifestyles that contradict Christ's teachings.
- 5.3 Because of the pace of technology and the proliferation of many social media and digital platforms, it is impossible to enumerate policy

for every possible technology situation. If encountering a form of media or communication not specifically addressed in this *Code of Conduct*, Deacons are asked to consider these overarching guidelines in determining the best course of action:

- 5.3.1 The **Rule of Two** always applies. Electronic communications and interactions with minors on official parish social media apps/platforms should be monitored by two adults who are in approved status with the Office of Safe Environment.
- 5.3.2 Parental permission must always be sought before minors are added to any group texts/apps and before any photos are shared.
- 5.4 Official Communications of Parishes or Places of Ministry:
 - 5.4.1 Except in an emergency, all communication (including electronic) between Deacons and any program services participant should take place between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., including posting to websites and social networking sites.
 - 5.4.2 Written Comments of Posts: Deacons should not post discriminatory comments, harassment, threats of violence, or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct. Deacons should not post any comments that would be malicious to a reasonable person. Deacons should not post comments that would create a hostile work environment. Deacons should not post personal matters or conflicts.
 - 5.4.3 Videos or Photos: Deacons should not post photos or videos that would display any illegal, immoral, political, or sexual activity or any matter that would not be in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Deacons should not post photos or videos of minors without the written consent of a parent or legal guardian.

5.5 Communications with Minors:

- 5.5.1 Except in case of an emergency, Deacons must not contact minors directly (on the minor's cell phone) and must instead contact parents or legal guardians or call family phones. If using a messaging app that allows group messages to be sent, parental permission must be obtained before adding a minor's cell phone to the app.
- 5.5.2 Deacons should avoid sharing personal cell phone numbers with minor. There may be some exceptions, such as when a Deacon is chaperoning a group of minors as part of his ministry. However, in that case the number of more than one OSE approved adult should be given to the group in case of emergency.
- 5.5.3 Deacons must not communicate one-to-one with minors by text or other electronic messaging services, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc. Should a Deacon receive an unsolicited electronic message from a minor, he should not respond and contact the minor's parent or legal guardian.
- 5.5.4 All email communications to minors must also be copied to a parent or legal guardian. *(NOTE: the exception to this is a Deacon assigned to a school who may be emailing a student through the school email account in the normal course of his duties at the school.)* In the case of an emergency, and a parent or legal guardians' information is not immediately available, a communication to a minor must also copy an OSE-approved diocesan employee.
- 5.5.5 Any and all areas of appropriate actions around minors outlined in the various policies and code(s) of conduct within the Diocese of Fall River shall be incorporated into this policy.
- 5.6 If, at any time Deacons receive inappropriate personal communication from anyone participating in or affiliated with the Diocese, the Deacon should maintain an electronic copy, and notify the Director of the Office of Safe Environment.

- 5.7 The Diocese reserves the right to review websites, social media, blogs, or other electronic communications created on Parish or diocesan computers at any time.

6. Records and Information

- 6.1 All Chancery, Parish, or Catholic school records are solely the property of the respective entity. Records include all recorded information, documents, letters, maps, books, photographs, film, sound recordings, tapes, records generated in an electronic format, emails, and any other documentary material, regardless of media format.
- 6.2 No records will be accessed, shared, removed, destroyed, stored, or transferred into another media format or otherwise disposed of except in compliance with Diocesan, Parish, or Catholic school policies.
- 6.3 Confidential records will be kept separate from public records for privacy purposes. Confidential records include sacramental records, Deacons' files, personnel files, and records of individual financial contributions to, as well as financial records of, the Diocese, Parish, or Catholic school.
- 6.4 When compiling and publishing statistical information from records, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.
- 6.5 Deacons who have been issued a diocesan email account are expected to use that account in all ministerial and professional communication.

7. Stewardship

- 7.1 Deacons must exercise responsible stewardship of all financial and material resources.
- 7.2 Deacons must provide a clear and accurate accounting of all funds and material resources for which they are responsible and must ensure that adequate systems and safeguards are in place and followed. Deacons will not misappropriate Church funds or materials for personal uses or purposes or for the use or purpose of any other person or entity.

8. Conflicts of Interest

- 8.1 Conflicts of interest situations that are to be avoided include:
 - 8.1.1 Acting with unfair bias or partiality toward anyone with whom a Deacon has an existing professional or personal relationship;
 - 8.1.2 Violating the confidence of another person for personal gain; and
 - 8.1.3 Accepting any gift of excessive material value.
- 8.2 Deacons must disclose conflicts of interest to all affected parties. In resolving the issues, primary attention must always be given to the protection of the person receiving ministry or services.
- 8.3 For advice on determining whether a conflict of interest is real or apparent, the Deacon can contact the Office of General Counsel.



**Diocese of Fall River
Code of Conduct for Deacons
Acknowledgment of Receipt & Agreement to Comply**

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received or accessed online and have carefully read, understand, and agree to abide by **The Diocese of Fall River Code of Conduct for Deacons**.

I understand that the Diocese will rely on this signed **Acknowledgment of Receipt and Agreement to Comply** to ensure my acceptance of and agreement to comply with all Diocesan safe environment policies, standards, and guidelines.

I also understand that, depending on the circumstances, a violation of this Code could be considered an act of ministerial misconduct and may be addressed accordingly.

PRINT Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

Please Print the Names(s) and Location(s) of Ministry:



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