

The Code of Civility

What is the code and why was it created?

The Code of Civility, adopted by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2000, applies to all judges and lawyers in Pennsylvania. As the name suggests, the code enunciates principles of courteous and civil behavior to be followed by lawyers and judges in all litigation and legal proceedings. The aim is to encourage members of the judiciary and the legal profession to uphold the dignity and decorum of the legal profession.

The Code of Civility has two sections, one which outlines a judge's duties to lawyers and other judges, the other which outlines a lawyer's duty to the court and to other lawyers. Both segments emphasize respectful, civil and dignified conduct in all litigation and courtroom proceedings.

"The conduct of lawyers and judges should be characterized at all times by professional integrity and personal courtesy in the fullest sense of those terms," the code says in its preamble. "Integrity and courtesy are indispensable to the practice of law and the orderly administration of justice by our courts. Uncivil or obstructive conduct impedes the fundamental goal of resolving disputes in a rational, peaceful and efficient manner."

While separate ethical rules for lawyers and judges also emphasize respect for the legal process and all those in it, the Code of Civility augments and further refines those principles. Judges and lawyers are expected to comply voluntarily with the Code of Civility. Its provisions do not supersede ethical rules contained in the Code of Judicial Conduct for judges and the Rules of Professional Conduct for lawyers, and they are not to be used as a basis for litigation or sanctions.

Revised November 2012

