

# NORTH CAROLINA CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT



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## North Carolina Code of Judicial Conduct

### **Preamble.**

An independent and honorable judiciary is indispensable to justice in our society, and to this end and in furtherance thereof, this Code of Judicial Conduct is hereby established. A violation of this Code of Judicial Conduct may be deemed conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice that brings the judicial office into disrepute, or willful misconduct in office, or otherwise as grounds for disciplinary proceedings pursuant to Article 30 of Chapter 7A of the General Statutes of North Carolina. No other code or proposed code of judicial conduct shall be relied upon in the interpretation and application of this Code of Judicial Conduct.

### **History Note.**

346 N.C. 806; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

### **Canon 1.**

**A judge should uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary.**

A judge should participate in establishing, maintaining, and enforcing, and should personally observe, appropriate standards of conduct to ensure that the integrity and independence of the judiciary shall be preserved.

### **History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

### **Canon 2.**

**A judge should avoid impropriety in all the judge's activities.**

A. A judge should respect and comply with the law and should conduct himself/herself at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.

B. A judge should not allow the judge's family, social or other relationships to influence the judge's judicial conduct or judgment. The judge should not lend the prestige of the judge's office to advance the private interest of others except as permitted by this Code; nor should the judge convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence the judge. A judge may, based on personal knowledge, serve as a personal reference or provide a letter of recommendation. A judge should not testify voluntarily as a character witness.

C. A judge should not hold membership in any organization that practices unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion or national origin.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 346 N.C. 806; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676; 368 N.C. 1029.

**Canon 3.**

**A judge should perform the duties of the judge's office impartially and diligently.**

The judicial duties of a judge take precedence over all the judge's other activities. The judge's judicial duties include all the duties of the judge's office prescribed by law. In the performance of these duties, the following standards apply.

**A. Adjudicative Responsibilities.**

- (1) A judge should be faithful to the law and maintain professional competence in it. A judge should be unswayed by partisan interests, public clamor, or fear of criticism.
- (2) A judge should maintain order and decorum in proceedings before the judge.
- (3) A judge should be patient, dignified and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, lawyers and others with whom the judge deals in the judge's official capacity, and should require similar conduct of lawyers, and of the judge's staff, court officials and others subject to the judge's direction and control.
- (4) A judge should accord to every person who is legally interested in a proceeding, or the person's lawyer, full right to be heard according to law, and, except as authorized by law, neither knowingly initiate nor knowingly consider *ex parte* or other communications concerning a pending proceeding. A judge, however, may obtain the advice of a disinterested expert on the law applicable to a proceeding before the judge.
- (5) A judge should dispose promptly of the business of the court.
- (6) A judge should abstain from public comment about the merits of a pending proceeding in any state or federal court dealing with a case or controversy arising in North Carolina or addressing North Carolina law and should encourage similar abstention on the part of court personnel subject to the judge's direction and control. This subsection does not prohibit a judge from making public statements in the course of official duties; from explaining for public information the proceedings of the Court; from addressing or discussing previously issued judicial decisions

when serving as faculty or otherwise participating in educational courses or programs; or from addressing educational, religious, charitable, fraternal, political, or civic organizations.

- (7) A judge should exercise discretion with regard to permitting broadcasting, televising, recording, or taking photographs in the courtroom and areas immediately adjacent thereto during civil or criminal sessions of court or recesses between sessions, pursuant to the provisions of Rule 15 of the General Rules of Practice for the Superior and District Courts.

**B. Administrative Responsibilities.**

- (1) A judge should diligently discharge the judge's administrative responsibilities, maintain professional competence in judicial administration, and facilitate the performance of the administrative responsibilities of other judges and court officials.
- (2) A judge should require the judge's staff and court officials subject to the judge's direction and control to observe the standards of fidelity and diligence that apply to the judge.
- (3) A judge should take or initiate appropriate disciplinary measures against a judge or lawyer for unprofessional conduct of which the judge may become aware.
- (4) A judge should not make unnecessary appointments. A judge should exercise the judge's power of appointment only on the basis of merit, avoiding nepotism and favoritism. A judge should not approve compensation of appointees beyond the fair value of services rendered.

**C. Disqualification.**

- (1) On motion of any party, a judge should disqualify himself/herself in a proceeding in which the judge's impartiality may reasonably be questioned, including but not limited to instances where:
  - (a) The judge has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party, or personal knowledge of disputed evidentiary facts concerning the proceedings;
  - (b) The judge served as lawyer in the matter in controversy, or a lawyer with whom the judge previously practiced law served during such association as a lawyer concerning the matter, or the judge or such lawyer has been a material witness concerning it;
  - (c) The judge knows that he/she, individually or as a fiduciary, or the judge's spouse or minor child residing in the judge's household, has a financial interest in the subject matter in

- controversy or in a party to the proceeding, or any other interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding;
- (d) The judge or the judge's spouse, or a person within the third degree of relationship to either of them, or the spouse of such a person:
    - (i) Is a party to the proceeding, or an officer, director, or trustee of a party;
    - (ii) Is acting as a lawyer in the proceeding;
    - (iii) Is known by the judge to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding;
    - (iv) Is to the judge's knowledge likely to be a material witness in the proceeding.
- (2) A judge should inform himself/herself about the judge's personal and fiduciary financial interests, and make a reasonable effort to inform himself/herself about the personal financial interests of the judge's spouse and minor children residing in the judge's household.
- (3) For the purposes of this section:
- (a) The degree of relationship is calculated according to the civil law system;
  - (b) "Fiduciary" includes such relationships as executor, administrator, trustee and guardian;
  - (c) "Financial interest" means ownership of a substantial legal or equitable interest (*i.e.*, an interest that would be significantly affected in value by the outcome of the subject legal proceeding), or a relationship as director or other active participant in the affairs of a party, except that:
    - (i) ownership in a mutual or common investment fund that holds securities is not a "financial interest" in such securities unless the judge participates in the management of the fund;
    - (ii) an office in an educational, cultural, historical, religious, charitable, fraternal or civic organization is not a "financial interest" in securities held by the organization.

**D. Remittal of Disqualification.** Nothing in this Canon shall preclude a judge from disqualifying himself/herself from participating in any proceeding upon

the judge's own initiative. Also, a judge potentially disqualified by the terms of Canon 3C may, instead of withdrawing from the proceeding, disclose on the record the basis of the judge's potential disqualification. If, based on such disclosure, the parties and lawyers, on behalf of their clients and independently of the judge's participation, all agree in writing that the judge's basis for potential disqualification is immaterial or insubstantial, the judge is no longer disqualified, and may participate in the proceeding. The agreement, signed by all lawyers, shall be incorporated in the record of the proceeding. For purposes of this section, *pro se* parties shall be considered lawyers.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 346 N.C. 806; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

**Canon 4.**

**A judge may participate in cultural or historical activities or engage in activities concerning the legal, economic, educational, or governmental system, or the administration of justice.**

A judge, subject to the proper performance of the judge's judicial duties, may engage in the following quasi-judicial activities, if in doing so the judge does not cast substantial doubt on the judge's capacity to decide impartially any issue that may come before the judge:

A. A judge may speak, write, lecture, teach, participate in cultural or historical activities, or otherwise engage in activities concerning the economic, educational, legal, or governmental system, or the administration of justice.

B. A judge may appear at a public hearing before an executive or legislative body or official with respect to activities permitted under Canon 4A or other provision of this Code, and the judge may otherwise consult with an executive or legislative body or official.

C. A judge may serve as a member, officer or director of an organization or governmental agency concerning the activities described in Canon 4A, and may participate in its management and investment decisions. A judge may not actively assist such an organization in raising funds but may be listed as a contributor on a fund-raising invitation. A judge may make recommendations to public and private fund-granting agencies regarding activities or projects undertaken by such an organization.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

**Canon 5.**

**A judge should regulate the judge's extra-judicial activities to ensure that they do not prevent the judge from carrying out the judge's judicial duties.**

**A. Avocational Activities.** A judge may write, lecture, teach, and speak on legal or non-legal subjects, and engage in the arts, sports, and other social and recreational activities, if such avocational activities do not substantially interfere with the performance of the judge's judicial duties.

**B. Civic and Charitable Activities.** A judge may participate in civic and charitable activities that do not reflect adversely upon the judge's impartiality or interfere with the performance of the judge's judicial duties. A judge may serve as an officer, director, trustee, or non-legal advisor of an educational, religious, charitable, fraternal or civic organization subject to the following limitations.

- (1) A judge should not serve if it is likely that the organization will be engaged in proceedings that would ordinarily come before the judge.
- (2) A judge may be listed as an officer, director or trustee of any cultural, educational, historical, religious, charitable, fraternal or civic organization. A judge may not actively assist such an organization in raising funds but may be listed as a contributor on a fundraising invitation.
- (3) A judge may serve on the board of directors or board of trustees of such an organization even though the board has the responsibility for approving investment decisions.

**C. Financial Activities.**

- (1) A judge should refrain from financial and business dealings that reflect adversely on the judge's impartiality, interfere with the proper performance of the judge's judicial duties, exploit the judge's judicial position or involve the judge in frequent transactions with lawyers or persons likely to come before the court on which the judge serves.
- (2) Subject to the requirements of subsection (1), a judge may hold and manage the judge's own personal investments or those of the judge's spouse, children, or parents, including real estate investments, and may engage in other remunerative activity not otherwise inconsistent with the provisions of this Code but should not serve as an officer, director or manager of any business.
- (3) A judge should manage his/her investments and other financial interests to minimize the number of cases in which the judge is disqualified.

- (4) Neither a judge nor a member of the judge’s family residing in the judge’s household should accept a gift from anyone except as follows:
- (a) A judge may accept a gift incident to a public testimonial to the judge; books supplied by publishers on a complimentary basis for official or academic use; or an invitation to the judge and the judge’s spouse to attend a bar-related function, a cultural or historical activity, or an event related to the economic, educational, legal, or governmental system, or the administration of justice;
  - (b) A judge or a member of the judge’s family residing in the judge’s household may accept ordinary social hospitality; a gift, favor or loan from a friend or relative; a wedding, engagement or other special occasion gift; a loan from a lending institution in its regular course of business on the same terms generally available to persons who are not judges; or a scholarship or fellowship awarded on the same terms applied to other applicants;
  - (c) Other than as permitted under subsection C.(4)(b) of this Canon, a judge or a member of the judge’s family residing in the judge’s household may accept any other gift only if the donor is not a party presently before the judge and, if its value exceeds \$500, the judge reports it in the same manner as the judge reports compensation in Canon 6C.
- (5) For the purposes of this section “member of the judge’s family residing in the judge’s household” means any relative of a judge by blood or marriage, or a person treated by a judge as a member of the judge’s family, who resides in the judge’s household.
- (6) A judge is not required by this Code to disclose his/her income, debts or investments, except as provided in this Canon and Canons 3 and 6.
- (7) Information acquired by a judge in the judge’s judicial capacity should not be used or disclosed by the judge in financial dealings or for any other purpose not related to the judge’s judicial duties.

**D. Fiduciary Activities.** A judge should not serve as the executor, administrator, trustee, guardian or other fiduciary, except for the estate, trust or person of a member of the judge’s family, and then only if such service will not interfere with the proper performance of the judge’s judicial duties. “Member of the judge’s family” includes a spouse, child, grandchild, parent, grandparent or any other relative of the judge by blood or marriage. As a family fiduciary a judge is subject to the following restrictions:

- (1) A judge should not serve if it is likely that as a fiduciary the judge will be engaged in proceedings that would ordinarily come before the judge, or if the estate, trust or ward becomes involved in adversarial proceedings in the court on which the judge serves or one under its appellate jurisdiction.
- (2) While acting as a fiduciary a judge is subject to the same restrictions on financial activities that apply to the judge in his/her personal capacity.

**E. Arbitration.** A judge should not act as an arbitrator or mediator. However, an emergency justice or judge of the Appellate Division designated as such pursuant to Article 6 of Chapter 7A of the General Statutes of North Carolina, and an Emergency Judge of the District Court or Superior Court commissioned as such pursuant to Article 8 of Chapter 7A of the General Statutes of North Carolina may serve as an arbitrator or mediator when such service does not conflict with or interfere with the justice's or judge's judicial service in emergency status. A judge of the Appellate Division may participate in any dispute resolution program conducted at the Court of Appeals and authorized by the Supreme Court.

**F. Practice of Law.** A judge should not practice law.

**G. Extra-Judicial Appointments.** A judge should not accept appointment to a committee, commission, or other body concerned with issues of fact or policy on matters other than those relating to cultural or historical matters, the economic, educational, legal or governmental system, or the administration of justice. A judge may represent his/her country, state or locality on ceremonial occasions or in connection with historical, educational or cultural activities.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 331 N.C. 771; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

**Canon 6.**

**A judge should regularly file reports of compensation received for quasi-judicial and extra-judicial activities.**

A judge may receive compensation, honoraria and reimbursement of expenses for the quasi-judicial and extra-judicial activities permitted by this Code, subject to the following restrictions:

**A. Compensation and Honoraria.** Compensation and honoraria should not exceed a reasonable amount.

**B. Expense Reimbursement.** Expense reimbursement should be limited to the actual cost of travel, food and lodging reasonably incurred by the judge and, where appropriate to the occasion, by the judge's spouse. Any payment in excess of such an amount is compensation.

C. **Public Reports.** A judge shall report the name and nature of any source or activity from which the judge received more than \$2,000 in income during the calendar year for which the report is filed. Any required report shall be made annually and filed as a public document as follows: The members of the Supreme Court shall file such reports with the Clerk of the Supreme Court; the members of the Court of Appeals shall file such reports with the Clerk of the Court of Appeals; and each Superior Court Judge, regular, special, and emergency, and each District Court Judge, shall file such report with the Clerk of the Superior Court of the county in which the judge resides. For each calendar year, such report shall be filed, absent good cause shown, not later than May 15th of the following year.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 286 N.C. 729; 308 N.C. 807; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

**Canon 7.**

**A judge may engage in political activity consistent with the judge's status as a public official.**

The provisions of Canon 7 are designed to strike a balance between two important but competing considerations: (1) the need for an impartial and independent judiciary and (2) in light of the continued requirement that judicial candidates run in public elections as mandated by the Constitution and laws of North Carolina, the right of judicial candidates to engage in constitutionally protected political activity. To promote clarity and to avoid potentially unfair application of the provisions of this Code, subsection B of Canon 7 establishes a safe harbor of permissible political conduct.

A. **Terminology.** For the purposes of this Canon only, the following definitions apply.

- (1) A "candidate" is a person actively and publicly seeking election to judicial office. A person becomes a candidate for judicial office as soon as the person makes a public declaration of candidacy, declares or files as a candidate with the appropriate election authority, authorizes solicitation or acceptance of contributions or public support, or sends a letter of intent to the chair of the Judicial Standards Commission. The term "candidate" has the same meaning when applied to a judge seeking election to a nonjudicial office.
- (2) To "solicit" means to directly, knowingly and intentionally make a request, appeal or announcement, public or private, oral or written, whether in person or through the press, radio, television, telephone, Internet, billboard, or distribution and circulation of printed materials, that expressly requests other persons to

contribute, give, loan or pledge any money, goods, labor, services or real property interest to a specific individual's efforts to be elected to public office.

- (3) To "endorse" means to knowingly and expressly request, appeal or announce publicly, orally or in writing, whether in person or through the press, radio, television, telephone, Internet, billboard or distribution and circulation of printed materials, that other persons should support a specific individual in that person's efforts to be elected to public office.

**B. Permissible Political Conduct.** A judge or a candidate may:

- (1) attend, preside over, and speak at any political party gathering, meeting or other convocation, including a fund-raising function for himself/herself, another individual or group of individuals seeking election to office and the judge or candidate may be listed or noted within any publicity relating to such an event;
- (2) if a judge is a candidate, endorse any individual seeking election to any office or conduct a joint campaign with and endorse other individuals seeking election to judicial office, including the solicitation of funds for a joint judicial campaign;
- (3) identify himself/herself as a member of a political party and make financial contributions to a political party or organization; provided, however, that he/she may not personally make financial contributions or loans to any individual seeking election to office (other than himself/herself) except as part of a joint judicial campaign as permitted in subsection B(2);
- (4) personally solicit campaign funds and request public support from anyone for his/her own campaign or, alternatively, and in addition thereto, authorize or establish committees of responsible persons to secure and manage the solicitation and expenditure of campaign funds;
- (5) become a candidate either in a primary or in a general election for a judicial office provided that the judge should resign the judge's judicial office prior to becoming a candidate either in a party primary or in a general election for a non-judicial office;
- (6) engage in any other constitutionally protected political activity.

**C. Prohibited Political Conduct.** A judge or a candidate should not:

- (1) solicit funds on behalf of a political party, organization, or an individual (other than himself/herself) seeking election to office, by specifically asking for such contributions in person, by telephone, by electronic media, or by signing a letter, except as

permitted under subsection B of this Canon or otherwise within this Code;

- (2) endorse a candidate for public office except as permitted under subsection B of this Canon or otherwise within this Code;
- (3) intentionally and knowingly misrepresent his/her identity or qualifications.

**D. Political Conduct of Family Members.** The spouse or other family member of a judge or a candidate is permitted to engage in political activity.

**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 286 N.C. 729; 289 N.C. 733; 346 N.C. 806; 347 N.C. 685; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676; 368 N.C. 1029.

**Limitation of Proceedings.**

Disciplinary proceedings to redress alleged violations of Canon 7 of this Code must be commenced within three months of the act or omission allegedly giving rise to the violation. Disciplinary proceedings to redress alleged violations of all other provisions of this Code must be commenced within three years of the act or omission allegedly giving rise to the violation; provided, however, that disciplinary proceedings may be instituted at any time against a judge convicted of a felony during the judge's tenure in judicial office.

**History Note.**

357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

**Scope and Effective Date of Compliance.**

The provisions of Canon 7 of this Code shall apply to judges and candidates for judicial office. The other provisions of this Code shall become effective as to a judge upon the administration of the judge's oath to the office of judge; provided, however, that it shall be permissible for a newly installed judge to facilitate or assist in the transfer of the judge's prior duties as legal counsel but the judge may not be compensated therefor.

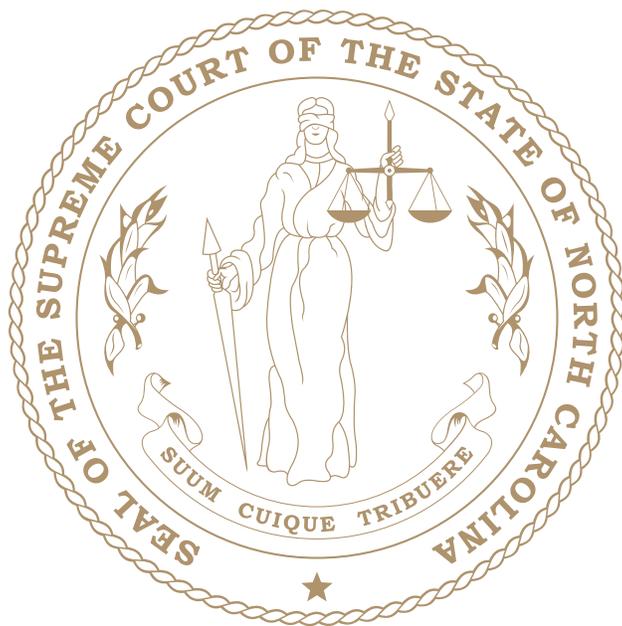
**History Note.**

283 N.C. 771; 357 N.C. 671; 360 N.C. 676.

## A Publication Record of the Code of Judicial Conduct

Reporter Volume	Page(s)	Canons Affected	Key Dates*
283 N.C.	771–82	All Canons; Effective Date of Compliance	Adopted 26 September 1973 Effective “upon publication [of the Code of Judicial Conduct] in the Advance Sheets of the North Carolina Reports”
286 N.C.	729–30	Canons 6, 7	Adopted 30 December 1974 Effective “upon publication [of the amendments] in the Advance Sheets of the North Carolina Reports”
289 N.C.	733–34	Canon 7	Adopted 16 March 1976 Effective “upon [the amendment’s] publication in Volume 289, No. 3, of the Supreme Court Advance Sheets”
308 N.C.	807	Canon 6	Adopted 3 November 1983 Effective “with the reports covering calendar year 1983 which are to be filed not later than 15 May 1984”
331 N.C.	771	Canon 5	Adopted 4 March 1992
346 N.C.	806–09	Preamble; Canons 2, 3, 7	Adopted 25 May 1997 Effective 1 September 1997
347 N.C.	685	Canon 7	Adopted 17 February 1998
357 N.C.	671–81	Preamble; All Canons; Limitation of Proceedings; Scope and Effective Date of Compliance	Adopted 2 April 2003
360 N.C.	676–86	Preamble; All Canons; Limitation of Proceedings; Scope and Effective Date of Compliance	Adopted 31 January 2006
368 N.C.	1029	Canons 2, 7	Adopted 5 November 2015

\* The type of date provided for each published entry (e.g., “Adopted,” “Effective,” “Ordered”) reflects the information that was preserved in the North Carolina Reports.



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