

# Ethics for Judges

## What happens if a judge engages in improper conduct?

Every judge at every level of the Pennsylvania courts system is governed by the Pennsylvania Constitution and specific ethical rules. For Common Pleas court judges, Philadelphia Municipal 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 and the Philadelphia Traffic Court judges.

Under both the Constitution and these 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.

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 may 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 may 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. While proceedings before the Judicial Conduct Board are confidential, proceedings before the Court of Judicial Discipline are open to the public. If the court upholds misconduct charges against a judge, it can issue a reprimand, impose a suspension with or without pay, or remove the judge from office. The Court of Judicial Discipline can also bar a judge from every holding judicial office again. 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 websites of the Judicial Conduct Board, [www.jcbpa.org](http://www.jcbpa.org), and the Court of Judicial Discipline, [www.cjdpa.org](http://www.cjdpa.org).

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