



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

### Ethics for Judges

Are judges punished for improper conduct?

Every judge at every level of the Pennsylvania court system is governed by a set of ethical rules. For Common Pleas Court judges and members of the Supreme, Superior and Commonwealth Courts, these rules are embodied in the Code of Judicial Conduct. A similar code, the Rules Governing Standards of Conduct for Magisterial District Judges, applies to lower court jurists, the magisterial district judges.

Under both these sets of rules, judges are expected to act at all times in a manner that fosters public confidence in the integrity and independence of the judiciary. Judges must avoid all forms of improper behavior or even the appearance of impropriety. They must carry out their duties impartially and diligently. They must refrain from inappropriate political activity. And they must avoid conflicts of interest.

The Pennsylvania Constitution provides a two-tiered structure for the investigation, prosecution and discipline of judges who violate ethical rules.

Misconduct complaints are filed with the Judicial Conduct Board, an independent panel whose 12 members are appointed half by the governor and half by the Supreme Court. This board and its staff investigate each complaint. If a judge is found to have engaged in questionable behavior or committed an isolated act of misconduct, the Judicial Conduct Board can issue a letter of caution or a private reprimand to that judge.

If there is clear and convincing evidence of serious misconduct, the Judicial Conduct Board can prosecute the judge in question before the Court of Judicial Discipline, an eight-member independent panel whose members also are appointed half by the governor and half by the Supreme Court. Proceedings before the Court of Judicial Discipline are public. If the court upholds misconduct charges against a judge, it can issue a reprimand, impose a suspension or remove the judge from office. The court's decisions can be appealed, but only on a limited basis, to the Supreme Court. More

information about ethical rules for judges and the disciplinary process is available on the Web sites of the Judicial Conduct Board and the Court of Judicial Discipline at [www.jcbpa.org](http://www.jcbpa.org) and [www.cjdpa.org](http://www.cjdpa.org), respectively.