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Preserving the Public Trust: The Need for Strict Adherence to the Code of Conduct for U.S. Judges, the Rules of Professional Conduct, and Other Ethical Principles

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**A Much-Needed Discussion: Disqualification Under the
Code of Judicial Conduct for United States Judges**

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Initially adopted by the Judicial Conference of the United States (the Judicial Conference) in 1973, the Code of Conduct for United States Judges (the Code) sets forth the ethical canons for federal judges, including bankruptcy judges.² Canon 1 aptly captures the overall purpose and policy of the Code:

An independent and honorable judiciary is indispensable to justice in our society. A judge should maintain and enforce high standards of conduct and should personally observe those standards, so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved. The provisions of this Code should be construed and applied to further that objective.

Canon 2A mandates, among other things, that “[a] judge should respect and comply with the law and should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.” *See also* Canon 3 (“The duties of judicial office take precedence over all other activities.”). The Commentary to Canon 2A further explains that:

An appearance of impropriety occurs when reasonable minds, with knowledge of all relevant circumstances disclosed by a reasonable inquiry, would conclude that the judge’s honesty, integrity, impartiality, temperament, or fitness to serve as a judge is impaired. Public confidence

¹ A portion of these materials are scheduled to be published in the May 2024 edition of the American Bankruptcy Institute Journal.

² “Anyone who is an officer of the federal judicial system authorized to perform is a judge for purposes of [the] Code.” The Code, cited herein as “Canon ___”, consists of the following five canons:

- Canon 1 – A Judge Should Uphold the Integrity and Independence of the Judiciary
- Canon 2 – A Judge Should Avoid Impropriety and the Appearance of Impropriety in All Activities
- Canon 3 – A Judge Should Perform the Duties of the Office Fairly, Impartially and Diligently
- Canon 4 – A Judge May Engage in Extrajudicial Activities that Are Consistent with the Obligations of Judicial Office
- Canon 5 – A Judge Should Refrain from Political Activity.

To review the canons, see <https://www.uscourts.gov/judges-judgeships/code-conduct-united-states-judges>. To review the recently promulgated Code of Conduct for Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, which is separate and distinct from the Code, see <https://www.supremecourt.gov/about/code-of-conduct-for-justices.aspx>.

in the judiciary is eroded by irresponsible or improper conduct by judges. .
. A judge must avoid all impropriety and appearance of impropriety. This
prohibition applies to both professional and personal conduct. . .

The Committee on Codes of Conduct (Committee) is authorized by the Judicial Conference to provide advisory opinions to judges and judicial employees concerning ethical issues arising under the Code. Since the Code's adoption, the Committee has published numerous advisory opinions, 90 of which remain as active guidance from the Committee.³

The purpose of this article is to bring professionals' attention to certain canons and advisory opinions regarding disqualification that are carefully considered by judges to ensure that confidence continues in the judiciary and the legal system on the whole.⁴ Because the canons complement and supplement one another, they should be read as a comprehensive scheme and not in isolation.⁵

A. Parties to Proceedings and Their Attorneys

While no single canon is more important than any other, Canon 3C, entitled "Disqualification," is constantly and continuously under consideration. Canon 3C(1) establishes the overall tone by requiring a judge to "disqualify himself or herself in a proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned." See Canon 3C(3)(d) (identifying illustrative list of "proceedings").

The Code is not overly rigid, however, as it allows for remittal in circumstances where a judge's impartiality might be reasonably questioned, *other than those identified in Canon 3C(1)(a) - (e)*. See Canon 3D. The remittal procedure requires a judge who is disqualified by Canon 3C(1), due to general circumstances not captured by subsections (a) - (e), to disclose on the record the reason for disqualification. If the parties all agree either in writing or on the record after having an opportunity to confer outside the presence of the judge, the judge may continue to participate in the proceeding (assuming the judge is willing to exercise such discretion).

1. Relatives

As one of the subsections without any opportunity for remittal, Canon 3C(1)(d) requires disqualification when the judge, the judge's spouse, a person related to either of them within a

³ To review the advisory opinions published by the Committee, see <https://www.uscourts.gov/rules-policies/judiciary-policies/ethics-policies/published-advisory-opinions>.

⁴ The canons are anything but *dicta*, notwithstanding the name of the column under which this article appears. And although the opinions published by the Committee are advisory, their guidance is highly persuasive.

⁵ This article is admittedly limited in scope given space constraints. Readers are strongly encouraged to review the text of all canons to further understand the serious nature of a judge's ethical obligations. This article does not address recusal under 28 U.S.C. §§ 144, 455, although the underlying principles are quite similar. For a recent decision addressing those statutes in a bankruptcy context, see *In re 4E Brands Northamerica LLC*, 655 B.R. 331 (Bankr. S.D. Tex. 2023). See also Nancy B. Rapoport, *Am I My Colleagues' Keeper When It Comes to Disclosing Connections?*, 40 EMORY BANKR. DEV. J. ____ (forthcoming 2024).

third degree, or the spouse of such person (*i.e.*, a relative), participates in or is otherwise affected by a proceeding. Canon 3C(1)(d)(i)-(iv). The degree of relationship between the judge and a relative includes not only obvious persons like a judge's child, but also the outer reaches of family relatives such as great grandchildren, half blood relatives and most step relatives. Canon 3C(3)(a).

Perhaps presciently, the Judicial Conference in 2009 expanded the term "spouse" from the typical dictionary definition to "a person other than a spouse with whom the judge maintains both a household *and* an intimate relationship." Commentary to Canon 3C (emphasis added). Because the Commentary uses the conjunctive "and", an argument can be made that the absence of one of the elements removes such a person from the status of a spouse for purposes of Canon 3C(1)(d). Accordingly, a judge would not technically need to undertake analysis under that subsection.

In the end, however, it should not matter. This author suggests that *either* maintaining a household with a person *or* being involved in an intimate relationship with a person should, at a minimum, cause a judge to carefully examine his or her duties under Canon 3C, not to mention others. *See* Canon 1, 2A.

Advisory Opinion No. 58 gives Canon 3C(1)(d) some context. Where a relative either participates in the representation of a party in a proceeding pending before the judge *or* is an equity partner in a law firm representing the party, the judge *must* recuse. The Committee explains that an equity partner is presumed to have an interest that could be affected by the proceeding's outcome. The same holds true where a non-equity partner or associate has an interest – with a "financial interest" being the most obvious – in the proceeding.⁶ Canon 3C is not unnecessarily restrictive, however. According to Advisory Opinion No. 58, if a judge's relative is (i) an associate or non-equity partner with no financial interest, and (ii) has not been involved in the preparation for or presentation in the proceeding, a judge is not required to recuse under Canon 3C(1)(d).

Yet even if recusal is not mandated under Canon 3C(1)(d), a judge's inquiry is not complete. Rather, the Committee reiterates in Advisory Opinion No. 58 that a judge must also determine (i) whether his or her impartiality might reasonably be questioned under Canon 3C(1), (ii) whether the public might lose confidence pursuant to Canon 2A, and (iii) whether any other circumstances exist that would call the judge's role into question. After careful consideration, the judge may invoke the remittal procedure under Canon 3D given that Canon 3C(1), and not Canon 3C(1)(a)-(e), is generally implicated.

2. Social Relationships

Relatives are not the only parties for a judge to consider under Canon 3C, as judges are obviously not without other relationships. The Commentary to Canon 4 notes that the "[c]omplete separation of a judge from extrajudicial activities is neither possible nor wise; a judge should not become isolated from the society in which the judge lives." Nonetheless, a judge's social relationships and the consequences thereof must be considered with respect to each proceeding.

⁶ Subject to limited exceptions, "financial interest" is defined as "ownership of a legal or equitable interest, however small, of a relationship as director, advisor or other active participant in the affairs of a party. . ." Canon 3C(3)(c); *see also* Canon 3C(4) (addressing divestiture of financial interest by judge, spouse or minor child).

Although none of the five subsections to Canon 3C(1) are directly applicable, a judge, of course, must still consider other provisions in the Code.

Advisory Opinion No. 11 addresses whether a judge's disqualification is mandated when an attorney representing a party to the proceeding is either a close friend or from a close friend's law firm. While a judge must carefully consider such close relationships to determine whether impartiality might reasonably be questioned or, separately, for example, whether an impression of influence could be conveyed under Canon 2B, the Committee advises in Advisory Opinion No. 11 that, subject to special circumstances, "a friendly relationship is not sufficient reason [for disqualification] in itself."⁷

B. Financial or Other Interests in the Proceeding

Canon 3C(1)(c) requires recusal from a proceeding without any opportunity for remittal when a judge, his or her spouse, or a minor child residing in the household maintains "a financial interest in the subject matter in controversy or in a party to the proceeding, or any other interest that could be affected substantially by the outcome of the proceeding." This subsection encompasses the subject matter involved in the proceeding even where no connection to a party exists. Moreover, the catch-all provision in Canon 3C(1)(c) broadly captures any interests that could be affected, including those of a non-financial nature.

The Committee specifically recognizes in Advisory Opinion No. 100 that bankruptcy cases, when compared to traditional civil or criminal matters, can present a more challenging analysis because creditors or other parties may not have any intention of actively participating in the proceeding. Nonetheless, a trustee, the parties to an adversary proceeding, the participants in contested matters and members of committees clearly constitute "parties to the proceeding" because they "occupy a central role in the proceedings or are actively involved in matters requiring judicial adjudication." A judge is required to recuse under Canon 3C(1)(c) if the judge has a financial interest in such a party.

With respect to other parties in bankruptcy proceedings, the Committee embraces a practical approach. Advisory Opinion No. 100 clarifies that creditors or other parties holding a mere interest in a bankruptcy proceeding are not automatically "parties to the proceeding" absent something more.⁸ As such, creditors who file a proof of claim or merely vote with respect to a plan do not trigger automatic recusal under Canon 3C. And, the Committee has suggested that in a typical bankruptcy case, a judge has no obligation to mine a debtor's schedules to search for potentially disqualifying circumstances. However, although recusal might not be mandated under

⁷ Canon 2B provides, in pertinent part, that:

A judge should not allow family, social, political, financial, or other relationships to influence judicial conduct or judgment. A judge should neither lend the prestige of the judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others nor convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence the judge...

⁸ Of course, creditors or other interest holders in a bankruptcy proceeding may transform into "parties to the proceeding" as a result of the actions they undertake at any time in the case. *See* Adv. Op. No. 100.

Canon 3C(1)(c), it may ultimately be required under other provisions of the Code based on the facts and circumstances.⁹

C. Newly Appointed Judges

Since 2014, the circuit courts of appeal have appointed 156 new bankruptcy judges. Or, to frame this differently, the composition of approximately one-half of the active bankruptcy judges in the United States has changed in a mere ten-year period. With that in mind, the disqualification process for soon-to-be judges comes to the forefront.

A newly appointed judge departing private practice has several ethical considerations even before taking his or her oath of office. One of those considerations involves the soon-to-be judge's relationship with his or her law firm. Advisory Opinion No. 24 provides helpful commentary by strongly recommending that as soon as practical upon learning of his or her impending appointment, the soon-to-be judge agree with his or her law firm and its partners that the judge will receive an exact amount in exchange for the judge's interest in the firm.

While it would be preferable to have the amount paid within the year, the Committee counsels in Advisory Opinion No. 24 that nothing precludes the judge from agreeing to be paid over a longer duration, subject to the following two restrictions. First, the judge cannot share in profits of the firm that were earned after the judge's departure as compared to an amount representing the fair value of the judge's interest in the firm itself, including the fees collected in the future for work undertaken before separation from the firm. Second, and just as importantly, the judge should not participate in any proceeding where an attorney for the former firm is acting as counsel to a party "until the firm has paid the full amount the judge is entitled to receive under the agreement."

Separate and apart from law firm divestiture considerations, Canon 3C(1) is again at play, as it requires a newly-appointed judge to determine whether an appearance of impropriety would exist in the event the judge participated in proceedings involving his or her former firm. Canon 3C(1)(b) further requires disqualification when, among other things, "a lawyer with whom the judge previously practiced law served during such association as a lawyer concerning the matter. . . ." Generally, a judge will implement a self-imposed rule of automatic disqualification from proceedings involving the former firm for a specified number of years. Though no amount of time is prescribed by the Code, Advisory Opinion No. 24 generally recommends that a judge recuse for a period of at least two years.

However, the Committee further recognizes that the appropriate period might depend on circumstances such as (i) the relationship the judge had at the law firm with the attorney participating in the proceeding, (ii) the length of time since the judge left the law firm, (iii) the

⁹ With that said, a judge must be cognizant of potential conflicts upon the commencement of a bankruptcy cases and related adversary proceedings. Because parties may become active participants at any time during a case, a bankruptcy judge should continue to review his or her connections throughout the pendency of any proceeding.

relationship between the judge and the party represented by the attorney, and (iv) the importance of the party as a client of the law firm.

D. Considerations When Former Judicial Colleague Participates in Pending Case

With the significant turnover of bankruptcy judges noted above, several former judges have decided to re-enter private practice by representing parties in proceedings or otherwise engaging in the practice of law. A sitting judge must therefore determine (i) whether his or her former colleague's involvement in a proceeding requires recusal, and (ii) what steps should be proactively taken to avoid what could become a difficult situation.¹⁰ Canon 2A and 3C(1) are implicated, requiring the sitting judge to determine (i) whether his or her participation would sacrifice public confidence, and (ii) whether his or her impartiality might reasonably be questioned.

Advisory Opinion No. 70 recommends that a sitting judge publicly announce in advance that he or she will withdraw from “any case in which the former colleague appears as counsel,” typically for a period of two years. According to that same opinion, the amount of time may vary depending on the number of judges within a district and the “degree and nature of interactions among the judges.”

However, the passage of time does not render a judge's analysis complete. Advisory Opinion No. 70 also advises a judge to consider recusal where counsel to a party is a former colleague with whom the sitting judge had a particularly close relationship. First, the sitting judge should determine whether he or she “feel[s] capable of disregarding the relationship” with his former colleague. If the judge is not able to do so, he or she should recuse.

Second, the sitting judge must consider whether third persons can “be reasonably expected to believe the relationship is disregarded” by examining (i) the closeness of the relationship, (ii) the length of time the judge and his or her former colleague served together, (iii) the number of judges serving on the court, and (iv) the amount of time that has elapsed since the former colleague departed from the court. If a person could not reasonably believe the relationship would be disregarded based on these factors, the Committee again advises that the judge recuse.

Not surprisingly, the Committee concludes in Advisory Opinion No. 70 that a former judge should not appear as counsel in a case assigned to the former judge before his departure, even if the conflict could technically be waived under the applicable rules of professional conduct. Nonetheless, a former judge may appear as an attorney in a case that was filed in his or her former court (but not assigned to the former judge) so long as his or her involvement does not offend the applicable rules of professional conduct. To that end, Canon 3B(6) requires the sitting judge to closely examine court records, as well as the applicable rules of professional conduct, to ensure compliance by the former judge.

¹⁰ The former colleague must undertake his or her own analysis under the applicable rules of professional conduct. *See, e.g.,* Model R. Prof. Cond. 1.12.

Subject to the foregoing, Advisory Opinion No. 70 emphasizes that a former judge may generally appear in cases pending in his or her former court¹¹:

That the former colleague may have superior knowledge of the viewpoints of the sitting judges does not require disqualification. The same information is available from a thorough study of the sitting judge's opinions, or from observation of the judge in the courtroom. Lawyers who frequently litigate before a particular judge may acquire the same type of information, yet no one would suggest recusal or disqualification in such cases.

E. Conclusion

The Code is designed to preserve the integrity of the judiciary and, ultimately, the legal system itself. Notwithstanding certain recent events, professionals, parties, and the public should continue to expect that the judiciary will dutifully adhere to the mandates and directives set forth in the Code. Anything less is unacceptable.

¹¹ If a former colleague appears as counsel in a case, the presiding judge should avoid any signs of familiarity, such as use of the former colleague's title or first name, as well as references to past events, occurrences or affiliations. *See also* Adv. Op. No. 72 (use of title "Judge" by former judges).

JUDICIAL MENTAL OR PHYSICAL DISABILITY COMPLAINTS

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Under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act¹ (the “Act”), any person may file a complaint alleging that a judge² is “unable to discharge all the duties of office by reason of mental or physical disability.”³ A complainant may file a disability complaint following the standards and procedures promulgated by the Judicial Conference of the United States (the “Judicial Conference”) in the Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial Disability Proceedings (collectively, the “Rules,” and each, a “Rule”).⁴ However, disability complaints under the Act are rare. As the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act Study Committee (the “Study Committee”) chaired by Justice Stephen Breyer found, “[a]lmost all complaints allege misconduct rather than disability.”⁵ Nevertheless, recent high-profile litigation has brought the Act to the forefront and raised questions on the extent of the federal judiciary’s power to “keep its own house in order.”⁶ This article will examine the Act’s key provisions, the review structure established under the Rules, and how the statutory framework has been applied in case law.

I. The Act’s Key Provisions

A. Filing a Complaint

Under Section 351(a) of the Act, “[a]ny person alleging that a judge has engaged in conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts, **or alleging that such judge is unable to discharge all the duties of office by reason of mental or physical disability**” is authorized to initiate a complaint.⁷ Complainants “may file with the clerk of the court of appeals for the circuit a written complaint containing a brief statement of the facts constituting such conduct” to commence the process.⁸

Notably, under Section 351(b), the Act also authorizes the chief judge to “identify a complaint” and thereby begin the review process without the need for a party to file a written

¹ Judicial Conduct and Disability Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–64 (2012).

² Under the Act, the term “judge” is defined as “a circuit judge, district judge, bankruptcy judge, or magistrate judge.” *Id.* § 351(d)(1).

³ *Id.* § 351(a).

⁴ See Rules for Judicial–Conduct and Judicial–Disability Proceedings, 249 F.R.D. 662 (U.S. Jud. Conf. 2008) [hereinafter Rules].

⁵ Implementation of the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act Of 1980, 239 F.R.D. 116, 123 (Sept. 2006). [hereinafter the Study Committee Report]

⁶ *McBryde v. Comm. to Rev. Cir. Council Conduct & Disability Ords. of Jud. Conf. of U.S.*, 264 F.3d 52, 61 (D.C. Cir. 2001)

⁷ 28 U.S.C. § 351(a) (emphasis added).

⁸ *Id.*

complaint.⁹ The chief judge must identify a complaint by written order “on the basis of information available to the chief judge.”¹⁰

After the clerk receives a written complaint filed under Section 351(a), they must promptly transmit it to (1) the chief judge of the circuit (however, if the chief judge is the subject of the complaint, the clerk must deliver the complaint to the next most senior active circuit judge), and (2) the judge the complaint is against.¹¹ After the chief judge receives the complaint the formal review process begins.

B. Review of the Complaint by the Chief Judge

Section 352(a) authorizes the chief judge to “expeditiously review” written complaints (Section 351(a)) or identified complaints (Section 351(b)).¹² However, the chief judge’s inquiry at this stage is limited and she may not “make findings of fact about any matter that is reasonably in dispute.”¹³ Instead, the chief judge must determine whether “appropriate corrective action has been or can be taken without the necessity for a formal investigation” or whether “the facts stated in the complaint are either plainly untrue or are incapable of being established through investigation.”¹⁴ To make these determinations, the chief judge may: require a written response from the subject judge; review relevant documents; and communicate, orally or in writing, with the parties to the complaint or any other persons with knowledge regarding the complaint.¹⁵

After review, the chief judge may decide to conclude the process pursuant to Section 352(b). She may do so by either dismissing the complaint or finding that “appropriate corrective action has been taken or that action on the complaint is no longer necessary because of intervening events.”¹⁶ The chief judge may dismiss the complaint on the following bases: (1) not being in conformity with Section 351(a) (*i.e.*, the allegations do not fall under the categories in Section 351(a)); (2) being “directly related to the merits of a decision or procedural ruling”; or (3) being “frivolous, lacking sufficient evidence to raise an inference that misconduct has occurred, or containing allegations which are incapable of being established through investigation.”¹⁷ And each complaint may have more than one reason for its dismissal. The overwhelming majority of complaints under the Act are dismissed by chief judges. For example, of the 1,363 complaints filed in 2023, 1,286 were dismissed in whole or in part.¹⁸ The chief judge’s order under Section 352 is a potential termination point for a disability complaint against a judge.

⁹ *Id.* § 351(b).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* § 352(a).

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* § 352(b).

¹⁷ *Id.* § 352(b).

¹⁸ The figure for dismissed complaints includes “complaints that later were terminated with finality by circuit judicial council orders on petitions for review, as well as complaints for which additional review was still possible.” *Complaints Against Judges—Judicial Business 2023*, U.S. COURTS, <https://www.uscourts.gov/statistics-reports/complaints-against-judges-judicial-business-2023> (last visited Apr. 12, 2024).

A complainant may petition the judicial council of the circuit to review the chief judge's final order.¹⁹ If the judicial council accepts the petition, it may refer it to a panel comprised of at least five (5) members of the council.²⁰ However, if the petition is denied by the judicial council, then the chief judge's order becomes final and barred from further appeals.²¹

C. The Special Committee Investigation and Report

If the chief judge does not issue a final order under Section 352(b), she must form a special committee to investigate the facts and allegations in the complaint.²² The chief judge must appoint herself and "equal numbers of circuit and district judges of the circuit to [the] special committee."²³ The special committee's investigation is comprehensive. Specifically, section 353(c) authorizes the committee to "conduct an investigation as extensive as it considers necessary."²⁴ When the investigation is complete, the special committee must promptly file a written report with the judicial council (the "Report").²⁵ The Report includes "the findings of the investigation and the committee's recommendations for necessary and appropriate action by the judicial council of the circuit."²⁶

D. Judicial Council Actions

After receiving the Report, the judicial council is authorized to either conduct additional investigation, dismiss the complaint, or take actions that are "appropriate to assure the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts within the circuit."²⁷ If the judicial council does not terminate the complaint, it may take the actions listed in Section 354(a)(2) subject to limitations regarding removals outlined in Section 354(a)(3). For example, the council may take any of the following actions with respect to the subject judge: pausing the assignment of cases; public or private censure or reprimand; certifying the disability of Supreme Court justices, and federal circuit and district judges (the "Article III Judges") subject to 28 U.S.C. § 372(b); requesting the voluntary retirement of Article III Judges; or ordering the removal of magistrate or bankruptcy judges (subject to the relevant statutory procedures).²⁸

Notably, under Section 354(a)(2)(b)(i), the judicial council is authorized to certify an Article III judge's disability "pursuant to the procedures and standards provided under section 372(b)."²⁹ In turn, Section 372(b) provides that if a certificate of disability is signed "by a majority of the members of the Judicial Council of his circuit in the case of a circuit or district judge" and presented to the President, and the President finds that "**such judge is unable to discharge efficiently all the duties of his office by reason of permanent mental or physical disability** and

¹⁹ 28 U.S.C. § 352(c).

²⁰ At least 2 of the members of the panel must be district judges. *Id.* § 352(d).

²¹ *Id.* § 352(c).

²² *Id.* § 353(a).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* § 353(c).

²⁵ *Id.* § 353(c).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* § 354(a).

²⁸ *See Id.* § 354(a)(2); § 354(a)(3)

²⁹ *Id.* § 354(a)(2)(b)(i).

that the appointment of an additional judge is necessary for the efficient dispatch of business, the President may make such appointment by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.”³⁰

Mental and physical disability is also an express cause for removal for magistrate and bankruptcy judges under the relevant statutory procedures, and, therefore, not a violation of the removal limitations outlined in Section 354(a)(3).³¹

With respect to bankruptcy judges, Section 152(e) provides as follows:

(e) A bankruptcy judge may be removed during the term for which such bankruptcy judge is appointed, only for incompetence, misconduct, neglect of duty, or **physical or mental disability** and only by the judicial council of the circuit in which the judge’s official duty station is located. Removal may not occur unless a majority of all of the judges of such council concur in the order of removal. Before any order of removal may be entered, a full specification of charges shall be furnished to such bankruptcy judge who shall be accorded an opportunity to be heard on such charges.³²

E. Judicial Conference Referral to the Judicial Conference

Section 354(b) authorizes the judicial council, in its discretion, to refer complaints arising under section 351 to the Judicial Conference. However, if the council determines that the subject judge may be impeached under article II of the Constitution, or that the complaint is not “amenable to resolution by the judicial council,” it *must* certify such determination and refer it to the Judicial Conference.³³ Alternatively, a complainant may petition the Judicial Conference to review a judicial council order under Section 357.³⁴

The Judicial Conference can take the actions specified in Section 354(a)(1)(C) and (2) (*i.e.*, substantively the same actions that the judicial council may take) by majority vote.³⁵ And the Judicial Conference has the responsibility to refer the matter to the House of Representatives if it determines that impeachment of the subject judge is warranted. Importantly, the Judicial Conference is authorized to create a “standing committee” to “exercise the authority provided in [the Act].”³⁶ The Judicial Conference has established the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability to serve as the standing committee.³⁷

³⁰ *Id.* § 372(b) (emphasis added).

³¹ *See Id.* § 631(i) (outlining removal procedures for a magistrate judge); § 152(e) (outlining removal procedures for a bankruptcy judge).

³² *Id.* § 152(e) (emphasis added).

³³ *Id.* § 354(b).

³⁴ *Id.* § 357.

³⁵ *Id.* § 355(a).

³⁶ 28 U.S.C. § 331.

³⁷ *See* Judicial Conference of the U.S., Report of the Proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States 17 (2023), available at https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/jcus_sep_2023_proceedings_0.pdf

II. The Rules Framework

In March 2008, the Judicial Conference established the Rules to govern the “substantive and procedural aspects of misconduct and disability proceedings under the Act.”³⁸ The rules are mandatory and nationally uniform as authorized by Section 358 (a) and (c) to promote consistency across proceedings.³⁹ Notably, prior to the adoption of the Rules, the Study Committee found that chief judges were generally conducting effective proceedings under the Act despite the lack of uniform standards and procedures. The Study Committee analyzed 593 terminations in their sample and determined that only 20 dispositions were “problematic” for procedural reasons.⁴⁰ The Study Committee made a series of recommendations to improve the application of the Act, including suggested standards that drew from the “observed patterns of chief judge and judicial council actions in applying the Act.”⁴¹ Ultimately, after a public comment and hearing process, the Judicial Conference published the nationally binding Rules to address the Study Committee’s concerns.

The Rules create the standards, procedures, and definitions necessary to operationalize the self-policing mechanism envisioned by the Act. Under the Rules, a disability is defined as “a temporary or permanent condition rendering a judge unable to discharge the duties of the particular judicial office,” and examples of actionable disability include “substance abuse, the inability to stay awake during court proceedings, or a severe impairment of cognitive abilities.”⁴² Furthermore, the Rules give detailed guidance on how the complaint and review process should be conducted. Specifically, Article III of the Rules discusses the initiation of the complaint, including the form of complaint, rules regarding the timing of a complaint, and whether there has been abuse of the complaint procedure.⁴³ Notably, for a complaint based on disability, the complainant must provide a concise statement detailing the specific facts of the disability and provide any “additional facts that form the basis of that allegation.”⁴⁴ Circuits may personalize the complaint procedures and promulgate other local rules so long as the local procedures only supplement the Rules.⁴⁵ Other notable provisions of the Rules include Article IV—Review of Complaint by Chief Judge; Article V—Investigation and Report by Special Committee; Article VI—Review by Judicial Council and Article VII—Review by Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. In sum, the Rules establish a detailed and comprehensive national framework for the administration of the Act.

³⁸ Rules, *supra* note 4, R. 2 cmt. The Rules were adopted on March 11, 2008, and became effective on April 10, 2008. Thereafter, the Rules have been amended on September 17, 2015, and March 12, 2019. The Rules were conformed on February 8, 2022.

³⁹ 28 U.S.C. § 358.

⁴⁰ Study Committee Report, *supra* note 5, at 44.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 17.

⁴² Rules, *supra* note 4, R. 4(c).

⁴³ *See generally Id.* Art. III—Initiation of Complaint.

⁴⁴ *Id.* R. 6(b)(4).

⁴⁵ Importantly, circuits are authorized to promulgate local rules; however, such local rules are supplemental to the Rules. The Rules apply in the event of a conflict with the local rules. *See* Fourth Circuit Local Rules for Judicial–Conduct and Disability Proceedings (4th Cir. 2023), available at https://www.ca4.uscourts.gov/docs/pdfs/jcd_national_4th_cir_rules_combined.pdf.

III. Recent Case Law

The case law on complaints under the Act arising from disability allegations is sparse. In 2023, a total of 1,363 complaints against judges were initiated and only 20 of those presented allegations of disability.⁴⁶ Disability and the competence to serve are inherently delicate matters that are not generally considered by the judiciary in formal, public platforms. However, the recent disability complaint against Judge Pauline Newman and the subsequent litigation arising from the complaint have offered a rare insight into the process.

A. The Initial Disability Complaint and Investigation

On March 24, 2023, Federal Circuit Chief Judge Moore identified a complaint against Judge Newman under the Act and as prescribed under Rule 5(a).⁴⁷ The order identifying the complaint noted concerns regarding the “extensive delays in processing and resolution of [Judge Newman’s] cases.”⁴⁸ In addition, the same order stated that Judge Newman “may suffer from impairment of cognitive abilities (*i.e.*, attention, focus, confusion, and memory) that render [her] unable to function effectively in discharging case-related and administrative duties.”⁴⁹ Chief Judge Moore’s written order identifying a complaint satisfied the requirements of Rule 5(a) and initiated the formal review process.

On the same day the complaint was identified, Chief Judge Moore appointed a special committee (the “Special Committee” or “Committee”) to investigate the allegations.⁵⁰ The Special Committee ordered Judge Newman “to submit to neurological and neuro-psychological testing by physicians of the [C]ommittee’s choosing” and share her medical records with the Committee.⁵¹ When Judge Newman refused to undergo the required testing and share her medical records, the Special Committee “narrow[ed] the investigation” to Rule 4(a)(5), which recognizes that “refusing, without good cause shown, to cooperate in the investigation of a complaint” is cognizable misconduct.⁵² The Special Committee also conducted extensive interviews with court employees, reviewed case records, and “consulted with a physician experienced in judicial-disability matters.”⁵³ Following the investigation, the Special Committee shared its report and recommendations with the Federal Circuit’s judicial council (the “Judicial Council”). Notably, the report found that “there [was], at a minimum, a reasonable basis for concluding that Judge Newman ***may suffer from a disability that renders her unable to perform the duties of her office***” and that her “failure to cooperate with the Committee’s orders constitute[d] misconduct.”⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Table S-22, *Report of Complaints Commenced and Action Taken Under Authority of 28 U.S.C. § 351-364 During Twelve Month Period Ending September 30, 2023*, U.S. COURTS (2023), available at https://www.uscourts.gov/sites/default/files/data_tables/jb_s22_0930.2023.pdf.

⁴⁷ See *Newman v. Moore*, 2024 WL 551836, at *3 (D.D.C. 2024).

⁴⁸ See *In re Complaint No. 23-90015*, C.C.D No. 23-01, 2 (U.S. Jud. Conf. Feb 7, 2024) [hereinafter Judicial Conference Order].

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Newman*, 2024 WL 551836, at *4.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*; see also Rules, *supra* note 4, R. 13 (authorizing a special committee’s use of “appropriate experts or other professionals”).

⁵⁴ *Id.* (emphasis added).

Accordingly, the Special Committee recommended suspending Judge Newman from hearing new cases for one year or until she cooperated with the investigation.⁵⁵

In its September 20, 2023, unanimous order, the Judicial Council accepted the Special Committee’s recommendations and agreed that Judge Newman’s failure to cooperate was not excused. The Judicial Council emphasized that Judge Newman’s misconduct had brought the “statutory mechanism for addressing disability to a grinding halt” and the Special Committee was unable to make “an informed assessment . . . about whether Judge Newman suffers from a disability.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, the Judicial Council barred Judge Newman from hearing any cases “for a period of one year, subject to ‘consideration of renewal’” if Judge Newman continued to not cooperate with the investigation.⁵⁷

Judge Newman petitioned the Judicial Conference to review the Judicial Council’s order pursuant to Rule 21.⁵⁸ Specifically, the petition argued that the Judicial Council had: (1) abused its discretion by refusing to transfer the investigation to another circuit under Rule 26; (2) violated the Act, the Rules, and the Fifth Amendment, thereby providing “good cause” for Judge Newman’s denial to cooperate; and (3) imposed sanctions that violated the Constitution, the Act, and the Rules. On February 7, 2024, the Judicial Conference denied the petition for review and affirmed the Judicial Council’s order, including the sanctions imposed therein.

B. Subsequent Litigation

While the Judicial Council investigation and proceedings were ongoing, Judge Newman filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (the “Court”).⁵⁹ The complaint brought eleven counts against Chief Judge Moore, Judge Prost, and Judge Taranto of the Special Committee (the “Defendants”).⁶⁰ Specifically, Judge Newman brought facial and as-applied constitutional challenges against the Act. Judge Newman also sought preliminary injunction to enjoin the Defendants from suspending her docket.⁶¹ The Court encouraged the parties to engage in mediation, which was conducted by retired D.C. Circuit Judge Thomas B. Griffith.⁶² But the informal mediation did not resolve the issues between the parties.

The Court interpreted Judge Newman’s complaint as a challenge against the judiciary’s self-regulatory regime, and it “decline[d] the invitation.”⁶³ Notably, the opinion emphasized that Section 357(c) of the Act, which states “[e]xcept as expressly provided in [the Act] and section 352(c), *all orders and determinations, including denials of petitions for review, shall be final and conclusive and shall not be judicially reviewable on appeal or otherwise,*” precluded Judge

⁵⁵ *Id.*
⁵⁶ *See Judicial Conference Order, supra* note 46, at 13.
⁵⁷ *Id.* at 13-14.
⁵⁸ Rules, *supra* note 4, R. 21.
⁵⁹ *Newman*, 2024 WL 551836, at *5.
⁶⁰ *Id.*
⁶¹ *Id.*
⁶² *Id.*
⁶³ *Id.* at 2.

Newman's as-applied claims.⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Court was barred from exercising jurisdiction over six of Judge Newman's claims. The Court grouped the barred claims as follows:

First, Counts II and III allege that neither the JC&D Act nor § 332(d) permit the Judicial Council to suspend Judge Newman from her cases, reduce her staff, or force her to submit to a mental health examination, among other restrictions.

Second, Count IV, titled 'As Applied Due Process of Law Violation,' contends that Defendants' continued investigation 'violates the fundamental principles of due process because the Special Committee is composed of complainants about and witnesses to Plaintiff's alleged disability.'

Third, Count VI alleges that '[n]either the [Act] nor the U.S. Constitution authorizes compelling an Article III judge to undergo a medical or psychiatric examination or to surrender to any investigative authority her private medical records.'

Finally, Counts X and XI raise as-applied Fourth Amendment challenges. The counts claim Judge Newman's rights were violated because Defendants lacked 'either a warrant issued on probable cause' or 'a constitutionally reasonable basis' for requiring her 'to submit to an involuntary medical or psychiatric examination' (Count X) or 'to surrender her private medical records' (Count XI).⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the Court found that it could exercise jurisdiction over Counts I, V, and VII—IX consistent with Section 357(c) because they presented facial challenges. While most of these claims alluded to specific Judicial Council orders, they primarily challenged the language of the Act authorizing the actions in the orders.⁶⁶ As a result, the Court could review these challenges and apply the highly demanding standard that "'no set of circumstances exists under which' the Judicial Council could validly apply those parts of the statute."⁶⁷ The Court noted that it would decide on the merits of only Count I and Count VII because "Judge Newman [did] not seek a preliminary injunction based on the likelihood of prevailing on the other counts."⁶⁸ With respect to Counts I and VII, the Court held:

Count I challenges the [Act's] authorization to suspend Article III judges from office. . . . Judge Newman contends that the [Act] unconstitutionally "delegate[s]" to judges "the impeachment power which the Constitution reserves to the House and Senate." . . . **The D.C. Circuit considered and rejected this argument in *McBryde*.** . . . The D.C. Circuit held that at least

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 8.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 11-12.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 12.

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 16.

some suspensions do not unconstitutionally arrogate Congress's impeachment power.

Finally, Count VII contends that the [Act] violates the Fifth Amendment's due process protection and Article III's guarantee of judicial independence by 'vest[ing] virtually complete discretion in the hands of a Special Committee to determine when compliance with [orders] may be compelled.' . . . And two related features of [Act] investigations cabin a special committee's discretion. First, the [Act] does not vest special committees with the authority to compel compliance with their orders. . . . Second, the [Rules] erect guardrails around a special committee's investigation. . . . Accordingly, the Court grants Defendants' motion to dismiss as to Count I and part of Count VII. Because Judge Newman has not shown a likelihood of prevailing on the merits of these counts, the Court also denies her motion for a preliminary injunction.⁶⁹

In summary, the Court denied Judge Newman's Motion for a Preliminary Injunction and granted in part and denied in part the Defendants' Motion to Dismiss. The matter is still ongoing, and the parties have submitted memoranda in support and in opposition for judgment on the pleadings.

IV. Conclusion

The Act and Rules have rarely been used to their full extent in connection with a disability complaint. Such claims are inherently sensitive and rarely handled in high-visibility, public cases. The recent disability complaint identified against Judge Newman in the Federal Circuit has provided a rare opportunity to see the entire process in practice. These proceedings demonstrate that the Act and Rules are intimately connected and, together, they provide a crucial mechanism for the judiciary's self-regulation.

One last observation as it relates to bankruptcy judges. Many of the arguments raised by Judge Newman would not apply to bankruptcy judges who do not have Article III protection. As already pointed out, Section 152(e) provides that a bankruptcy judge may be removed for physical or mental disability by a majority vote of all of the judges on the circuit council.

Martin Glenn

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 17-18.

Guide to Judiciary Policy

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Ch. 2: Code of Conduct for United States Judges

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Introduction

The Code of Conduct for United States Judges was initially adopted by the Judicial Conference on April 5, 1973, and was known as the “Code of Judicial Conduct for United States Judges.” **See:** JCUS-APR 73, pp. 9-11. Since then, the Judicial Conference has made the following changes to the Code:

- March 1987: deleted the word “Judicial” from the name of the Code;
- September 1992: adopted substantial revisions to the Code;
- March 1996: revised part C of the Compliance section, immediately following the Code;
- September 1996: revised Canons 3C(3)(a) and 5C(4);
- September 1999: revised Canon 3C(1)(c);
- September 2000: clarified the Compliance section;
- March 2009: adopted substantial revisions to the Code;
- March 2014: revised part C of the Compliance section, which appears below, immediately following the Code;

Last revised (Transmittal 02-046) March 12, 2019

- March 2019: adopted revisions to Canon 2A Commentary, Canon 3, Canon 3A(3), Canon 3B(4), Canon 3B(4) Commentary, Canon 3B(6), and Canon 3B(6) Commentary.

This Code applies to United States circuit judges, district judges, Court of International Trade judges, Court of Federal Claims judges, bankruptcy judges, and magistrate judges. Certain provisions of this Code apply to special masters and commissioners as indicated in the “Compliance” section. The Tax Court, Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, and Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces have adopted this Code.

The Judicial Conference has authorized its Committee on Codes of Conduct to render advisory opinions about this Code only when requested by a judge to whom this Code applies. Requests for opinions and other questions concerning this Code and its applicability should be addressed to the Chair of the Committee on Codes of Conduct by email or as follows:

Chair, Committee on Codes of Conduct
c/o General Counsel
Administrative Office of the United States Courts
Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building
One Columbus Circle, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20544
202-502-1100

Procedural questions may be addressed to:

Office of the General Counsel
Administrative Office of the United States Courts
Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building
One Columbus Circle, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20544
202-502-1100

Canon 1: A Judge Should Uphold the Integrity and Independence of the Judiciary

An independent and honorable judiciary is indispensable to justice in our society. A judge should maintain and enforce high standards of conduct and should personally observe those standards, so that the integrity and independence of the judiciary may be preserved. The provisions of this Code should be construed and applied to further that objective.

COMMENTARY

Deference to the judgments and rulings of courts depends on public confidence in the integrity and independence of judges. The integrity and independence of judges depend in turn on their acting without fear or favor. Although judges should be independent, they must comply with the law and should comply with this Code. Adherence to this responsibility helps to maintain public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. Conversely, violation of this Code diminishes public confidence in the judiciary and injures our system of government under law.

The Canons are rules of reason. They should be applied consistently with constitutional requirements, statutes, other court rules and decisional law, and in the context of all relevant circumstances. The Code is to be construed so it does not impinge on the essential independence of judges in making judicial decisions.

The Code is designed to provide guidance to judges and nominees for judicial office. It may also provide standards of conduct for application in proceedings under the Judicial Councils Reform and Judicial Conduct and Disability Act of 1980 (28 U.S.C. §§ 332(d)(1), 351-364). Not every violation of the Code should lead to disciplinary action. Whether disciplinary action is appropriate, and the degree of discipline, should be determined through a reasonable application of the text and should depend on such factors as the seriousness of the improper activity, the intent of the judge, whether there is a pattern of improper activity, and the effect of the improper activity on others or on the judicial system. Many of the restrictions in the Code are necessarily cast in general terms, and judges may reasonably differ in their interpretation. Furthermore, the Code is not designed or intended as a basis for civil liability or criminal prosecution. Finally, the Code is not intended to be used for tactical advantage.

Canon 2: A Judge Should Avoid Impropriety and the Appearance of Impropriety in All Activities

- A. *Respect for Law.* A judge should respect and comply with the law and should act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary.
- B. *Outside Influence.* A judge should not allow family, social, political, financial, or other relationships to influence judicial conduct or judgment. A judge should neither lend the prestige of the judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others nor convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence the judge. A judge should not testify voluntarily as a character witness.
- C. *Nondiscriminatory Membership.* A judge should not hold membership in any organization that practices invidious discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin.

COMMENTARY

Canon 2A. An appearance of impropriety occurs when reasonable minds, with knowledge of all the relevant circumstances disclosed by a reasonable inquiry, would conclude that the judge's honesty, integrity, impartiality, temperament, or fitness to serve as a judge is impaired. Public confidence in the judiciary is eroded by irresponsible or improper conduct by judges, including harassment and other inappropriate workplace behavior. A judge must avoid all impropriety and appearance of impropriety. This prohibition applies to both professional and personal conduct. A judge must expect to be the subject of constant public scrutiny and accept freely and willingly restrictions that might be viewed as burdensome by the ordinary citizen. Because it is not practicable to list all prohibited acts, the prohibition is necessarily cast in general terms that extend to conduct by judges that is harmful although not specifically mentioned in the Code. Actual improprieties under this standard include violations of law, court rules, or other specific provisions of this Code.

Canon 2B. Testimony as a character witness injects the prestige of the judicial office into the proceeding in which the judge testifies and may be perceived as an official testimonial. A judge should discourage a party from requiring the judge to testify as a character witness except in unusual circumstances when the demands of justice require. This Canon does not create a privilege against testifying in response to an official summons.

A judge should avoid lending the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others. For example, a judge should not use the judge's judicial position or title to gain advantage in litigation involving a friend or a member of the judge's family. In contracts for publication of a judge's writings, a judge should retain control over the advertising to avoid exploitation of the judge's office.

A judge should be sensitive to possible abuse of the prestige of office. A judge should not initiate communications to a sentencing judge or a probation or corrections officer but may provide information to such persons in response to a formal request. Judges may participate in the process of judicial selection by cooperating with appointing authorities and screening committees seeking names for consideration and by responding to official inquiries concerning a person being considered for a judgeship.

Canon 2C. Membership of a judge in an organization that practices invidious discrimination gives rise to perceptions that the judge's impartiality is impaired. Canon 2C refers to the current practices of the organization. Whether an organization practices invidious discrimination is often a complex question to which judges should be sensitive. The answer cannot be determined from a mere examination of an organization's current membership rolls but rather depends on how the organization selects members and other relevant factors, such as that the organization is dedicated to the preservation of religious, ethnic or cultural values of legitimate common interest to its members, or that it is in fact and effect an intimate, purely private organization whose membership limitations could not be constitutionally prohibited. *See New York State*

Club Ass'n. Inc. v. City of New York, 487 U.S. 1, 108 S. Ct. 2225, 101 L. Ed. 2d 1 (1988); *Board of Directors of Rotary International v. Rotary Club of Duarte*, 481 U.S. 537, 107 S. Ct. 1940, 95 L. Ed. 2d 474 (1987); *Roberts v. United States Jaycees*, 468 U.S. 609, 104 S. Ct. 3244, 82 L. Ed. 2d 462 (1984). Other relevant factors include the size and nature of the organization and the diversity of persons in the locale who might reasonably be considered potential members. Thus the mere absence of diverse membership does not by itself demonstrate a violation unless reasonable persons with knowledge of all the relevant circumstances would expect that the membership would be diverse in the absence of invidious discrimination. Absent such factors, an organization is generally said to discriminate invidiously if it arbitrarily excludes from membership on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin persons who would otherwise be admitted to membership.

Although Canon 2C relates only to membership in organizations that invidiously discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion or national origin, a judge's membership in an organization that engages in any invidiously discriminatory membership practices prohibited by applicable law violates Canons 2 and 2A and gives the appearance of impropriety. In addition, it would be a violation of Canons 2 and 2A for a judge to arrange a meeting at a club that the judge knows practices invidious discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin in its membership or other policies, or for the judge to use such a club regularly. Moreover, public manifestation by a judge of the judge's knowing approval of invidious discrimination on any basis gives the appearance of impropriety under Canon 2 and diminishes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary, in violation of Canon 2A.

When a judge determines that an organization to which the judge belongs engages in invidious discrimination that would preclude membership under Canon 2C or under Canons 2 and 2A, the judge is permitted, in lieu of resigning, to make immediate and continuous efforts to have the organization discontinue its invidiously discriminatory practices. If the organization fails to discontinue its invidiously discriminatory practices as promptly as possible (and in all events within two years of the judge's first learning of the practices), the judge should resign immediately from the organization.

Canon 3: A Judge Should Perform the Duties of the Office Fairly, Impartially and Diligently

The duties of judicial office take precedence over all other activities. The judge should perform those duties with respect for others, and should not engage in behavior that is harassing, abusive, prejudiced, or biased. The judge should adhere to the following standards:

A. Adjudicative Responsibilities.

- (1) A judge should be faithful to, and maintain professional competence in, the law and should not be swayed by partisan interests, public clamor, or fear of criticism.
- (2) A judge should hear and decide matters assigned, unless disqualified, and should maintain order and decorum in all judicial proceedings.
- (3) A judge should be patient, dignified, respectful, and courteous to litigants, jurors, witnesses, lawyers, and others with whom the judge deals in an official capacity. A judge should require similar conduct by those subject to the judge's control, including lawyers to the extent consistent with their role in the adversary process.
- (4) A judge should accord to every person who has a legal interest in a proceeding, and that person's lawyer, the full right to be heard according to law. Except as set out below, a judge should not initiate, permit, or consider ex parte communications or consider other communications concerning a pending or impending matter that are made outside the presence of the parties or their lawyers. If a judge receives an unauthorized ex parte communication bearing on the substance of a matter, the judge should promptly notify the parties of the subject matter of the communication and allow the parties an opportunity to respond, if requested. A judge may:
 - (a) initiate, permit, or consider ex parte communications as authorized by law;
 - (b) when circumstances require it, permit ex parte communication for scheduling, administrative, or emergency purposes, but only if the ex parte communication does not address substantive matters and the judge reasonably believes that no party will gain a procedural, substantive, or tactical advantage as a result of the ex parte communication;
 - (c) obtain the written advice of a disinterested expert on the law, but only after giving advance notice to the parties of the person to be consulted and the subject matter of the advice and affording the parties reasonable opportunity to object and respond to the notice and to the advice received; or
 - (d) with the consent of the parties, confer separately with the parties and their counsel in an effort to mediate or settle pending matters.

- (5) A judge should dispose promptly of the business of the court.
 - (6) A judge should not make public comment on the merits of a matter pending or impending in any court. A judge should require similar restraint by court personnel subject to the judge's direction and control. The prohibition on public comment on the merits does not extend to public statements made in the course of the judge's official duties, to explanations of court procedures, or to scholarly presentations made for purposes of legal education.
- B. Administrative Responsibilities.
- (1) A judge should diligently discharge administrative responsibilities, maintain professional competence in judicial administration, and facilitate the performance of the administrative responsibilities of other judges and court personnel.
 - (2) A judge should not direct court personnel to engage in conduct on the judge's behalf or as the judge's representative when that conduct would contravene the Code if undertaken by the judge.
 - (3) A judge should exercise the power of appointment fairly and only on the basis of merit, avoiding unnecessary appointments, nepotism, and favoritism. A judge should not approve compensation of appointees beyond the fair value of services rendered.
 - (4) A judge should practice civility, by being patient, dignified, respectful, and courteous, in dealings with court personnel, including chambers staff. A judge should not engage in any form of harassment of court personnel. A judge should not retaliate against those who report misconduct. A judge should hold court personnel under the judge's direction to similar standards.
 - (5) A judge with supervisory authority over other judges should take reasonable measures to ensure that they perform their duties timely and effectively.
 - (6) A judge should take appropriate action upon receipt of reliable information indicating the likelihood that a judge's conduct contravened this Code, that a judicial employee's conduct contravened the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees, or that a lawyer violated applicable rules of professional conduct.

C. Disqualification.

- (1) A judge shall disqualify himself or herself in a proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned, including but not limited to instances in which:
 - (a) the judge has a personal bias or prejudice concerning a party, or personal knowledge of disputed evidentiary facts concerning the proceeding;
 - (b) the judge served as a 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 lawyer has been a material witness;
 - (c) the judge knows that the judge, 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 affected substantially by the outcome of the proceeding;
 - (d) the judge or the judge's spouse, or a person related to either within the third degree of relationship, or the spouse of such a person is:
 - (i) a party to the proceeding, or an officer, director, or trustee of a party;
 - (ii) acting as a lawyer in the proceeding,
 - (iii) known by the judge to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding; or
 - (iv) to the judge's knowledge likely to be a material witness in the proceeding;
 - (e) the judge has served in governmental employment and in that capacity participated as a judge (in a previous judicial position), counsel, advisor, or material witness concerning the proceeding or has expressed an opinion concerning the merits of the particular case in controversy.
- (2) A judge should keep informed about the judge's personal and fiduciary financial interests and make a reasonable effort to keep informed 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; the following relatives are within the third degree of relationship: parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, great grandparent, great grandchild, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, niece, and nephew; the listed relatives include whole and half blood relatives and most step relatives;
 - (b) “fiduciary” includes such relationships as executor, administrator, trustee, and guardian;
 - (c) “financial interest” means ownership of a legal or equitable interest, however small, or a relationship as director, advisor, 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, religious, charitable, fraternal, or civic organization is not a “financial interest” in securities held by the organization;
 - (iii) the proprietary interest of a policyholder in a mutual insurance company, or a depositor in a mutual savings association, or a similar proprietary interest, is a “financial interest” in the organization only if the outcome of the proceeding could substantially affect the value of the interest;
 - (iv) ownership of government securities is a “financial interest” in the issuer only if the outcome of the proceeding could substantially affect the value of the securities;
 - (d) “proceeding” includes pretrial, trial, appellate review, or other stages of litigation.
- (4) Notwithstanding the preceding provisions of this Canon, if a judge would be disqualified because of a financial interest in a party (other than an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome), disqualification is not required if the judge (or the judge’s spouse or minor child) divests the interest that provides the grounds for disqualification.

- D. *Remittal of Disqualification.* Instead of withdrawing from the proceeding, a judge disqualified by Canon 3C(1) may, except in the circumstances specifically set out in subsections (a) through (e), disclose on the record the basis of disqualification. The judge may participate in the proceeding if, after that disclosure, the parties and their lawyers have an opportunity to confer outside the presence of the judge, all agree in writing or on the record that the judge should not be disqualified, and the judge is then willing to participate. The agreement should be incorporated in the record of the proceeding.

COMMENTARY

Canon 3A(3). The duty to hear all proceedings fairly and with patience is not inconsistent with the duty to dispose promptly of the business of the court. Courts can be efficient and businesslike while being patient and deliberate.

The duty under Canon 2 to act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary applies to all the judge's activities, including the discharge of the judge's adjudicative and administrative responsibilities. The duty to be respectful includes the responsibility to avoid comment or behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as harassment, prejudice or bias.

Canon 3A(4). The restriction on ex parte communications concerning a proceeding includes communications from lawyers, law teachers, and others who are not participants in the proceeding. A judge may consult with other judges or with court personnel whose function is to aid the judge in carrying out adjudicative responsibilities. A judge should make reasonable efforts to ensure that law clerks and other court personnel comply with this provision.

A judge may encourage and seek to facilitate settlement but should not act in a manner that coerces any party into surrendering the right to have the controversy resolved by the courts.

Canon 3A(5). In disposing of matters promptly, efficiently, and fairly, a judge must demonstrate due regard for the rights of the parties to be heard and to have issues resolved without unnecessary cost or delay. A judge should monitor and supervise cases to reduce or eliminate dilatory practices, avoidable delays, and unnecessary costs.

Prompt disposition of the court's business requires a judge to devote adequate time to judicial duties, to be punctual in attending court and expeditious in determining matters under submission, and to take reasonable measures to ensure that court personnel, litigants, and their lawyers cooperate with the judge to that end.

Canon 3A(6). The admonition against public comment about the merits of a pending or impending matter continues until the appellate process is complete. If the

public comment involves a case from the judge's own court, the judge should take particular care so that the comment does not denigrate public confidence in the judiciary's integrity and impartiality, which would violate Canon 2A. A judge may comment publicly on proceedings in which the judge is a litigant in a personal capacity, but not on mandamus proceedings when the judge is a litigant in an official capacity (but the judge may respond in accordance with Fed. R. App. P. 21(b)).

Canon 3B(3). A judge's appointees include assigned counsel, officials such as referees, commissioners, special masters, receivers, guardians, and personnel such as law clerks, secretaries, and judicial assistants. Consent by the parties to an appointment or an award of compensation does not relieve the judge of the obligation prescribed by this subsection.

Canon 3B(4). A judge should neither engage in, nor tolerate, workplace conduct that is reasonably interpreted as harassment, abusive behavior, or retaliation for reporting such conduct. The duty to refrain from retaliation includes retaliation against former as well as current judiciary personnel.

Under this Canon, harassment encompasses a range of conduct having no legitimate role in the workplace, including harassment that constitutes discrimination on impermissible grounds and other abusive, oppressive, or inappropriate conduct directed at judicial employees or others. See Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings, Rule 4(a)(2) (providing that "cognizable misconduct includes: (A) engaging in unwanted, offensive, or abusive sexual conduct, including sexual harassment or assault; (B) treating litigants, attorneys, judicial employees, or others in a demonstrably egregious and hostile manner; or (C) creating a hostile work environment for judicial employees") and Rule 4(a)(3) (providing that "cognizable misconduct includes intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender, gender identity, pregnancy, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, age, or disability").

Canon 3B(6). Public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary is promoted when judges take appropriate action based on reliable information of likely misconduct. Appropriate action depends on the circumstances, but the overarching goal of such action should be to prevent harm to those affected by the misconduct and to prevent recurrence. A judge, in deciding what action is appropriate, may take into account any request for confidentiality made by a person complaining of or reporting misconduct. See Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings, Rule 4(a)(6) (providing that "cognizable misconduct includes failing to call to the attention of the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge any reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability. A judge who receives such reliable information shall respect a request for confidentiality but shall nonetheless disclose the information to the chief district judge or chief circuit judge, who shall also treat the information as confidential. Certain reliable information may be protected from disclosure by statute or rule. A judge's assurance of confidentiality must yield when there is reliable information of misconduct or disability that threatens the safety or security of any person or that is serious or egregious such that it threatens the integrity

and proper functioning of the judiciary. A person reporting information of misconduct or disability must be informed at the outset of a judge's responsibility to disclose such information to the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge. Reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability related to a chief circuit judge should be called to the attention of the next most-senior active circuit judge. Such information related to a chief district judge should be called to the attention of the chief circuit judge.").

Appropriate action may include direct communication with the judge or lawyer, other direct action if available, reporting the conduct to the appropriate authorities, or, when the judge believes that a judge's or lawyer's conduct is caused by drugs, alcohol, or a medical condition, making a confidential referral to an assistance program. Appropriate action may also include responding to a subpoena to testify or otherwise cooperating with or participating in judicial or lawyer disciplinary proceedings; a judge should be candid and honest with disciplinary authorities.

Canon 3C. Recusal considerations applicable to a judge's spouse should also be considered with respect to a person other than a spouse with whom the judge maintains both a household and an intimate relationship.

Canon 3C(1)(c). In a criminal proceeding, a victim entitled to restitution is not, within the meaning of this Canon, a party to the proceeding or the subject matter in controversy. A judge who has a financial interest in the victim of a crime is not required by Canon 3C(1)(c) to disqualify from the criminal proceeding, but the judge must do so if the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned under Canon 3C(1) or if the judge has an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding under Canon 3C(1)(d)(iii).

Canon 3C(1)(d)(II). The fact that a lawyer in a proceeding is affiliated with a law firm with which a relative of the judge is affiliated does not of itself disqualify the judge. However, if "the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned" under Canon 3C(1), or the relative is known by the judge to have an interest in the law firm that could be "substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding" under Canon 3C(1)(d)(iii), the judge's disqualification is required.

Canon 4: A Judge May Engage in Extrajudicial Activities That Are Consistent With the Obligations of Judicial Office

A judge may engage in extrajudicial activities, including law-related pursuits and civic, charitable, educational, religious, social, financial, fiduciary, and governmental activities, and may speak, write, lecture, and teach on both law-related and nonlegal subjects. However, a judge should not participate in extrajudicial activities that detract from the dignity of the judge's office, interfere with the performance of the judge's official duties, reflect adversely on the judge's impartiality, lead to frequent disqualification, or violate the limitations set forth below.

A. Law-related Activities.

- (1) *Speaking, Writing, and Teaching.* A judge may speak, write, lecture, teach, and participate in other activities concerning the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice.
- (2) *Consultation.* A judge may consult with or appear at a public hearing before an executive or legislative body or official:
 - (a) on matters concerning the law, the legal system, or the administration of justice;
 - (b) to the extent that it would generally be perceived that a judge's judicial experience provides special expertise in the area; or
 - (c) when the judge is acting pro se in a matter involving the judge or the judge's interest.
- (3) *Organizations.* A judge may participate in and serve as a member, officer, director, trustee, or nonlegal advisor of a nonprofit organization devoted to the law, the legal system, or the administration of justice and may assist such an organization in the management and investment of funds. A judge may make recommendations to public and private fund-granting agencies about projects and programs concerning the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice.
- (4) *Arbitration and Mediation.* A judge should not act as an arbitrator or mediator or otherwise perform judicial functions apart from the judge's official duties unless expressly authorized by law.
- (5) *Practice of Law.* A judge should not practice law and should not serve as a family member's lawyer in any forum. A judge may, however, act pro se and may, without compensation, give legal advice to and draft or review documents for a member of the judge's family.

B. *Civic and Charitable Activities.* A judge may participate in and serve as an officer, director, trustee, or nonlegal advisor of a nonprofit civic, charitable, educational, religious, or social organization, subject to the following limitations:

- (1) A judge should not serve if it is likely that the organization will either be engaged in proceedings that would ordinarily come before the

judge or be regularly engaged in adversary proceedings in any court.

- (2) A judge should not give investment advice to such an organization but may serve on its board of directors or trustees even though it has the responsibility for approving investment decisions.

C. *Fund Raising.* A judge may assist nonprofit law-related, civic, charitable, educational, religious, or social organizations in planning fund-raising activities and may be listed as an officer, director, or trustee. A judge may solicit funds for such an organization from judges over whom the judge does not exercise supervisory or appellate authority and from members of the judge's family. Otherwise, a judge should not personally participate in fund-raising activities, solicit funds for any organization, or use or permit the use of the prestige of judicial office for that purpose. A judge should not personally participate in membership solicitation if the solicitation might reasonably be perceived as coercive or is essentially a fund-raising mechanism.

D. Financial Activities.

- (1) A judge may hold and manage investments, including real estate, and engage in other remunerative activity, but should refrain from financial and business dealings that exploit the judicial position or involve the judge in frequent transactions or continuing business relationships with lawyers or other persons likely to come before the court on which the judge serves.
- (2) A judge may serve as an officer, director, active partner, manager, advisor, or employee of a business only if the business is closely held and controlled by members of the judge's family. For this purpose, "members of the judge's family" means persons related to the judge or the judge's spouse within the third degree of relationship as defined in Canon 3C(3)(a), any other relative with whom the judge or the judge's spouse maintains a close familial relationship, and the spouse of any of the foregoing.
- (3) As soon as the judge can do so without serious financial detriment, the judge should divest investments and other financial interests that might require frequent disqualification.
- (4) A judge should comply with the restrictions on acceptance of gifts and the prohibition on solicitation of gifts set forth in the Judicial Conference Gift Regulations. A judge should endeavor to prevent any member of the judge's family residing in the household from soliciting or accepting a gift except to the extent that a judge would

be permitted to do so by the Judicial Conference Gift Regulations. A “member of the judge’s family” means any relative of a judge by blood, adoption, or marriage, or any person treated by a judge as a member of the judge’s family.

- (5) A judge should not disclose or use nonpublic information acquired in a judicial capacity for any purpose unrelated to the judge’s official duties.
- E. *Fiduciary Activities.* A judge may serve as the executor, administrator, trustee, guardian, or other fiduciary only for the estate, trust, or person of a member of the judge’s family as defined in Canon 4D(4). As a family fiduciary a judge is subject to the following restrictions:
 - (1) The judge should not serve if it is likely that as a fiduciary the judge would be engaged in proceedings that would ordinarily come before the judge or if the estate, trust, or ward becomes involved in adversary 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 a personal capacity.
- F. *Governmental Appointments.* A judge may accept appointment to a governmental committee, commission, or other position only if it is one that concerns the law, the legal system, or the administration of justice, or if appointment of a judge is required by federal statute. A judge should not, in any event, accept such an appointment if the judge’s governmental duties would tend to undermine the public confidence in the integrity, impartiality, or independence of the judiciary. A judge may represent the judge’s country, state, or locality on ceremonial occasions or in connection with historical, educational, and cultural activities.
- G. *Chambers, Resources, and Staff.* A judge should not to any substantial degree use judicial chambers, resources, or staff to engage in extrajudicial activities permitted by this Canon.
- H. *Compensation, Reimbursement, and Financial Reporting.* A judge may accept compensation and reimbursement of expenses for the law-related and extrajudicial activities permitted by this Code if the source of the payments does not give the appearance of influencing the judge in the judge’s judicial duties or otherwise give the appearance of impropriety, subject to the following restrictions:

- (1) Compensation should not exceed a reasonable amount nor should it exceed what a person who is not a judge would receive for the same activity.
- (2) Expense reimbursement should be limited to the actual costs of travel, food, and lodging reasonably incurred by the judge and, where appropriate to the occasion, by the judge's spouse or relative. Any additional payment is compensation.
- (3) A judge should make required financial disclosures, including disclosures of gifts and other things of value, in compliance with applicable statutes and Judicial Conference regulations and directives.

COMMENTARY

Canon 4. Complete separation of a judge from extrajudicial activities is neither possible nor wise; a judge should not become isolated from the society in which the judge lives. As a judicial officer and a person specially learned in the law, a judge is in a unique position to contribute to the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice, including revising substantive and procedural law and improving criminal and juvenile justice. To the extent that the judge's time permits and impartiality is not compromised, the judge is encouraged to do so, either independently or through a bar association, judicial conference, or other organization dedicated to the law. Subject to the same limitations, judges may also engage in a wide range of non-law-related activities.

Within the boundaries of applicable law (*see, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 953*) a judge may express opposition to the persecution of lawyers and judges anywhere in the world if the judge has ascertained, after reasonable inquiry, that the persecution is occasioned by conflict between the professional responsibilities of the persecuted judge or lawyer and the policies or practices of the relevant government.

A person other than a spouse with whom the judge maintains both a household and an intimate relationship should be considered a member of the judge's family for purposes of legal assistance under Canon 4A(5), fund raising under Canon 4C, and family business activities under Canon 4D(2).

Canon 4A. Teaching and serving on the board of a law school are permissible, but in the case of a for-profit law school, board service is limited to a nongoverning advisory board.

Consistent with this Canon, a judge may encourage lawyers to provide pro bono legal services.

Canon 4A(4). This Canon generally prohibits a judge from mediating a state court matter, except in unusual circumstances (e.g., when a judge is mediating a federal matter that cannot be resolved effectively without addressing the related state court matter).

Canon 4A(5). A judge may act pro se in all legal matters, including matters involving litigation and matters involving appearances before or other dealings with governmental bodies. In so doing, a judge must not abuse the prestige of office to advance the interests of the judge or the judge's family.

Canon 4B. The changing nature of some organizations and their exposure to litigation make it necessary for a judge regularly to reexamine the activities of each organization with which the judge is affiliated to determine if the judge's continued association is appropriate. For example, in many jurisdictions, charitable hospitals are in court more often now than in the past.

Canon 4C. A judge may attend fund-raising events of law-related and other organizations although the judge may not be a speaker, a guest of honor, or featured on the program of such an event. Use of a judge's name, position in the organization, and judicial designation on an organization's letterhead, including when used for fund raising or soliciting members, does not violate Canon 4C if comparable information and designations are listed for others.

Canon 4D(1), (2), and (3). Canon 3 requires disqualification of a judge in any proceeding in which the judge has a financial interest, however small. Canon 4D requires a judge to refrain from engaging in business and from financial activities that might interfere with the impartial performance of the judge's judicial duties. Canon 4H requires a judge to report compensation received for activities outside the judicial office. A judge has the rights of an ordinary citizen with respect to financial affairs, except for limitations required to safeguard the proper performance of the judge's duties. A judge's participation in a closely held family business, while generally permissible, may be prohibited if it takes too much time or involves misuse of judicial prestige or if the business is likely to come before the court on which the judge serves. Owning and receiving income from investments do not as such affect the performance of a judge's duties.

Canon 4D(5). The restriction on using nonpublic information is not intended to affect a judge's ability to act on information as necessary to protect the health or safety of the judge or a member of a judge's family, court personnel, or other judicial officers if consistent with other provisions of this Code.

Canon 4E. Mere residence in the judge's household does not by itself make a person a member of the judge's family for purposes of this Canon. The person must be treated by the judge as a member of the judge's family.

The Applicable Date of Compliance provision of this Code addresses continued service as a fiduciary.

A judge's obligation under this Code and the judge's obligation as a fiduciary may come into conflict. For example, a judge should resign as a trustee if it would result in detriment to the trust to divest holdings whose retention would require frequent disqualification of the judge in violation of Canon 4D(3).

Canon 4F. The appropriateness of accepting extrajudicial assignments must be assessed in light of the demands on judicial resources and the need to protect the courts from involvement in matters that may prove to be controversial. Judges should not accept governmental appointments that could interfere with the effectiveness and independence of the judiciary, interfere with the performance of the judge's judicial responsibilities, or tend to undermine public confidence in the judiciary.

Canon 4H. A judge is not required by this Code to disclose income, debts, or investments, except as provided in this Canon. The Ethics Reform Act of 1989 and implementing regulations promulgated by the Judicial Conference impose additional restrictions on judges' receipt of compensation. That Act and those regulations should be consulted before a judge enters into any arrangement involving the receipt of compensation. The restrictions so imposed include but are not limited to: (1) a prohibition against receiving "honoraria" (defined as anything of value received for a speech, appearance, or article), (2) a prohibition against receiving compensation for service as a director, trustee, or officer of a profit or nonprofit organization, (3) a requirement that compensated teaching activities receive prior approval, and (4) a limitation on the receipt of "outside earned income."

Canon 5: A Judge Should Refrain From Political Activity

A. *General Prohibitions.* A judge should not:

- (1) act as a leader or hold any office in a political organization;
- (2) make speeches for a political organization or candidate, or publicly endorse or oppose a candidate for public office; or
- (3) solicit funds for, pay an assessment to, or make a contribution to a political organization or candidate, or attend or purchase a ticket for a dinner or other event sponsored by a political organization or candidate.

B. *Resignation upon Candidacy.* A judge should resign the judicial office if the judge becomes a candidate in a primary or general election for any office.

- C. *Other Political Activity.* A judge should not engage in any other political activity. This provision does not prevent a judge from engaging in activities described in Canon 4.

COMMENTARY

The term “political organization” refers to a political party, a group affiliated with a political party or candidate for public office, or an entity whose principal purpose is to advocate for or against political candidates or parties in connection with elections for public office.

Compliance with the Code of Conduct

Anyone who is an officer of the federal judicial system authorized to perform judicial functions is a judge for the purpose of this Code. All judges should comply with this Code except as provided below.

A. Part-time Judge

A part-time judge is a judge who serves part-time, whether continuously or periodically, but is permitted by law to devote time to some other profession or occupation and whose compensation for that reason is less than that of a full-time judge. A part-time judge:

- (1) is not required to comply with Canons 4A(4), 4A(5), 4D(2), 4E, 4F, or 4H(3);
- (2) except as provided in the Conflict-of-Interest Rules for Part-time Magistrate Judges, should not practice law in the court on which the judge serves or in any court subject to that court's appellate jurisdiction, or act as a lawyer in a proceeding in which the judge has served as a judge or in any related proceeding.

B. Judge Pro Tempore

A judge pro tempore is a person who is appointed to act temporarily as a judge or as a special master.

- (1) While acting in this capacity, a judge pro tempore is not required to comply with Canons 4A(4), 4A(5), 4D(2), 4D(3), 4E, 4F, or 4H(3); further, one who acts solely as a special master is not required to comply with Canons 4A(3), 4B, 4C, 4D(4), or 5.
- (2) A person who has been a judge pro tempore should not act as a lawyer in a proceeding in which the judge has served as a judge or in any related proceeding.

C. Retired Judge

A judge who is retired under 28 U.S.C. § 371(b) or § 372(a) (applicable to Article III judges), or who is subject to recall under § 178(d) (applicable to judges on the Court of Federal Claims), or who is recalled to judicial service, should comply with all the provisions of this Code except Canon 4F, but the judge should refrain from judicial service during the period of extrajudicial appointment not sanctioned by Canon 4F. All other retired judges who are eligible for recall to judicial service (except those in U.S. territories and possessions) should comply with the provisions of this Code governing part-time judges. However, bankruptcy judges and magistrate judges who are eligible for recall but who have notified the Administrative Office of the United States Courts that they will not consent to recall are not obligated to comply with the provisions of this Code governing part-time judges. Such notification may be made at any time after retirement, and is irrevocable. A senior judge in the territories and possessions must comply with this Code as prescribed by 28 U.S.C. § 373(c)(5) and (d).

COMMENTARY

The 2014 amendment to the Compliance section, regarding retired bankruptcy judges and magistrate judges and exempting those judges from compliance with the Code as part-time judges if they notify the Administrative Office of the United States Courts that they will not consent to recall, was not intended to alter those judges' statutory entitlements to annuities, cost-of-living adjustments, or any other retirement benefits.

Applicable Date of Compliance

Persons to whom this Code applies should arrange their financial and fiduciary affairs as soon as reasonably possible to comply with it and should do so in any event within one year after appointment. If, however, the demands on the person's time and the possibility of conflicts of interest are not substantial, such a person may continue to act, without compensation, as an executor, administrator, trustee, or other fiduciary for the estate or person of one who is not a member of the person's family if terminating the relationship would unnecessarily jeopardize any substantial interest of the estate or person and if the judicial council of the circuit approves.

JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

**RULES FOR JUDICIAL-CONDUCT AND
JUDICIAL-DISABILITY PROCEEDINGS**

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Effective April 10, 2008
Amended September 17, 2015
Amended March 12, 2019
Conformed February 8, 2022

RULES FOR JUDICIAL-CONDUCT AND JUDICIAL-DISABILITY PROCEEDINGS

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RULES FOR JUDICIAL-CONDUCT AND JUDICIAL-DISABILITY PROCEEDINGS

Preface

These Rules were promulgated by the Judicial Conference of the United States, after public comment, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 331 and 358, to establish standards and procedures for addressing complaints filed by complainants or identified by chief judges under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364.

ARTICLE I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. Scope and Covered Judges

- (a) **Scope.** These Rules govern proceedings under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act (Act), 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364, to determine whether a covered judge has engaged in conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts or is unable to discharge the duties of office because of mental or physical disability.
- (b) **Covered Judge.** A covered judge is defined under the Act and is limited to judges of United States courts of appeals, judges of United States district courts, judges of United States bankruptcy courts, United States magistrate judges, and judges of the courts specified in 28 U.S.C. § 363.

Commentary on Rule 1

In September 2006, the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act Study Committee (“Breyer Committee”), appointed in 2004 by Chief Justice Rehnquist, presented a report (“Breyer Committee Report”), 239 F.R.D. 116 (Sept. 2006), to Chief Justice Roberts that evaluated implementation of the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act of 1980, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364. The Breyer Committee had been formed in response to criticism from the public and Congress regarding the effectiveness of the Act’s implementation. The Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference directed its Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability to consider the Breyer Committee’s recommendations and to report on their implementation to the Conference.

The Breyer Committee found that it could not evaluate implementation of the Act without establishing interpretive standards, Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 132, and that a major problem faced by chief judges in implementing the Act was the lack of authoritative interpretive standards. *Id.* at 212–15. The Breyer Committee then established standards to guide its evaluation, some of which were new formulations and some of which were taken from the “Illustrative Rules Governing Complaints of Judicial Misconduct and Disability,” discussed below. The principal standards used by the Breyer Committee are in Appendix E of its Report. *Id.* at 238.

Based on the Breyer Committee’s findings, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability concluded that there was a need for the Judicial Conference to exercise its power under Section 358 of the Act to fashion standards guiding the various officers and bodies that must exercise responsibility under the Act. To that end, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and

Disability proposed rules based largely on Appendix E of the Breyer Committee Report and the Illustrative Rules.

The Illustrative Rules were originally prepared in 1986 by the Special Committee of the Conference of Chief Judges of the United States Courts of Appeals, and were subsequently revised and amended, most recently in 2000, by the predecessor to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. The Illustrative Rules were adopted, with minor variations, by circuit judicial councils, to govern complaints under the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act.

After being submitted for public comment pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 358(c), the Judicial Conference promulgated the present Rules on March 11, 2008. They were amended on September 17, 2015, and again on March 12, 2019.

The definition of a covered judge tracks the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act. See 28 U.S.C. § 351(d)(1) (defining the term “judge” as “a circuit judge, district judge, bankruptcy judge, or magistrate judge”). As long as the subject of a complaint retains the judicial office and remains a covered judge as defined in Rule 1(b), a complaint must be addressed. *Id.*; 28 U.S.C. §§ 371(b); 372(a).

Rules 8(c) and (d) address the procedures for processing a complaint involving allegations against a person *not* covered by the Act, such as other court personnel, or against both a covered judge and a noncovered person. Court employees seeking to report, or file a claim related to, misconduct or the denial of rights granted under their Employment Dispute Resolution (EDR) plan by other court personnel may wish to consult the Model EDR Plan and the EDR plan for the relevant court, among other resources. *See* Guide to Judiciary Policy, vol. 12, appx. 2B.

2. Construction and Effect

- (a) **Generally. These Rules are mandatory; they supersede any conflicting judicial-council rules. Judicial councils may promulgate additional rules to implement the Act as long as those rules do not conflict with these Rules.**
- (b) **Exception. A Rule will not apply if, when performing duties authorized by the Act, a chief judge, a special committee, a judicial council, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, or the Judicial Conference expressly finds that exceptional circumstances render application of that Rule in a particular proceeding manifestly unjust or contrary to the purposes of the Act or these Rules.**

Commentary on Rule 2

Unlike the Illustrative Rules, these Rules provide mandatory and nationally uniform provisions governing the substantive and procedural aspects of misconduct and disability proceedings under the Act. The mandatory nature of these Rules is authorized by 28 U.S.C. § 358(a) and (c). Judicial councils retain the power to promulgate rules consistent with these Rules. For example, a local rule may authorize the electronic distribution of materials pursuant to Rule 8(b).

Rule 2(b) recognizes that unforeseen and exceptional circumstances may call for a different approach in particular cases.

3. General Definitions

The following general definitions apply to these Rules. Cognizable misconduct and disability are defined in Rule 4.

- (a) **Chief Judge.** “Chief judge” means the chief judge of a United States court of appeals, of the United States Court of International Trade, or of the United States Court of Federal Claims.
- (b) **Circuit Clerk.** “Circuit clerk” means a clerk of a United States court of appeals, the clerk of the United States Court of International Trade, the clerk of the United States Court of Federal Claims, or the circuit executive of the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.
- (c) **Complaint.** A “complaint” is:
 - (1) a document that, in accordance with Rule 6, is filed by, or on behalf of, any person, including a document filed by an organization; or
 - (2) information from any source, other than a document described in (c)(1), that gives a chief judge probable cause to believe that a covered judge, as defined in Rule 1(b), has engaged in misconduct or may have a disability, whether or not the information is framed as or is intended to be an allegation of misconduct or disability.
- (d) **Court of Appeals, District Court, and District Judge.** “Court of appeals,” “district court,” and “district judge,” where appropriate, include the United States Court of Federal Claims, the United States Court of International Trade, and the judges thereof.
- (e) **Judicial Council and Circuit.** “Judicial council” and “circuit,” where appropriate, include any courts designated in 28 U.S.C. § 363.
- (f) **Judicial Employee.** “Judicial Employee” includes judicial assistants, law clerks, and other court employees, including unpaid staff, such as interns, externs, and other volunteer employees.
- (g) **Magistrate Judge.** “Magistrate judge,” where appropriate, includes a special master appointed by the Court of Federal Claims under 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-12(c).
- (h) **Subject Judge.** “Subject judge” means a covered judge, as described in Rule 1(b), who is the subject of a complaint.

Commentary on Rule 3

Rule 3 is derived and adapted from the Breyer Committee Report and the Illustrative Rules.

Unless otherwise specified or the context otherwise indicates, the term “complaint” is used in these Rules to refer both to complaints identified by a chief judge under Rule 5 and to complaints filed by a complainant under Rule 6.

Under the Act, a “complaint” may be filed by “any person” or “identified” by a chief judge. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 351(a), (b). Under Rule 3(c)(1), a complaint may be submitted by, or on behalf of, any person, including a document filed by an organization. Traditional standing requirements do not apply. Individuals or organizations may file a complaint even if they have not been directly injured or aggrieved.

Generally, the word “complaint” brings to mind the commencement of an adversary proceeding in which the contending parties are left to present the evidence and legal arguments, and judges play the role of an essentially passive arbiter. The Act, however, establishes an administrative, inquisitorial process. For example, even absent a complaint filed by a complainant under Rule 6, chief judges are expected in some circumstances to trigger the process — “identify a complaint,” *see* 28 U.S.C. § 351(b) and Rule 5 — and conduct an investigation without becoming a party. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 352(a); Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 214; Illustrative Rule 2(j). Where the complainant reveals information of misconduct or disability but does not claim it as such, the chief judge is not limited to the “four corners of the complaint” and should proceed under Rule 5 to determine whether identification of a complaint is appropriate. *See* Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 183–84.

An allegation of misconduct or disability filed under Rule 6 is a “complaint,” and the Rule so provides in subsection (c)(1). However, both the nature of the process and the use of the term “identify” suggest that the word “complaint” covers more than a document formally triggering the process. The process relies on chief judges considering known information and triggering the process when appropriate. “Identifying” a “complaint,” therefore, is best understood as the chief judge’s concluding that information known to the judge constitutes probable cause to believe that misconduct occurred or a disability exists, whether or not the information is framed as, or intended to be, an accusation. This definition is codified in subsection (c)(2).

The remaining subsections of Rule 3 provide technical definitions clarifying the application of the Rules.

ARTICLE II. MISCONDUCT AND DISABILITY

4. Misconduct and Disability Definitions

(a) **Misconduct Generally. Cognizable Misconduct is conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts. Cognizable misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:**

(1) **Violation of Specific Standards of Judicial Conduct.**
Cognizable misconduct includes:

(A) **using the judge’s office to obtain special treatment for friends or relatives;**

- (B) accepting bribes, gifts, or other personal favors related to the judicial office;
 - (C) engaging in improper ex parte communications with parties or counsel for one side in a case;
 - (D) engaging in partisan political activity or making inappropriately partisan statements;
 - (E) soliciting funds for organizations; or
 - (F) violating rules or standards pertaining to restrictions on outside income or knowingly violating requirements for financial disclosure.
- (2) **Abusive or Harassing Behavior.** Cognizable misconduct includes:
- (A) engaging in unwanted, offensive, or abusive sexual conduct, including sexual harassment or assault;
 - (B) treating litigants, attorneys, judicial employees, or others in a demonstrably egregious and hostile manner; or
 - (C) creating a hostile work environment for judicial employees.
- (3) **Discrimination.** Cognizable misconduct includes intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender, gender identity, pregnancy, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, age, or disability;
- (4) **Retaliation.** Cognizable misconduct includes retaliating against complainants, witnesses, judicial employees, or others for participating in this complaint process, or for reporting or disclosing judicial misconduct or disability;
- (5) **Interference or Failure to Comply with the Complaint Process.** Cognizable misconduct includes refusing, without good cause shown, to cooperate in the investigation of a complaint or enforcement of a decision rendered under these Rules; or
- (6) **Failure to Report or Disclose.** Cognizable misconduct includes failing to call to the attention of the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge any reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability.

A judge who receives such reliable information shall respect a request for confidentiality but shall nonetheless disclose the information to the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge, who shall also treat the information as confidential. Certain reliable information may be protected from disclosure by statute or rule. A judge's assurance of confidentiality must yield when there is reliable information of misconduct or disability that

threatens the safety or security of any person or that is serious or egregious such that it threatens the integrity and proper functioning of the judiciary.

A person reporting information of misconduct or disability must be informed at the outset of a judge's responsibility to disclose such information to the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge.

Reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability related to a chief circuit judge should be called to the attention of the next most-senior active circuit judge. Such information related to a chief district judge should be called to the attention of the chief circuit judge.

- (7) **Conduct Outside the Performance of Official Duties.** Cognizable misconduct includes conduct occurring outside the performance of official duties if the conduct is reasonably likely to have a prejudicial effect on the administration of the business of the courts, including a substantial and widespread lowering of public confidence in the courts among reasonable people.

(b) Conduct Not Constituting Cognizable Misconduct.

- (1) **Allegations Related to the Merits of a Decision or Procedural Ruling.** Cognizable misconduct does not include an allegation that calls into question the correctness of a judge's ruling, including a failure to recuse.

If the decision or ruling is alleged to be the result of an improper motive, *e.g.*, a bribe, ex parte contact, racial or ethnic bias, or improper conduct in rendering a decision or ruling, such as personally derogatory remarks irrelevant to the issues, the complaint is not cognizable to the extent that it calls into question the merits of the decision.

- (2) **Allegations About Delay.** Cognizable misconduct does not include an allegation about delay in rendering a decision or ruling, unless the allegation concerns an improper motive in delaying a particular decision or habitual delay in a significant number of unrelated cases.

- (c) **Disability.** Disability is a temporary or permanent impairment, physical or mental, rendering a judge unable to discharge the duties of the particular judicial office. Examples of disability include substance abuse, the inability to stay awake during court proceedings, or impairment of cognitive abilities that renders the judge unable to function effectively.

Commentary on Rule 4

The phrase “prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts” is not subject to precise definition, and subsection (a) therefore provides some specific examples. 28 U.S.C. § 351(a). The Code of Conduct for United States Judges sets forth behavioral guidelines for judges. While the Code's Canons are instructive, ultimately the responsibility for determining what constitutes cognizable misconduct is determined by the Act

and these Rules, as interpreted and applied by judicial councils, subject to review and limitations prescribed by the Act and these Rules. *See also* Rule 24 (Public Availability of Decisions).

Even where specific, mandatory rules exist — for example, governing the receipt of gifts by judges, outside earned income, and financial disclosure obligations — the distinction between the misconduct statute and these specific, mandatory rules must be borne in mind. For example, an inadvertent, minor violation of any one of these rules, promptly remedied when called to the attention of the judge, might still be a violation but might not rise to the level of misconduct under the Act. By contrast, a pattern of such violations of the Code might well rise to the level of misconduct.

Rule 4(a)(2)(A) provides expressly that unwanted, offensive, or abusive sexual conduct by a judge, including sexual harassment or assault, constitutes cognizable misconduct. The Rule recognizes that anyone can be a victim of unwanted, offensive, or abusive sexual conduct, regardless of their sex and of the sex of the judge engaging in the misconduct.

Under Rule 4(a)(4), a judge's efforts to retaliate against any person for reporting or disclosing misconduct, or otherwise participating in the complaint process constitute cognizable misconduct. The Rule makes the prohibition against retaliation explicit in the interest of promoting public confidence in the complaint process.

Rules 4(a)(2), (3), and (4) reflect the judiciary's commitment to maintaining a work environment in which all judicial employees are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, and are free from harassment, discrimination, and retaliation. *See* Code of Conduct for United States Judges, Canon 3A(3) cmt. ("The duty to be respectful includes the responsibility to avoid comment or behavior that could reasonably be interpreted as harassment, prejudice or bias.").

Rule 4(a)(5) provides that a judge's refusal, without good cause shown, to cooperate in the investigation of a complaint or enforcement of a decision rendered under these Rules constitutes cognizable misconduct. While the exercise of rights under the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution would constitute good cause under Rule 4(a)(5), given the fact-specific nature of the inquiry, it is not possible to otherwise anticipate all circumstances that might also constitute good cause. The Commentary on Rule 13 provides additional discussion regarding Rule 4(a)(5). The Rules contemplate that judicial councils will not consider commencing proceedings under Rule 4(a)(5) except as necessary after other means to acquire the information or enforce a decision have been tried or have proven futile.

All judges have a duty to bring to the attention of the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability. *See* Rule 4(a)(6). This duty is included within every judge's obligation to assist in addressing allegations of misconduct or disability and to take appropriate action as necessary. Public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary is promoted when judges take appropriate action based on reliable information of likely misconduct. Appropriate action depends on the circumstances, but the overarching goal of such action should be to prevent harm to those affected by the misconduct and to prevent recurrence. *See* Code of Conduct for United States Judges, Canon 3B(6) & cmt. These Rules incorporate those principles while allowing for appropriate, expeditious, fair, and effective resolutions of all such complaints.

The formal procedures outlined in these Rules are intended to address serious issues of judicial misconduct and disability. By statute and rule, the chief circuit judge administers the misconduct and disability complaint process, including the authority to investigate an allegation and, if warranted, to identify a formal complaint. *See* Rule 5. Disclosures made to or otherwise brought to the attention of the appropriate chief district judge of reliable information of misconduct or disability that threatens the safety or security of any person or that is serious or egregious such that it threatens the integrity and proper functioning of the judiciary warrant communication to and consultation with the chief circuit judge in light of the chief circuit judge’s statutory responsibility for overseeing any required final action.

In practice, however, not all allegations of misconduct or disability will warrant resort to the formal procedures outlined in these Rules because they appear likely to yield to effective, prompt resolution through informal corrective action. In such cases, allegations may initially be addressed to the chief district judge or the chief circuit judge to determine whether informal corrective action will suffice and to initiate such steps as promptly as is reasonable under the circumstances.

A person who seeks to report information of misconduct or disability on a confidential or anonymous basis may proceed through various alternative avenues within the judiciary, including the Office of Judicial Integrity and/or comparable offices within the circuits.

Rule 4(a)(7) reflects that an allegation can meet the statutory standard for misconduct even though the judge’s alleged conduct did not occur in the course of the performance of official duties. Furthermore, some conduct specified in Rule 4(a)(1) through 4(a)(6), or not specified within these Rules, might constitute misconduct occurring outside the performance of official duties. The Code of Conduct for United States Judges expressly covers a wide range of extra-official activities, and some of these activities may constitute misconduct under the Act and these Rules. For example, allegations that a judge solicited funds for a charity or other organization or participated in a partisan political event are cognizable under the Act even though they did not occur in the course of the performance of the judge’s official duties.

Rule 4(b)(1) tracks the Act, 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(1)(A)(ii), in excluding from the definition of misconduct allegations “[d]irectly related to the merits of a decision or procedural ruling.” This exclusion preserves the independence of judges in the exercise of judicial authority by ensuring that the complaint procedure is not used to collaterally call into question the substance of a judge’s decision or procedural ruling. Any allegation that calls into question the correctness of an official decision or procedural ruling of a judge — without more — is merits-related. The phrase “decision or procedural ruling” is not limited to rulings issued in deciding Article III cases or controversies. Thus, a complaint challenging the correctness of a chief judge’s determination to dismiss a prior misconduct complaint would be properly dismissed as merits-related — in other words, as challenging the substance of the judge’s administrative determination to dismiss the complaint — even though it does not concern the judge’s rulings in Article III litigation. Similarly, an allegation that a judge incorrectly declined to approve a Criminal Justice Act voucher is merits-related under this standard.

Conversely, an allegation that a judge conspired with a prosecutor to make a particular ruling is not merits-related, even though it “relates” to a ruling in a colloquial sense. Such an allegation attacks the propriety of conspiring with the prosecutor and goes beyond a challenge to the correctness — “the merits” — of the ruling itself. An allegation that a judge ruled against the

complainant because the complainant is a member of a particular racial or ethnic group, or because the judge dislikes the complainant personally, is also not merits-related. Such an allegation attacks the propriety of arriving at rulings with an illicit or improper motive. Similarly, an allegation that a judge used an inappropriate term to refer to a class of people is not merits-related even if the judge used it on the bench or in an opinion; the correctness of the judge's rulings is not at stake. An allegation that a judge treated litigants, attorneys, judicial employees, or others in a demonstrably egregious and hostile manner is also not merits-related.

The existence of an appellate remedy is usually irrelevant to whether an allegation is merits-related. The merits-related ground for dismissal exists to protect judges' independence in making rulings, not to protect or promote the appellate process. A complaint alleging an incorrect ruling is merits-related even though the complainant has no recourse from that ruling. By the same token, an allegation that is otherwise cognizable under the Act should not be dismissed merely because an appellate remedy appears to exist (for example, vacating a ruling that resulted from an improper *ex parte* communication). However, there may be occasions when appellate and misconduct proceedings overlap, and consideration and disposition of a complaint under these Rules may be properly deferred by the chief judge until the appellate proceedings are concluded to avoid inconsistent decisions.

Because of the special need to protect judges' independence in deciding what to say in an opinion or ruling, a somewhat different standard applies to determine the merits-relatedness of a non-frivolous allegation that a judge's language in a ruling reflected an improper motive. If the judge's language was relevant to the case at hand — for example, a statement that a claim is legally or factually “frivolous” — then the judge's choice of language is presumptively merits-related and excluded, absent evidence apart from the ruling itself suggesting an improper motive. If, on the other hand, the challenged language does not seem relevant on its face, then an additional inquiry under Rule 11(b) is necessary.

With regard to Rule 4(b)(2), a complaint of delay in a single case is excluded as merits-related. Such an allegation may be said to challenge the correctness of an official action of the judge, *i.e.*, assigning a low priority to deciding the particular case. But, an allegation of a habitual pattern of delay in a significant number of unrelated cases, or an allegation of deliberate delay in a single case arising out of an improper motive, is not merits-related.

Rule 4(c) relates to disability and provides only the most general definition, recognizing that a fact-specific approach is the only one available. A mental disability could involve cognitive impairment or any psychiatric or psychological condition that renders the judge unable to discharge the duties of office. Such duties may include those that are administrative. If, for example, the judge is a chief judge, the judicial council, fulfilling its obligation under 28 U.S.C. § 332(d)(1) to make “necessary and appropriate orders for the effective and expeditious administration of justice,” may find, under 28 U.S.C. § 45(d) or § 136(e), that the judge is “temporarily unable to perform” his or her chief-judge duties. In that event, an appropriate remedy could involve, under Rule 20(b)(1)(D)(vii), temporary reassignment of chief-judge duties to the next judge statutorily eligible to perform them.

Confidentiality as referenced elsewhere in these Rules is directed toward protecting the fairness and thoroughness of the process by which a complaint is filed or initiated, investigated (in specific circumstances), and ultimately resolved, as specified under these Rules. Nothing in these Rules concerning the confidentiality of the complaint process or the Code of Conduct for

Judicial Employees concerning use or disclosure of confidential information received in the course of official duties prevents judicial employees from reporting or disclosing misconduct or disability. *See* Rule 23(c).

ARTICLE III. INITIATION OF COMPLAINT

5. Identification of Complaint

- (a) **Identification.** When a chief judge has information constituting reasonable grounds for inquiry into whether a covered judge has engaged in misconduct or has a disability, the chief judge may conduct an inquiry, as he or she deems appropriate, into the accuracy of the information even if no related complaint has been filed. A chief judge who finds probable cause to believe that misconduct has occurred or that a disability exists may seek an informal resolution that he or she finds satisfactory. If no informal resolution is achieved or is feasible, the chief judge may identify a complaint and, by written order stating the reasons, begin the review provided in Rule 11. If the evidence of misconduct is clear and convincing and no informal resolution is achieved or is feasible, the chief judge must identify a complaint. A chief judge must not decline to identify a complaint merely because the person making the allegation has not filed a complaint under Rule 6. This Rule is subject to Rule 7.
- (b) **Submission Not Fully Complying with Rule 6.** A legible submission in substantial but not full compliance with Rule 6 must be considered as possible grounds for the identification of a complaint under Rule 5(a).

Commentary on Rule 5

This Rule is adapted from the Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 245–46.

The Act authorizes a chief judge, by written order stating reasons, to identify a complaint and thereby dispense with the filing of a written complaint. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 351(b). Under Rule 5, when a chief judge becomes aware of information constituting reasonable grounds to inquire into possible misconduct or disability on the part of a covered judge, and no formal complaint has been filed, the chief judge has the power in his or her discretion to begin an appropriate inquiry. A chief judge's decision whether to informally seek a resolution and/or to identify a complaint is guided by the results of that inquiry. If the chief judge concludes that there is probable cause to believe that misconduct has occurred or a disability exists, the chief judge may seek an informal resolution, if feasible, and if failing in that, may identify a complaint. Discretion is accorded largely for the reasons police officers and prosecutors have discretion in making arrests or bringing charges. The matter may be trivial and isolated, based on marginal evidence, or otherwise highly unlikely to lead to a misconduct or disability finding. On the other hand, if the inquiry leads the chief judge to conclude that there is clear and convincing evidence of misconduct or a disability, and no satisfactory informal resolution has been achieved or is feasible, the chief judge is required to identify a complaint.

An informal resolution is one agreed to by the subject judge and found satisfactory by the chief judge. Because an informal resolution under Rule 5 reached before a complaint is filed under Rule 6 will generally cause a subsequent Rule 6 complaint alleging the identical matter

to be concluded, *see* Rule 11(d), the chief judge must be sure that the resolution is fully appropriate before endorsing it. In doing so, the chief judge must balance the seriousness of the matter against the particular judge's alacrity in addressing the issue. The availability of this procedure should encourage attempts at swift remedial action before a formal complaint is filed.

When a chief judge identifies a complaint, a written order stating the reasons for the identification must be provided; this begins the process articulated in Rule 11. Rule 11 provides that once a chief judge has identified a complaint, the chief judge, subject to the disqualification provisions of Rule 25, will perform, with respect to that complaint, all functions assigned to the chief judge for the determination of complaints filed by a complainant.

In high-visibility situations, it may be desirable for a chief judge to identify a complaint without first seeking an informal resolution (and then, if the circumstances warrant, dismiss or conclude the identified complaint without appointment of a special committee) in order to assure the public that the allegations have not been ignored.

A chief judge's decision not to identify a complaint under Rule 5 is not appealable and is subject to Rule 4(b)(1), which excludes merits-related complaints from the definition of misconduct.

A chief judge may not decline to identify a complaint solely on the basis that the unfiled allegations could be raised by one or more persons in a filed complaint, but none of these persons has opted to do so.

Subsection (a) concludes by stating that this Rule is "subject to Rule 7." This is intended to establish that only (i) the chief judge of the home circuit of a potential subject judge, or (ii) the chief judge of a circuit in which misconduct is alleged to have occurred in the course of official business while the potential subject judge was sitting by designation, shall have the power or a duty under this Rule to identify a complaint.

Subsection (b) provides that submissions that do not comply with the requirements of Rule 6(d) must be considered under Rule 5(a). For instance, if a complaint has been filed but the form submitted is unsigned, or the truth of the statements therein are not verified in writing under penalty of perjury, then a chief judge must nevertheless consider the allegations as known information and as a possible basis for the identification of a complaint under the process described in Rule 5(a).

6. Filing of Complaint

- (a) **Form.** A complainant may use the form reproduced in the Appendix to these Rules or a form designated by the rules of the judicial council in the circuit in which the complaint is filed. A complaint form is also available on each court of appeals' website or may be obtained from the circuit clerk or any district court or bankruptcy court within the circuit. A form is not necessary to file a complaint, but the complaint must be written and must include the information described in (b).

Local Rule 6(a): A complainant is strongly encouraged to use the complaint form provided on the Court of Appeals' website, which is also available from the Court of Appeals' Clerk's Office.

- (b) **Brief Statement of Facts.** A complaint must contain a concise statement that details the specific facts on which the claim of misconduct or disability is based. The statement of facts should include a description of:
- (1) what happened;
 - (2) when and where the relevant events happened;
 - (3) any information that would help an investigator check the facts; and
 - (4) for an allegation of disability, any additional facts that form the basis of that allegation.

Local Rule 6(b): The statement of facts must not exceed five pages (five sides).

- (c) **Legibility.** A complaint should be typewritten if possible. If not typewritten, it must be legible. An illegible complaint will be returned to the complainant with a request to resubmit it in legible form. If a resubmitted complaint is still illegible, it will not be accepted for filing.
- (d) **Complainant's Address and Signature; Verification.** The complainant must provide a contact address and sign the complaint. The truth of the statements made in the complaint must be verified in writing under penalty of perjury. If any of these requirements are not met, the submission will be accepted, but it will be reviewed under only Rule 5(b).
- (e) **Number of Copies; Envelope Marking.** The complainant shall provide the number of copies of the complaint required by local rule. Each copy should be in an envelope marked "Complaint of Misconduct" or "Complaint of Disability." The envelope must not show the name of any subject judge.

Local Rule 6(e): The complainant must file a separate complaint, with the required number of copies, for each subject judge. If the subject judge is a circuit judge, the complainant must file four copies of the complaint. If the subject judge is a district or magistrate judge, the complainant must file five copies of the complaint. If the subject judge is a bankruptcy judge, the complainant must file six copies of the complaint. The complainant may file one copy of any supporting transcripts, exhibits, or other documents.

Commentary on Rule 6

The Rule is adapted from the Illustrative Rules and is largely self-explanatory. As discussed in the Commentary on Rule 4 and in Rule 23(c), confidentiality as referenced elsewhere in these Rules does not prevent judicial employees from reporting or disclosing misconduct or disability.

7. Where to Initiate Complaint

- (a) **Where to File.** Except as provided in (b),
- (1) **a complaint against a judge of a United States court of appeals, a United States district court, a United States bankruptcy court, or a United States magistrate judge must be filed with the circuit clerk in the jurisdiction in which the subject judge holds office.**
 - (2) **a complaint against a judge of the United States Court of International Trade or the United States Court of Federal Claims must be filed with the respective clerk of that court.**
 - (3) **a complaint against a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit must be filed with the circuit executive of that court.**
- (b) **Misconduct in Another Circuit; Transfer.** If a complaint alleges misconduct in the course of official business while the subject judge was sitting on a court by designation under 28 U.S.C. §§ 291–293 and 294(d), the complaint may be filed or identified with the circuit clerk of that circuit or of the subject judge’s home circuit. The proceeding will continue in the circuit of the first-filed or first-identified complaint. The judicial council of the circuit where the complaint was first filed or first identified may transfer the complaint to the subject judge’s home circuit or to the circuit where the alleged misconduct occurred, as the case may be.

Commentary on Rule 7

Title 28 U.S.C. § 351 states that complaints are to be filed with “the clerk of the court of appeals for the circuit.” However, in many circuits, this role is filled by circuit executives. Accordingly, the term “circuit clerk,” as defined in Rule 3(b) and used throughout these Rules, applies to circuit executives.

Section 351 uses the term “the circuit” in a way that suggests that either the home circuit of the subject judge or the circuit in which misconduct is alleged to have occurred is the proper venue for complaints. With an exception for judges sitting by designation, the Rule requires the filing or identification of a misconduct or disability complaint in the circuit in which the judge holds office, largely based on the administrative perspective of the Act. Given the Act’s emphasis on the future conduct of the business of the courts, the circuit in which the judge holds office is the appropriate forum because that circuit is likely best able to influence a judge’s future behavior in constructive ways.

However, when judges sit by designation, the non-home circuit has a strong interest in redressing misconduct in the course of official business, and where allegations also involve a member of the bar — ex parte contact between an attorney and a judge, for example — it may often be desirable to have the judicial and bar misconduct proceedings take place in the same venue. Rule 7(b), therefore, allows transfer to, or filing or identification of a complaint in, the non-home circuit. The proceeding may be transferred by the judicial council of the filing or identified circuit to the other circuit.

8. Action by Circuit Clerk

- (a) **Receipt of Complaint.** Upon receiving a complaint against a judge filed under Rule 6 or identified under Rule 5, the circuit clerk must open a file, assign a docket number according to a uniform numbering scheme promulgated by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, and acknowledge the complaint's receipt.
- (b) **Distribution of Copies.** The circuit clerk must promptly send copies of a complaint filed under Rule 6 to the chief judge or, where the chief judge is disqualified from considering a complaint, to the judge authorized to act as chief judge under Rule 25(f), and copies of complaints filed under Rule 6 or identified under Rule 5 to each subject judge. The circuit clerk must retain the original complaint. Any further distribution should be as provided by local rule.

Local Rule 8(b): In addition to the distribution required under Rule 8(b), if the subject judge is a district or magistrate judge, the clerk must promptly send a copy of the complaint to the chief district judge of the district in which the subject judge holds office. If the subject judge is a bankruptcy judge, the clerk must promptly send a copy of the complaint to both the chief district judge and the chief bankruptcy judge of the district in which the subject judge holds office.

- (c) **Complaint Against Noncovered Person.** If the circuit clerk receives a complaint about a person not holding an office described in Rule 1(b), the clerk must not accept the complaint under these Rules.
- (d) **Complaint Against Judge and Another Noncovered Person.** If the circuit clerk receives a complaint about a judge described in Rule 1(b) and a person not holding an office described in Rule 1(b), the clerk must accept the complaint under these Rules only with regard to the judge and must so inform the complainant.

Commentary on Rule 8

This Rule is adapted from the Illustrative Rules and is largely self-explanatory.

The uniform docketing scheme described in subsection (a) should take into account potential problems associated with a complaint that names multiple judges. One solution may be to provide separate docket numbers for each subject judge. Separate docket numbers would help avoid difficulties in tracking cases, particularly if a complaint is dismissed with respect to some, but not all of the named judges.

Complaints against noncovered persons are not to be accepted for processing under these Rules but may, of course, be accepted under other circuit rules or procedures for grievances.

9. Time for Filing or Identifying Complaint

A complaint may be filed or identified at any time. If the passage of time has made an accurate and fair investigation of a complaint impracticable, the complaint must be dismissed under Rule 11(c)(1)(E).

Commentary on Rule 9

This Rule is adapted from the Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351, 352(b)(1)(A)(iii), and the Illustrative Rules.

10. Abuse of Complaint Procedure

- (a) Abusive Complaints.** A complainant who has filed repetitive, harassing, or frivolous complaints, or has otherwise abused the complaint procedure, may be restricted from filing further complaints. After giving the complainant an opportunity to show cause in writing why his or her right to file further complaints should not be limited, the judicial council may prohibit, restrict, or impose conditions on the complainant's use of the complaint procedure. Upon written request of the complainant, the judicial council may revise or withdraw any prohibition, restriction, or condition previously imposed.
- (b) Orchestrated Complaints.** When many essentially identical complaints from different complainants are received and appear to be part of an orchestrated campaign, the chief judge may recommend that the judicial council issue a written order instructing the circuit clerk to accept only a certain number of such complaints for filing and to refuse to accept additional complaints. The circuit clerk must send a copy of any such order to anyone whose complaint was not accepted.

Commentary on Rule 10

This Rule is adapted from the Illustrative Rules.

Rule 10(a) provides a mechanism for a judicial council to restrict the filing of further complaints by a single complainant who has abused the complaint procedure. In some instances, however, the complaint procedure may be abused in a manner for which the remedy provided in Rule 10(a) may not be appropriate. For example, some circuits have been inundated with submissions of dozens or hundreds of essentially identical complaints against the same judge or judges, all submitted by different complainants. In many of these instances, persons with grievances against a particular judge or judges used the Internet or other technology to orchestrate mass complaint-filing campaigns against them. If each complaint submitted as part of such a campaign were accepted for filing and processed according to these Rules, there would be a serious drain on court resources without any benefit to the adjudication of the underlying merits.

A judicial council may, therefore, respond to such mass filings under Rule 10(b) by declining to accept repetitive complaints for filing, regardless of the fact that the complaints are nominally submitted by different complainants. When the first complaint or complaints have been dismissed on the merits, and when further, essentially identical submissions follow, the

judicial council may issue a second order noting that these are identical or repetitive complaints, directing the circuit clerk not to accept these complaints or any further such complaints for filing, and directing the clerk to send each putative complainant copies of both orders.

ARTICLE IV. REVIEW OF COMPLAINT BY CHIEF JUDGE

11. Chief Judge's Review

- (a) **Purpose of Chief Judge's Review.** When a complaint is identified by the chief judge or is filed, the chief judge must review it unless the chief judge is disqualified under Rule 25, in which case the most-senior active circuit judge not disqualified will review the complaint. If a complaint contains information constituting evidence of misconduct or disability, but the complainant does not claim it as such, the chief judge must treat the complaint as if it did allege misconduct or disability and give notice to the subject judge. After reviewing a complaint, the chief judge must determine whether it should be:
 - (1) dismissed;
 - (2) concluded on the ground that voluntary corrective action has been taken;
 - (3) concluded because intervening events have made action on the complaint no longer necessary; or
 - (4) referred to a special committee.
- (b) **Chief Judge's Inquiry.** In determining what action to take under Rule 11(a), the chief judge may conduct a limited inquiry. The chief judge, or a designee, may communicate orally or in writing with the complainant, the subject judge, and any others who may have knowledge of the matter, and may obtain and review transcripts and other relevant documents. In conducting the inquiry, the chief judge must not determine any reasonably disputed issue. Any such determination must be left to a special committee appointed under Rule 11(f) and to the judicial council that considers the committee's report.
- (c) **Dismissal.**
 - (1) **Permissible grounds.** A complaint may be dismissed in whole or in part to the extent that the chief judge concludes that the complaint:
 - (A) alleges conduct that, even if true, is not prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts and does not indicate a mental or physical disability resulting in the inability to discharge the duties of judicial office;
 - (B) is directly related to the merits of a decision or procedural ruling;
 - (C) is frivolous;

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- (D) is based on allegations lacking sufficient evidence to raise an inference that misconduct has occurred or that a disability exists;
 - (E) is based on allegations that are incapable of being established through investigation;
 - (F) has been filed in the wrong circuit under Rule 7; or
 - (G) is otherwise not appropriate for consideration under the Act.
 - (2) **Impermissible grounds.** A complaint must not be dismissed solely because it repeats allegations of a previously dismissed complaint if it also contains material information not previously considered and does not constitute harassment of the subject judge.
- (d) **Corrective Action.** The chief judge may conclude a complaint proceeding in whole or in part if:
- (1) an informal resolution under Rule 5 satisfactory to the chief judge was reached before the complaint was filed under Rule 6; or
 - (2) the chief judge determines that the subject judge has taken appropriate voluntary corrective action that acknowledges and remedies the problems raised by the complaint.
- (e) **Intervening Events.** The chief judge may conclude a complaint proceeding in whole or in part upon determining that intervening events render some or all of the allegations moot or make remedial action impossible as to the subject judge.
- (f) **Appointment of Special Committee.** If some or all of a complaint is not dismissed or concluded, the chief judge must promptly appoint a special committee to investigate the complaint or any relevant portion of it and to make recommendations to the judicial council. Before appointing a special committee, the chief judge must invite the subject judge to respond to the complaint either orally or in writing if the judge was not given an opportunity during the limited inquiry. In the chief judge's discretion, separate complaints may be joined and assigned to a single special committee. Similarly, a single complaint about more than one judge may be severed and more than one special committee appointed.
- (g) **Notice of Chief Judge's Action; Petition for Review.**
- (1) **When chief judge appoints special committee.** If the chief judge appoints a special committee, the chief judge must notify the complainant and the subject judge that the matter has been referred to a committee, notify the complainant of a complainant's rights under Rule 16, and identify the members of the committee. A copy of the order appointing the special committee must be sent to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.

- (2) **When chief judge disposes of complaint without appointing special committee.** If the chief judge disposes of a complaint under Rule 11(c), (d), or (e), the chief judge must prepare a supporting memorandum that sets forth the reasons for the disposition. If the complaint was initiated by identification under Rule 5, the memorandum must so indicate. Except as authorized by 28 U.S.C. § 360, the memorandum must not include the name of the complainant or of the subject judge. The order and memoranda incorporated by reference in the order must be promptly sent to the complainant, the subject judge, and the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.
- (3) **Right to petition for review.** If the chief judge disposes of a complaint under Rule 11(c), (d), or (e), the complainant and the subject judge must be notified of the right to petition the judicial council for review of the disposition, as provided in Rule 18. If the chief judge so disposes of a complaint that was identified under Rule 5 or filed by its subject judge, the chief judge must transmit the order and memoranda incorporated by reference in the order to the judicial council for review in accordance with Rule 19. In the event of such a transmission, the subject judge may make a written submission to the judicial council but will have no further right of review except as allowed under Rule 21(b)(1)(B). When a disposition is to be reviewed by the judicial council, the chief judge must promptly transmit all materials obtained in connection with the inquiry under Rule 11(b) to the circuit clerk for transmittal to the council.
- (h) **Public Availability of Chief Judge’s Decision.** The chief judge’s decision must be made public to the extent, at the time, and in the manner provided in Rule 24.

Commentary on Rule 11

This Rule describes complaint-review actions available either to the chief judge or, where that judge is the subject judge or is otherwise disqualified under Rule 25, such as where the complaint is filed against the chief judge, to the judge designated under Rule 25(f) to perform the chief judge’s duties under these Rules. Subsection (a) of this Rule provides that where a complaint has been filed under Rule 6, the ordinary doctrines of waiver do not apply. The chief judge must identify as a complaint any misconduct or disability issues raised by the factual allegations of the complaint even if the complainant makes no such claim with regard to those issues. For example, an allegation limited to misconduct in fact-finding that mentions periods during a trial when the judge was asleep must be treated as a complaint regarding disability. A formal order giving notice of the expanded scope of the proceeding must be given to the subject judge.

Subsection (b) describes the nature of the chief judge’s inquiry. It is based largely on the Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 243–45. The Act states that dismissal is appropriate “when a limited inquiry . . . demonstrates that the allegations in the complaint lack any factual foundation or are conclusively refuted by objective evidence.” 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(1)(B). At the same time, however, Section 352(a) states that “[t]he chief judge shall not undertake to make findings of fact about any matter that is reasonably in dispute.” These two statutory standards

should be read together so that a matter is not “reasonably” in dispute if a limited inquiry shows that the allegations do not constitute misconduct or disability, that they lack any reliable factual foundation, or that they are conclusively refuted by objective evidence.

In conducting a limited inquiry under subsection (b), the chief judge must avoid determinations of reasonably disputed issues, including reasonably disputed issues as to whether the facts alleged constitute misconduct or disability, which are ordinarily left to the judicial council and its special committee. An allegation of fact is ordinarily not “refuted” simply because the subject judge denies it. The limited inquiry must reveal something more in the way of refutation before it is appropriate to dismiss a complaint that is otherwise cognizable. If it is the complainant’s word against the subject judge’s — in other words, there is simply no other significant evidence of what happened or of the complainant’s unreliability — then there must be a special-committee investigation. Such a credibility issue is a matter “reasonably in dispute” within the meaning of the Act.

However, dismissal following a limited inquiry may occur when a complaint refers to transcripts or to witnesses and the chief judge determines that the transcripts and witnesses all support the subject judge. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 243. For example, consider a complaint alleging that the subject judge said X, and the complaint mentions, or it is independently clear, that five people may have heard what the judge said. *Id.* The chief judge is told by the subject judge and one witness that the judge did not say X, and the chief judge dismisses the complaint without questioning the other four possible witnesses. *Id.* In this example, the matter remains reasonably in dispute. If all five witnesses say the subject judge did not say X, dismissal is appropriate, but if potential witnesses who are reasonably accessible have not been questioned, then the matter remains reasonably in dispute. *Id.*

Similarly, under subsection (c)(1)(A), if it is clear that the conduct or disability alleged, even if true, is not cognizable under these Rules, the complaint should be dismissed. If that issue is reasonably in dispute, however, dismissal under subsection (c)(1)(A) is inappropriate.

Essentially, the standard articulated in subsection (b) is that used to decide motions for summary judgment pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 56. Genuine issues of material fact are not resolved at the summary judgment stage. A material fact is one that “might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law,” and a dispute is “genuine” if “the evidence is such that a reasonable jury could return a verdict for the nonmoving party.” *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby*, 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986). Similarly, the chief judge may not resolve a genuine issue concerning a material fact or the existence of misconduct or a disability when conducting a limited inquiry pursuant to subsection (b).

Subsection (c) describes the grounds on which a complaint may be dismissed. These are adapted from the Act, 28 U.S.C. § 352(b), and the Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 239–45. Subsection (c)(1)(A) permits dismissal of an allegation that, even if true, does not constitute misconduct or disability under the statutory standard. The proper standards are set out in Rule 4 and discussed in the Commentary on that Rule. Subsection (c)(1)(B) permits dismissal of complaints related to the merits of a decision by a subject judge; this standard is also governed by Rule 4 and its accompanying Commentary.

Subsections (c)(1)(C)–(E) implement the statute by allowing dismissal of complaints that are “frivolous, lacking sufficient evidence to raise an inference that misconduct has occurred, or

containing allegations which are incapable of being established through investigation.” 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(1)(A)(iii).

Dismissal of a complaint as “frivolous” under Rule 11(c)(1)(C) will generally occur without any inquiry beyond the face of the complaint. For instance, when the allegations are facially incredible or so lacking in indicia of reliability that no further inquiry is warranted, dismissal under this subsection is appropriate.

A complaint warranting dismissal under Rule 11(c)(1)(D) is illustrated by the following example. Consider a complainant who alleges an impropriety and asserts that he knows of it because it was observed and reported to him by a person who is identified. The subject judge denies that the event occurred. When contacted, the source also denies it. In such a case, the chief judge’s proper course of action may turn on whether the source had any role in the allegedly improper conduct. If the complaint was based on a lawyer’s statement that he or she had an improper *ex parte* contact with a judge, the lawyer’s denial of the impropriety might not be taken as wholly persuasive, and it would be appropriate to conclude that a real factual issue is raised. On the other hand, if the complaint quoted a disinterested third party and that disinterested party denied that the statement had been made, there would be no value in opening a formal investigation. In such a case, it would be appropriate to dismiss the complaint under Rule 11(c)(1)(D).

Rule 11(c)(1)(E) is intended, among other things, to cover situations when no evidence is offered or identified, or when the only identified source is unavailable. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 243. For example, a complaint alleges that an unnamed attorney told the complainant that the subject judge did X. *Id.* The subject judge denies it. The chief judge requests that the complainant (who does not purport to have observed the subject judge do X) identify the unnamed witness, or that the unnamed witness come forward so that the chief judge can learn the unnamed witness’s account. *Id.* The complainant responds that he has spoken with the unnamed witness, that the unnamed witness is an attorney who practices in federal court, and that the unnamed witness is unwilling to be identified or to come forward. *Id.* at 243–44. The allegation is then properly dismissed as containing allegations that are incapable of being established through investigation. *Id.*

If, however, the situation involves a reasonable dispute over credibility, the matter should proceed. For example, the complainant alleges an impropriety and alleges that he or she observed it and that there were no other witnesses; the subject judge denies that the event occurred. Unless the complainant’s allegations are facially incredible or so lacking indicia of reliability as to warrant dismissal under Rule 11(c)(1)(C), a special committee must be appointed because there is a material factual question that is reasonably in dispute.

Dismissal is also appropriate when a complaint is filed so long after an alleged event that memory loss, death, or changes to unknown residences prevent a proper investigation.

Subsection (c)(2) indicates that the investigative nature of the process prevents the application of claim preclusion principles where new and material evidence becomes available. However, it also recognizes that at some point a renewed investigation may constitute harassment of the subject judge and should not be undertaken, depending of course on the seriousness of the issues and the weight of the new evidence.

Rule 11(d) implements the Act’s provision for dismissal if voluntary appropriate corrective action has been taken. It is largely adapted from the Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 244–45. The Act authorizes the chief judge to conclude the complaint proceedings if “appropriate corrective action has been taken.” 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(2). Under the Rule, action taken after a complaint is filed is “appropriate” when it acknowledges and remedies the problem raised by the complaint. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 244. Because the Act deals with the conduct of judges, the emphasis is on correction of the judicial conduct that was the subject of the complaint. *Id.* Terminating a complaint based on corrective action is premised on the implicit understanding that voluntary self-correction or redress of misconduct or a disability may be preferable to sanctions. *Id.* The chief judge may facilitate this process by giving the subject judge an objective view of the appearance of the judicial conduct in question and by suggesting appropriate corrective measures. *Id.* Moreover, when corrective action is taken under Rule 5 satisfactory to the chief judge before a complaint is filed, that informal resolution will be sufficient to conclude a subsequent complaint based on identical conduct.

“Corrective action” must be voluntary action taken by the subject judge. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 244. A remedial action directed by the chief judge or by an appellate court without the participation of the subject judge in formulating the directive or without the subject judge’s subsequent agreement to such action does not constitute the requisite voluntary corrective action. *Id.* Neither the chief judge nor an appellate court has authority under the Act to impose a formal remedy or sanction; only the judicial council can impose a formal remedy or sanction under 28 U.S.C. § 354(a)(2). *Id.* Compliance with a previous judicial-council order may serve as corrective action allowing conclusion of a later complaint about the same behavior. *Id.*

Where a subject judge’s conduct has resulted in identifiable, particularized harm to the complainant or another individual, appropriate corrective action should include steps taken by that judge to acknowledge and redress the harm, if possible, such as by an apology, recusal from a case, or a pledge to refrain from similar conduct in the future. *Id.* While the Act is generally forward-looking, any corrective action should, to the extent possible, serve to correct a specific harm to an individual, if such harm can reasonably be remedied. *Id.* In some cases, corrective action may not be “appropriate” to justify conclusion of a complaint unless the complainant or other individual harmed is meaningfully apprised of the nature of the corrective action in the chief judge’s order, in a direct communication from the subject judge, or otherwise. *Id.*

Voluntary corrective action should be proportionate to any plausible allegations of misconduct in a complaint. The form of corrective action should also be proportionate to any sanctions that the judicial council might impose under Rule 20(b), such as a private or public reprimand or a change in case assignments. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D at 244–45. In other words, minor corrective action will not suffice to dispose of a serious matter. *Id.*

Rule 11(e) implements Section 352(b)(2) of the Act, which permits the chief judge to “conclude the proceeding,” if “action on the complaint is no longer necessary because of intervening events,” such as a resignation from judicial office. Ordinarily, stepping down from an administrative post such as chief judge, judicial-council member, or court-committee chair does not constitute an event rendering unnecessary any further action on a complaint alleging judicial misconduct. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 245. As long as the subject of a complaint retains the judicial office and remains a covered judge as defined in Rule 1(b), a complaint must be addressed. *Id.*; 28 U.S.C. §§ 371(b); 372(a).

Concluding a complaint proceeding, by either the judicial council of the subject judge or the judicial council to which a complaint proceeding has been transferred, precludes remedial action under the Act and these Rules as to the subject judge. But the Judicial Conference and the judicial council of the subject judge have ample authority to assess potential institutional issues related to the complaint as part of their respective responsibilities to promote “the expeditious conduct of court business,” 28 U.S.C. § 331, and to “make all necessary and appropriate orders for the effective administration of justice within [each] circuit.” *Id.* at § 332(d)(1). Such an assessment might include an analysis of what conditions may have enabled misconduct or prevented its discovery, and what precautionary or curative steps could be undertaken to prevent its recurrence. The judicial council may request that the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability transmit its order to relevant Congressional entities.

If a complaint is not disposed of pursuant to Rule 11(c), (d), or (e), a special committee must be appointed. Rule 11(f) states that a subject judge must be invited to respond to the complaint before a special committee is appointed, if no earlier response was invited.

Subject judges receive copies of complaints at the same time that they are referred to the chief judge, and they are free to volunteer responses to them. Under Rule 11(b), the chief judge may request a response if it is thought necessary. However, many complaints are clear candidates for dismissal even if their allegations are accepted as true, and there is no need for the subject judge to devote time to a defense.

The Act requires that the order dismissing a complaint or concluding a proceeding contain a statement of reasons and that a copy of the order be sent to the complainant. 28 U.S.C. § 352(b). Rule 24, dealing with availability of information to the public, contemplates that the order will be made public, usually without disclosing the names of the complainant or the subject judge. If desired for administrative purposes, more identifying information can be included in a non-public version of the order.

When a complaint is disposed of by the chief judge, the statutory purposes are best served by providing the complainant with a full, particularized, but concise explanation, giving reasons for the conclusions reached. *See also* Commentary on Rule 24 (dealing with public availability).

Rule 11(g) provides that the complainant and the subject judge must be notified, in the case of a disposition by the chief judge, of the right to petition the judicial council for review. Because an identified complaint has no “complainant” to petition for review, the chief judge’s dispositive order on such a complaint will be transmitted to the judicial council for review. The same will apply where a complaint was filed by its subject judge. A copy of the chief judge’s order, and memoranda incorporated by reference in the order, disposing of a complaint must be sent by the circuit clerk to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.

ARTICLE V. INVESTIGATION AND REPORT BY SPECIAL COMMITTEE

12. Special Committee’s Composition

- (a) **Membership.** Except as provided in (e), a special committee appointed under Rule 11(f) must consist of the chief judge and equal numbers of circuit and district

judges. These judges may include senior judges. If the complaint is about a district judge, bankruptcy judge, or magistrate judge, then, when possible, the district-judge members of the special committee must be from districts other than the district of the subject judge. For the courts named in 28 U.S.C. § 363, the special committee must be selected from the judges serving on the subject judge's court.

- (b) Presiding Officer. When appointing the special committee, the chief judge may serve as the presiding officer or else must designate a committee member as the presiding officer.**
- (c) Bankruptcy Judge or Magistrate Judge as Adviser. If the subject judge is a bankruptcy judge or magistrate judge, he or she may, within 14 days after being notified of the special committee's appointment, ask the chief judge to designate as a committee adviser another bankruptcy judge or magistrate judge, as the case may be. The chief judge must grant such a request but may otherwise use discretion in naming the adviser. Unless the adviser is a Court of Federal Claims special master appointed under 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-12(c), the adviser must be from a district other than the district of the subject bankruptcy judge or subject magistrate judge. The adviser cannot vote but has the other privileges of a special-committee member.**
- (d) Provision of Documents. The chief judge must certify to each other member of the special committee and to any adviser copies of the complaint and statement of facts, in whole or relevant part, and any other relevant documents on file.**
- (e) Continuing Qualification of Special-Committee Member. A member of a special committee may continue to serve on the committee even though the member relinquishes the position of chief judge, active circuit judge, or active district judge, as the case may be, but only if the member continues to hold office under Article III, Section 1, of the Constitution of the United States, or under 28 U.S.C. § 171.**
- (f) Inability of Special-Committee Member to Complete Service. If a member of a special committee can no longer serve because of death, disability, disqualification, resignation, retirement from office, or other reason, the chief judge must decide whether to appoint a replacement member, either a circuit or district judge as needed under (a). No special committee appointed under these Rules may function with only a single member, and the votes of a two-member committee must be unanimous.**
- (g) Voting. All actions by a special committee must be by vote of a majority of all members of the committee.**

Commentary on Rule 12

This Rule is adapted from the Act and the Illustrative Rules.

Rule 12 leaves the size of a special committee flexible, to be determined on a case-by-case basis. The question the size of a special committee is one that should be weighed with care in view of the potential for consuming the members' time; a large committee should be appointed only if there is a special reason to do so. Rule 12(a) acknowledges the common

practice of including senior judges in the membership of a special committee.

Although the Act requires that the chief judge be a member of each special committee, 28 U.S.C. § 353(a)(1), it does not require that the chief judge preside. Accordingly, Rule 12(b) provides that if the chief judge does not preside, he or she must designate another member of the special committee as the presiding officer.

Rule 12(c) provides that the chief judge must appoint a bankruptcy judge or magistrate judge as an adviser to a special committee at the request of a bankruptcy or magistrate subject judge. Subsection (c) also provides that the adviser will have all the privileges of a member of the special committee except a vote. The adviser, therefore, may participate in all deliberations of the special committee, question witnesses at hearings, and write a separate statement to accompany the committee's report to the judicial council.

Rule 12(e) provides that a member of a special committee who remains an Article III judge may continue to serve on the committee even though the member's status otherwise changes. Thus, a special committee that originally consisted of the chief judge and an equal number of circuit and district judges, as required by the law, may continue to function even though changes of status alter that composition. This provision reflects the belief that stability of membership will contribute to the quality of the work of such committees.

Stability of membership is also the principal concern animating Rule 12(f), which deals with the case in which a special committee loses a member before its work is complete. The Rule permits the chief judge to determine whether a replacement member should be appointed. Generally, appointment of a replacement member is desirable in these situations unless the special committee has conducted evidentiary hearings before the vacancy occurs. However, cases may arise in which a special committee is in the late stages of its work, and in which it would be difficult for a new member to play a meaningful role. The Rule also preserves the collegial character of the special-committee process by prohibiting a single surviving member from serving as a committee and by providing that a committee of two surviving members will, in essence, operate under a unanimity rule.

Rule 12(g) provides that actions of a special committee must be by vote of a majority of all the members. All the members of a special committee should participate in committee decisions. In that circumstance, it seems reasonable to require that special-committee decisions be made by a majority of the membership, rather than a majority of some smaller quorum.

13. Conduct of Special-Committee Investigation

- (a) **Extent and Methods of Special-Committee Investigation.** A special committee should determine the appropriate extent and methods of its investigation in light of the allegations in the complaint and the committee's preliminary inquiry. In investigating the alleged misconduct or disability, the special committee should take steps to determine the full scope of the potential misconduct or disability, including whether a pattern of misconduct or a broader disability exists. The investigation may include use of appropriate experts or other professionals. If, in the course of the investigation, the special committee has cause to believe that the subject judge may have engaged in misconduct or has a disability that is beyond the specific pending complaint, the committee must refer the new matter to the chief judge for a

determination of whether action under Rule 5 or Rule 11 is necessary before the committee's investigation is expanded to include the new matter.

- (b) Criminal Conduct.** If the special committee's investigation concerns conduct that may be a crime, the committee must consult with the appropriate prosecutorial authorities to the extent permitted by the Act to avoid compromising any criminal investigation. The special committee has final authority over the timing and extent of its investigation and the formulation of its recommendations.
- (c) Staff.** The special committee may arrange for staff assistance to conduct the investigation. It may use existing staff of the judiciary or may hire special staff through the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts.
- (d) Delegation of Subpoena Power; Contempt.** The chief judge may delegate the authority to exercise the subpoena powers of the special committee. The judicial council or special committee may institute a contempt proceeding under 28 U.S.C. § 332(d) against anyone who fails to comply with a subpoena.

Commentary on Rule 13

This Rule is adapted from the Illustrative Rules.

Rule 13, as well as Rules 14, 15, and 16, are concerned with the way in which the special committee carries out its mission. They reflect the view that the special committee has two roles that are separated in ordinary litigation. First, the special committee has an investigative role of the kind that is characteristically left to executive branch agencies or discovery by civil litigants. 28 U.S.C. § 353(c). Second, it has a formalized fact-finding and recommendation-of-disposition role that is characteristically left to juries, judges, or arbitrators. *Id.* Rule 13 generally governs the investigative stage. Even though the same body has responsibility for both roles under the Act, it is important to distinguish between them in order to ensure that appropriate rights are afforded at appropriate times to the subject judge.

Rule 13(a) includes a provision making clear that the special committee may choose to consult appropriate experts or other professionals if it determines that such a consultation is warranted. If, for example, the special committee has cause to believe that the subject judge may be unable to discharge all of the duties of office by reason of mental or physical disability, the committee could ask the subject judge to respond to inquiries and, if necessary, request the judge to undergo a medical or psychological examination. In advance of any such examination, the special committee may enter into an agreement with the subject judge as to the scope and use that may be made of the examination results. In addition or in the alternative, the special committee may ask to review existing records, including medical records.

The extent of the subject judge's cooperation in the investigation may be taken into account in the consideration of the underlying complaint. If, for example, the subject judge impedes reasonable efforts to confirm or disconfirm the presence of a disability, the special committee may still consider whether the conduct alleged in the complaint and confirmed in the investigation constitutes disability. The same would be true of a complaint alleging misconduct.

The special committee may also consider whether such a judge might be in violation of his or her duty to cooperate in an investigation under these Rules, a duty rooted not only in the Act's definition of misconduct but also in the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, which emphasizes the need to maintain public confidence in the judiciary, *see* Canon 2(A) and Canon 1 cmt., and requires judges to “facilitate the performance of the administrative responsibilities of other judges and court personnel,” Canon 3(B)(1). If the special committee finds a breach of the duty to cooperate and believes that the breach may amount to misconduct under Rule 4(a)(5), it should determine, under the final sentence of Rule 13(a), whether that possibility should be referred to the chief judge for consideration of action under Rule 5 or Rule 11. *See also* Commentary on Rule 4.

One of the difficult questions that can arise is the relationship between proceedings under the Act and criminal investigations. Rule 13(b) assigns responsibility for coordination to the special committee in cases in which criminal conduct is suspected, but gives the committee the authority to determine the appropriate pace of its activity in light of any criminal investigation.

Title 28 U.S.C. § 356(a) provides that a special committee will have full subpoena powers as provided in 28 U.S.C. § 332(d). Section 332(d)(1) provides that subpoenas will be issued on behalf of a judicial council by the circuit clerk “at the direction of the chief judge of the circuit or his designee.” Rule 13(d) contemplates that, where the chief judge designates someone else as presiding officer of the special committee, the presiding officer also be delegated the authority to direct the circuit clerk to issue subpoenas related to committee proceedings. That is not intended to imply, however, that the decision to use the subpoena power is exercisable by the presiding officer alone. *See* Rule 12(g).

14. Conduct of Special-Committee Hearings

- (a) **Purpose of Hearings.** The special committee may hold hearings to take testimony and receive other evidence, to hear argument, or both. If the special committee is investigating allegations against more than one judge, it may hold joint or separate hearings.
- (b) **Special-Committee Evidence.** Subject to Rule 15, the special committee must obtain material, nonredundant evidence in the form it considers appropriate. In the special committee's discretion, evidence may be obtained by committee members, staff, or both. Witnesses offering testimonial evidence may include the complainant and the subject judge.
- (c) **Counsel for Witnesses.** The subject judge has the right to counsel. The special committee has discretion to decide whether other witnesses may have counsel present when they testify.
- (d) **Witness Fees.** Witness fees must be paid as provided in 28 U.S.C. § 1821.
- (e) **Oath.** All testimony taken at a hearing must be given under oath or affirmation.
- (f) **Rules of Evidence.** The Federal Rules of Evidence do not apply to special-committee hearings.

- (g) **Record and Transcript.** A record and transcript must be made of all hearings.

Commentary on Rule 14

This Rule is adapted from the Act, 28 U.S.C. § 353, and the Illustrative Rules.

Rule 14 is concerned with the conduct of fact-finding hearings. Special-committee hearings will normally be held only after the investigative work has been completed and the committee has concluded that there is sufficient evidence to warrant a formal fact-finding proceeding. Special-committee proceedings are primarily inquisitorial rather than adversarial. Accordingly, the Federal Rules of Evidence do not apply to such hearings. Inevitably, a hearing will have something of an adversary character. Nevertheless, that tendency should be moderated to the extent possible. Even though a proceeding will commonly have investigative and hearing stages, special-committee members should not regard themselves as prosecutors one day and judges the next. Their duty — and that of their staff — is at all times to be impartial seekers of the truth.

Rule 14(b) contemplates that material evidence will be obtained by the special committee and presented in the form of affidavits, live testimony, etc. Staff or others who are organizing the hearings should regard it as their role to present evidence representing the entire picture. With respect to testimonial evidence, the subject judge should normally be called as a special-committee witness. Cases may arise in which the subject judge will not testify voluntarily. In such cases, subpoena powers are available, subject to the normal testimonial privileges. Although Rule 15(c) recognizes the subject judge's statutory right to call witnesses on his or her own behalf, exercise of this right should not usually be necessary.

15. Subject Judge's Rights

- (a) **Notice.**

- (1) **Generally.** The subject judge must receive written notice of:

- (A) the appointment of a special committee under Rule 11(f);
- (B) the expansion of the scope of an investigation under Rule 13(a);
- (C) any hearing under Rule 14, including its purposes, the names of any witnesses the special committee intends to call, and the text of any statements that have been taken from those witnesses.

- (2) **Suggestion of additional witnesses.** The subject judge may suggest additional witnesses to the special committee.

- (b) **Special-Committee Report.** The subject judge must be sent a copy of the special committee's report when it is filed with the judicial council.

- (c) **Presentation of Evidence.** At any hearing held under Rule 14, the subject judge has the right to present evidence, to compel the attendance of witnesses, and to compel the production of documents. At the request of the subject judge, the chief judge or

the judge's designee must direct the circuit clerk to issue a subpoena to a witness under 28 U.S.C. § 332(d)(1). The subject judge must be given the opportunity to cross-examine special-committee witnesses, in person or by counsel.

- (d) **Presentation of Argument.** The subject judge may submit written argument to the special committee and must be given a reasonable opportunity to present oral argument at an appropriate stage of the investigation.
- (e) **Attendance at Hearings.** The subject judge has the right to attend any hearing held under Rule 14 and to receive copies of the transcript, of any documents introduced, and of any written arguments submitted by the complainant to the special committee.
- (f) **Representation by Counsel.** The subject judge may choose to be represented by counsel in the exercise of any right enumerated in this Rule. As provided in Rule 20(e), the United States may bear the costs of the representation.

Commentary on Rule 15

This Rule is adapted from the Act and the Illustrative Rules.

The Act states that these Rules must contain provisions requiring that “the judge whose conduct is the subject of a complaint . . . be afforded an opportunity to appear (in person or by counsel) at proceedings conducted by the investigating panel, to present oral and documentary evidence, to compel the attendance of witnesses or the production of documents, to cross-examine witnesses, and to present argument orally or in writing.” 28 U.S.C. § 358(b)(2). To implement this provision, Rule 15(e) gives the subject judge the right to attend any hearing held for the purpose of receiving evidence of record or hearing argument under Rule 14.

The Act does not require that the subject judge be permitted to attend all proceedings of the special committee. Accordingly, the Rules do not give a right to attend other proceedings — for example, meetings at which the special committee is engaged in investigative activity, such as interviewing persons to learn whether they ought to be called as witnesses or examining for relevance purposes documents delivered pursuant to a subpoena duces tecum, or meetings in which the committee is deliberating on the evidence or its recommendations.

16. Complainant's Rights in Investigation

- (a) **Notice.** The complainant must receive written notice of the investigation as provided in Rule 11(g)(1). When the special committee's report to the judicial council is filed, the complainant must be notified of the filing. The judicial council may, in its discretion, provide a copy of the report of a special committee to the complainant.
- (b) **Opportunity to Provide Evidence.** If the complainant knows of relevant evidence not already before the special committee, the complainant may briefly explain in writing the basis of that knowledge and the nature of that evidence. If the special committee determines that the complainant has information not already known to the committee that would assist in the committee's investigation, a representative of the committee must interview the complainant.

- (c) **Presentation of Argument.** The complainant may submit written argument to the special committee. In its discretion, the special committee may permit the complainant to offer oral argument.
- (d) **Representation by Counsel.** A complainant may submit written argument through counsel and, if permitted to offer oral argument, may do so through counsel.

Commentary on Rule 16

This Rule is adapted from the Act and the Illustrative Rules.

In accordance with the view of the process as fundamentally administrative and inquisitorial, these Rules do not give the complainant the rights of a party to litigation and leave the complainant's role largely to the discretion of the special committee. However, Rule 16(b) gives the complainant the prerogative to make a brief written submission showing that he or she is aware of relevant evidence not already known to the special committee. (Such a submission may precede any written or oral argument the complainant provides under Rule 16(c), or it may accompany that argument.) If the special committee determines, independently or from the complainant's submission, that the complainant has information that would assist the committee in its investigation, the complainant must be interviewed by a representative of the committee. Such an interview may be in person or by telephone, and the representative of the special committee may be either a member or staff.

Rule 16 does not contemplate that the complainant will ordinarily be permitted to attend proceedings of the special committee except when testifying or presenting oral argument. A special committee may exercise its discretion to permit the complainant to be present at its proceedings, or to permit the complainant, individually or through counsel, to participate in the examination or cross-examination of witnesses.

The Act authorizes an exception to the normal confidentiality provisions where the judicial council in its discretion provides a copy of the report of the special committee to the complainant and to the subject judge. 28 U.S.C. § 360(a)(1). However, the Rules do not entitle the complainant to a copy of the special committee's report.

17. Special-Committee Report

The special committee must file with the judicial council a comprehensive report of its investigation, including findings and recommendations for council action. The report must be accompanied by a statement of the vote by which it was adopted, any separate or dissenting statements of special-committee members, and the record of any hearings held under Rule 14. In addition to being sent to the subject judge under Rule 15(b), a copy of the report and any accompanying statements and documents must be sent to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.

Commentary on Rule 17

This Rule is adapted from the Illustrative Rules and is self-explanatory. The provision for sending a copy of the special-committee report and accompanying statements and documents to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability was new at the time the Judicial Conference promulgated the Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings in 2008.

ARTICLE VI. REVIEW BY JUDICIAL COUNCIL

18. Petition for Review of Chief-Judge Disposition Under Rule 11(c), (d), or (e)

- (a) **Petition for Review.** After the chief judge issues an order under Rule 11(c), (d), or (e), the complainant or the subject judge may petition the judicial council of the circuit to review the order. By rules promulgated under 28 U.S.C. § 358, the judicial council may refer a petition for review filed under this Rule to a panel of no fewer than five members of the council, at least two of whom must be district judges.

Local Rule 18(a): The Chief Judge shall designate six members of the judicial council (other than the Chief Judge) to serve as a review panel. The review panel will be composed of three circuit judges and three district judges. Membership on the review panel will be changed after six months so that all members of the council will serve on a review panel once each year. The review panel will act for the judicial council on all petitions for review filed under Rule 18, except those petitions referred to the full membership of the council pursuant to the request of any member of the review panel.

- (b) **When to File; Form; Where to File.** A petition for review must be filed in the office of the circuit clerk within 42 days after the date of the chief judge's order. The petition for review should be in letter form, addressed to the circuit clerk, and in an envelope marked "Misconduct Petition" or "Disability Petition." The name of the subject judge must not be shown on the envelope. The petition for review should be typewritten or otherwise legible. It should begin with "I hereby petition the judicial council for review of . . ." and state the reasons why the petition should be granted. It must be signed.
- (c) **Receipt and Distribution of Petition.** A circuit clerk who receives a petition for review filed in accordance with this Rule must:
 - (1) acknowledge its receipt and send a copy to the complainant or subject judge, as the case may be;
 - (2) promptly distribute to each member of the judicial council, or its relevant panel, except for any member disqualified under Rule 25, or make available in the manner provided by local rule, the following materials:
 - (A) copies of the complaint;
 - (B) all materials obtained by the chief judge in connection with the inquiry;

- (C) the chief judge's order disposing of the complaint;
 - (D) any memorandum in support of the chief judge's order;
 - (E) the petition for review; and
 - (F) an appropriate ballot; and
- (3) send the petition for review to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. Unless the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability requests them, the circuit clerk will not send copies of the materials obtained by the chief judge.
- (d) **Untimely Petition.** The circuit clerk must refuse to accept a petition that is received after the time allowed in (b).
- (e) **Timely Petition Not in Proper Form.** When the circuit clerk receives a petition for review filed within the time allowed but in a form that is improper to a degree that would substantially impair its consideration by the judicial council — such as a document that is ambiguous about whether it is intended to be a petition for review — the circuit clerk must acknowledge its receipt, call the filer's attention to the deficiencies, and give the filer the opportunity to correct the deficiencies within the original time allowed for filing the petition or within 21 days after the date on which a notice of the deficiencies was sent to the complainant, whichever is later. If the deficiencies are corrected within the time allowed, the circuit clerk will proceed according to paragraphs (a) and (c) of this Rule. If the deficiencies are not corrected, the circuit clerk must reject the petition.

Commentary on Rule 18

Rule 18 is adapted largely from the Illustrative Rules.

Subsection (a) permits the subject judge, as well as the complainant, to petition for review of the chief judge's order dismissing a complaint under Rule 11(c), or concluding that appropriate corrective action or intervening events have remedied or mooted the problems raised by the complaint pursuant to Rule 11(d) or (e). Although the subject judge may ostensibly be vindicated by the dismissal or conclusion of a complaint, the chief judge's order may include language disagreeable to the subject judge. For example, an order may dismiss a complaint, but state that the subject judge did in fact engage in misconduct. Accordingly, a subject judge may wish to object to the content of the order and is given the opportunity to petition the judicial council of the circuit for review.

Subsection (b) contains a time limit of 42 days to file a petition for review. It is important to establish a time limit on petitions for review of chief judges' dispositions in order to provide finality to the process. If the complaint requires an investigation, the investigation should proceed; if it does not, the subject judge should know that the matter is closed.

The standards for timely filing under the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure should be applied to petitions for review. *See* Fed. R. App. P. 25(a)(2)(A), (C).

Rule 18(e) provides for an automatic extension of the time limit imposed under subsection (b) if a person files a petition that is rejected for failure to comply with formal requirements.

19. Judicial-Council Disposition of Petition for Review

- (a) **Rights of Subject Judge.** At any time after a complainant files a petition for review, the subject judge may file a written response with the circuit clerk. The circuit clerk must promptly distribute copies of the response to each member of the judicial council or of the relevant panel, unless that member is disqualified under Rule 25. Copies must also be distributed to the chief judge, to the complainant, and to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. The subject judge must not otherwise communicate with individual judicial-council members about the matter. The subject judge must be given copies of any communications to the judicial council from the complainant.
- (b) **Judicial-Council Action.** After considering a petition for review and the materials before it, the judicial council may:
 - (1) affirm the chief judge's disposition by denying the petition;
 - (2) return the matter to the chief judge with directions to conduct a further inquiry under Rule 11(b) or to identify a complaint under Rule 5;
 - (3) return the matter to the chief judge with directions to appoint a special committee under Rule 11(f); or
 - (4) in exceptional circumstances, take other appropriate action.
- (c) **Notice of Judicial-Council Decision.** Copies of the judicial council's order, together with memoranda incorporated by reference in the order and separate concurring or dissenting statements, must be given to the complainant, the subject judge, and the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.
- (d) **Memorandum of Judicial-Council Decision.** If the judicial council's order affirms the chief judge's disposition, a supporting memorandum must be prepared only if the council concludes that there is a need to supplement the chief judge's explanation. A memorandum supporting a judicial-council order must not include the name of the complainant or the subject judge.
- (e) **Review of Judicial-Council Decision.** If the judicial council's decision is adverse to the petitioner, and if no member of the council dissented, the complainant must be notified that he or she has no right to seek review of the decision. If there was a dissent, the petitioner must be informed that he or she can file a petition for review under Rule 21(b).

- (f) **Public Availability of Judicial-Council Decision.** Materials related to the judicial council's decision must be made public to the extent, at the time, and in the manner set forth in Rule 24.

Commentary on Rule 19

This Rule is adapted largely from the Act and is self-explanatory.

The judicial council should ordinarily review the decision of the chief judge on the merits, treating the petition for review for all practical purposes as an appeal. The judicial council may respond to a petition for review by affirming the chief judge's order, remanding the matter, or, in exceptional cases, taking other appropriate action.

Under Rule 19(b), after considering a petition for review and the materials before it, a judicial council may return a matter to the chief judge to take various actions, including conducting further inquiry under Rule 11(b), identifying a complaint under Rule 5, or appointing a special committee under Rule 11(f).

A petition for review of a judicial council's decision under this Rule may be filed in any matter in which one or more members of the council dissented from the order. *See* Rule 21(b).

20. Judicial-Council Action Following Appointment of Special Committee

- (a) **Subject Judge's Rights.** Within 21 days after the filing of the report of a special committee, the subject judge may send a written response to the members of the judicial council. The subject judge must also be given an opportunity to present argument, personally or through counsel, written or oral, as determined by the judicial council. The subject judge must not otherwise communicate with judicial-council members about the matter.
- (b) **Judicial-Council Action.**
- (1) **Discretionary actions.** Subject to the subject judge's rights set forth in subsection (a), the judicial council may:
- (A) **dismiss the complaint because:**
- (i) even if the claim is true, the claimed conduct is not conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts and does not indicate a mental or physical disability resulting in inability to discharge the duties of office;
- (ii) the complaint is directly related to the merits of a decision or procedural ruling;
- (iii) the facts on which the complaint is based have not been established; or

- (iv) the complaint is otherwise not appropriate for consideration under 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364.
 - (B) conclude the proceeding because appropriate corrective action has been taken or intervening events have made the proceeding unnecessary.
 - (C) refer the complaint to the Judicial Conference with the judicial council’s recommendations for action.
 - (D) take remedial action to ensure the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts, including:
 - (i) censuring or reprimanding the subject judge, either by private communication or by public announcement;
 - (ii) ordering that no new cases be assigned to the subject judge for a limited, fixed period;
 - (iii) in the case of a magistrate judge, ordering the chief judge of the district court to take action specified by the council, including the initiation of removal proceedings under 28 U.S.C. § 631(i) or 42 U.S.C. § 300aa-12(c)(2);
 - (iv) in the case of a bankruptcy judge, removing the judge from office under 28 U.S.C. § 152(e);
 - (v) in the case of a circuit or district judge, requesting the judge to retire voluntarily with the provision (if necessary) that ordinary length-of-service requirements be waived;
 - (vi) in the case of a circuit or district judge who is eligible to retire but does not do so, certifying the disability of the judge under 28 U.S.C. § 372(b) so that an additional judge may be appointed; and
 - (vii) in the case of a circuit chief judge or district chief judge, finding that the judge is temporarily unable to perform chief-judge duties, with the result that those duties devolve to the next eligible judge in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 45(d) or § 136(e).
 - (E) take any combination of actions described in (b)(1)(A)–(D) of this Rule that is within its power.
- (2) **Mandatory actions.** A judicial council must refer a complaint to the Judicial Conference if the council determines that a circuit judge or district judge may have engaged in conduct that:

- (A) might constitute ground for impeachment; or
 - (B) in the interest of justice, is not amenable to resolution by the judicial council.
- (c) **Inadequate Basis for Decision.** If the judicial council finds that a special committee's report, recommendations, and record provide an inadequate basis for decision, it may return the matter to the committee for further investigation and a new report, or it may conduct further investigation. If the judicial council decides to conduct further investigation, the subject judge must be given adequate prior notice in writing of that decision and of the general scope and purpose of the additional investigation. The judicial council's conduct of the additional investigation must generally accord with the procedures and powers set forth in Rules 13 through 16 for the conduct of an investigation by a special committee.
- (d) **Judicial-Council Vote.** Judicial-council action must be taken by a majority of those members of the council who are not disqualified. A decision to remove a bankruptcy judge from office requires a majority vote of all the members of the judicial council.
- (e) **Recommendation for Fee Reimbursement.** If the complaint has been finally dismissed or concluded under (b)(1)(A) or (B) of this Rule, and if the subject judge so requests, the judicial council may recommend that the Director of the Administrative Office use funds appropriated to the judiciary to reimburse the judge for reasonable expenses incurred during the investigation, when those expenses would not have been incurred but for the requirements of the Act and these Rules. Reasonable expenses include attorneys' fees and expenses related to a successful defense or prosecution of a proceeding under Rule 21(a) or (b).
- (f) **Judicial-Council Order.** Judicial-council action must be by written order. Unless the judicial council finds that extraordinary reasons would make it contrary to the interests of justice, the order must be accompanied by a memorandum setting forth the factual determinations on which it is based and the reasons for the council action. Such a memorandum may incorporate all or part of any underlying special-committee report. If the complaint was initiated by identification under Rule 5, the memorandum must so indicate. The order and memoranda incorporated by reference in the order must be provided to the complainant, the subject judge, and the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. The complainant and the subject judge must be notified of any right to review of the judicial council's decision as provided in Rule 21(b). If the complaint was identified under Rule 5 or filed by its subject judge, the judicial council must transmit the order and memoranda incorporated by reference in the order to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability for review in accordance with Rule 21. In the event of such a transmission, the subject judge may make a written submission to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability but will have no further right of review.

Commentary on Rule 20

This Rule is largely adapted from the Illustrative Rules.

Rule 20(a) provides that within 21 days after the filing of the report of a special committee, the subject judge may address a written response to all of the members of the judicial council. The subject judge must also be given an opportunity to present argument to the judicial council, personally or through counsel, or both, at the direction of the council. Whether that argument is written or oral would be for the judicial council to determine. The subject judge may not otherwise communicate with judicial-council members about the matter.

Rule 20(b)(1)(B) allows a judicial council to conclude a proceeding where appropriate corrective action has been taken or intervening events have made the proceeding unnecessary. This provision tracks Rules 11(d) and (e), which provide for similar action by the chief judge. As with Rule 11(d), appropriate corrective action must acknowledge and remedy the problem raised by the complaint. *See* Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 244. And similar to Rule 11(e), although “action on the complaint is no longer necessary because of intervening events,” the Judicial Conference and the judicial council of the subject judge may nonetheless be able to take action on potential institutional issues related to the complaint (such as an analysis of what conditions may have enabled misconduct or prevented its discovery, and what precautionary or curative steps could be undertaken to prevent its recurrence). 28 U.S.C. § 352(b)(2).

Rule 20(b)(1)(D) recites the remedial actions enumerated in 28 U.S.C. § 354(a)(2) while making clear that this list is not exhaustive. A judicial council may consider lesser remedies. Some remedies may be unique to senior judges, whose caseloads can be modified by agreement or through statutory designation and certification processes.

Under 28 U.S.C. §§ 45(d) and 136(e), which provide for succession where “a chief judge is temporarily unable to perform his duties as such,” the determination whether such an inability exists is not expressly reserved to the chief judge. Nor, indeed, is it assigned to any particular judge or court-governance body. Clearly, however, a chief judge’s inability to function as chief could implicate “the effective and expeditious administration of justice,” which the judicial council of the circuit must, under 28 U.S.C. § 332(d)(1), “make all necessary and appropriate orders” to secure. For this reason, such reassignment is among a judicial council’s remedial options, as subsection (b)(1)(D)(vii) makes clear. Consistent with 28 U.S.C. §§ 45(d) and 136(e), however, any reassignment of chief-judge duties must not outlast the subject judge’s inability to perform them. Nor can such reassignment result in any extension of the subject judge’s term as chief judge.

Rule 20(c) provides that a judicial council may return a matter to a special committee to augment its findings and report of its investigation to include additional areas of inquiry and investigation to allow the judicial council to reach a complete and fully informed judgment. Rule 20(c) also provides that if the judicial council decides to conduct an additional investigation, the subject judge must be given adequate prior notice in writing of that decision and of the general scope and purpose of the additional investigation. The conduct of the investigation will be generally in accordance with the procedures set forth in Rules 13 through 16 for the conduct of an investigation by a special committee. However, if hearings are held, the judicial council may limit testimony or the presentation of evidence to avoid unnecessary repetition of testimony and evidence before the special committee.

Rule 20(d) provides that judicial-council action must be taken by a majority of those members of the council who are not disqualified, except that a decision to remove a bankruptcy judge from office requires a majority of all the members of the council as required by 28 U.S.C. § 152(e). However, it is inappropriate to apply a similar rule to the less severe actions that a judicial council may take under the Act. If some members of the judicial council are disqualified in the matter, their disqualification should not be given the effect of a vote against council action.

With regard to Rule 20(e), the judicial council, on the request of the subject judge, may recommend to the Director of the Administrative Office that the subject judge be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred, including attorneys' fees. The judicial council has the authority to recommend such reimbursement where, after investigation by a special committee, the complaint has been finally dismissed or concluded under subsection (b)(1)(A) or (B) of this Rule. It is contemplated that such reimbursement may be provided for the successful prosecution or defense of a proceeding under Rule 21(a) or (b), in other words, one that results in a Rule 20(b)(1)(A) or (B) dismissal or conclusion.

Rule 20(f) requires that judicial-council action be by order and, normally, that it be supported with a memorandum of factual determinations and reasons. Notice of the action must be given to the complainant and the subject judge, and must include notice of any right to petition for review of the judicial council's decision under Rule 21(b). Because an identified complaint has no "complainant" to petition for review, a judicial council's dispositive order on an identified complaint on which a special committee has been appointed must be transmitted to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability for review. The same will apply where a complaint was filed by its subject judge.

ARTICLE VII. REVIEW BY COMMITTEE ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT AND DISABILITY

21. Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability

- (a) Committee Review.** The Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, consisting of seven members, considers and disposes of all petitions for review under (b) of this Rule, in conformity with the Committee's jurisdictional statement. Its review of judicial-council orders is for errors of law, clear errors of fact, or abuse of discretion. Its disposition of petitions for review is ordinarily final. The Judicial Conference may, in its sole discretion, review any such Committee decision, but a complainant or subject judge does not have a right to this review.
- (b) Reviewable Matters.**
 - (1) Upon petition.** A complainant or subject judge may petition the Committee for review of a judicial-council order entered in accordance with:
 - (A) Rule 20(b)(1)(A), (B), (D), or (E); or**
 - (B) Rule 19(b)(1) or (4) if one or more members of the judicial council dissented from the order.**

- (2) **Upon Committee's initiative.** At its initiative and in its sole discretion, the Committee may review any judicial-council order entered under Rule 19(b)(1) or (4), but only to determine whether a special committee should be appointed. Before undertaking the review, the Committee must invite that judicial council to explain why it believes the appointment of a special committee is unnecessary, unless the reasons are clearly stated in the council's order denying the petition for review. If the Committee believes that it would benefit from a submission by the subject judge, it may issue an appropriate request. If the Committee determines that a special committee should be appointed, the Committee must issue a written decision giving its reasons.
- (c) **Committee Vote.** Any member of the Committee from the same circuit as the subject judge is disqualified from considering or voting on a petition for review related to that subject judge. Committee decisions under (b) of this Rule must be by majority vote of the qualified Committee members. Those members hearing the petition for review should serve in that capacity until final disposition of the petition, whether or not their term of committee membership has ended. If only six members are qualified to consider a petition for review, the Chief Justice shall select an additional judge to join the qualified members to consider the petition. If four or fewer members are qualified to consider a petition for review, the Chief Justice shall select a panel of five judges, including the qualified Committee members, to consider it.
- (d) **Additional Investigation.** Except in extraordinary circumstances, the Committee will not conduct an additional investigation. The Committee may return the matter to the judicial council with directions to undertake an additional investigation. If the Committee conducts an additional investigation, it will exercise the powers of the Judicial Conference under 28 U.S.C. § 331.
- (e) **Oral Argument; Personal Appearance.** There is ordinarily no oral argument or personal appearance before the Committee. In its discretion, the Committee may permit written submissions.
- (f) **Committee Decision.** A Committee decision under this Rule must be transmitted promptly to the Judicial Conference. Other distribution will be by the Administrative Office at the direction of the Committee chair.
- (g) **Finality.** All orders of the Judicial Conference or of the Committee (when the Conference does not exercise its power of review) are final.

Commentary on Rule 21

This Rule is largely self-explanatory.

Rule 21(a) is intended to clarify that the delegation of power to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability to dispose of petitions for review does not preclude review of such dispositions by the Judicial Conference. However, there is no right to such review in any party.

Rules 21(b)(1)(B) and (b)(2) are intended to fill a jurisdictional gap as to review of a dismissal or a conclusion of a complaint under Rule 19(b)(1) or (4). Where one or more members of a judicial council reviewing a petition have dissented, the complainant or the subject judge has the right to petition for review by the Committee. Under Rule 21(b)(2), the Committee may review such a dismissal or conclusion in its sole discretion, whether or not a dissent occurred, and only as to the appointment of a special committee. Any review under Rule 21(b)(2) will be conducted as soon as practicable after the dismissal or conclusion at issue. No party has a right to such review, and such review will be rare.

Rule 21(c) provides for review only by Committee members from circuits other than that of the subject judge. The Rule provides that every petition for review must be considered and voted on by at least five, and if possible by seven, qualified Committee members to avoid the possibility of tie votes. If six, or four or fewer, members are qualified, the Chief Justice shall appoint other judges to join the qualified members to consider the petition for review. To the extent possible, the judges whom the Chief Justice selects to join the qualified members should be drawn from among former members of the Committee.

Under this Rule, all Committee decisions are final in that they are unreviewable unless the Judicial Conference, in its discretion, decides to review a decision. Committee decisions, however, do not necessarily constitute final action on a complaint for purposes of Rule 24.

22. Procedures for Review

- (a) **Filing Petition for Review.** A petition for review of a judicial-council decision on a reviewable matter, as defined in Rule 21(b)(1), may be filed by sending a brief written statement to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability at JCD_PetitionforReview@ao.uscourts.gov or to:

**Judicial Conference Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability
Attn: Office of the General Counsel
Administrative Office of the United States Courts
One Columbus Circle, NE
Washington, D.C. 20544**

The Administrative Office will send a copy of the petition for review to the complainant or the subject judge, as the case may be.

- (b) **Form and Contents of Petition.** No particular form is required. The petition for review must contain a short statement of the basic facts underlying the complaint, the history of its consideration before the appropriate judicial council, a copy of the council's decision, and the grounds on which the petitioner seeks review. The petition for review must specify the date and docket number of the judicial-council order for which review is sought. The petitioner may attach any documents or correspondence arising in the course of the proceeding before the judicial council or its special committee. A petition for review should not normally exceed 20 pages plus necessary attachments. A petition for review must be signed by the petitioner or his or her attorney.

- (c) **Time.** A petition for review must be submitted within 42 days after the date of the order for which review is sought.
- (d) **Action on Receipt of Petition.** When a petition for review of a judicial-council decision on a reviewable matter, as defined in Rule 21(b)(1), is submitted in accordance with this Rule, the Administrative Office shall acknowledge its receipt, notify the chair of the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, and distribute the petition to the members of the Committee for their deliberation.

Commentary on Rule 22

Rule 22 is self-explanatory.

ARTICLE VIII. MISCELLANEOUS RULES

23. Confidentiality

- (a) **Confidentiality Generally.** Confidentiality under these Rules is intended to protect the fairness and thoroughness of the process by which a complaint is filed or initiated, investigated (in specific circumstances), and ultimately resolved, as specified under these Rules.
- (b) **Confidentiality in the Complaint Process.**
 - (1) **General Rule.** The consideration of a complaint by a chief judge, a special committee, a judicial council, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability is confidential. Information about this consideration must not be publicly disclosed by any judge or judicial employee, or by any person who records or transcribes testimony except as allowed by these Rules. A chief judge, a judicial council, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability may disclose the existence of a proceeding under these Rules when necessary or appropriate to maintain public confidence in the judiciary's ability to redress misconduct or disability.
 - (2) **Files.** All files related to a complaint must be separately maintained with appropriate security precautions to ensure confidentiality.
 - (3) **Disclosure in Decisions.** Except as otherwise provided in Rule 24, written decisions of a chief judge, a judicial council, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, and dissenting opinions or separate statements of members of a council or the Committee may contain information and exhibits that the authors consider appropriate for inclusion, and the information and exhibits may be made public.
 - (4) **Availability to Judicial Conference.** On request of the Judicial Conference or its Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, the circuit clerk must furnish any requested records related to a complaint. For auditing purposes, the circuit clerk must provide access to the Committee on Judicial Conduct

and Disability to records of proceedings under the Act at the site where the records are kept.

- (5) Availability to District Court.** If the judicial council directs the initiation of proceedings for removal of a magistrate judge under Rule 20(b)(1)(D)(iii), the circuit clerk must provide to the chief judge of the district court copies of the report of the special committee and any other documents and records that were before the council at the time of its decision. On request of the chief judge of the district court, the judicial council may authorize release to that chief judge of any other records relating to the investigation.
- (6) Impeachment Proceedings.** If the Judicial Conference determines that consideration of impeachment may be warranted, it must transmit the record of all relevant proceedings to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- (7) Subject Judge's Consent.** If both the subject judge and the chief judge consent in writing, any materials from the files may be disclosed to any person. In any such disclosure, the chief judge may require that the identity of the complainant, or of witnesses in an investigation conducted under these Rules, not be revealed.
- (8) Disclosure in Special Circumstances.** The Judicial Conference, its Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, a judicial council, or a chief judge may authorize disclosure of information about the consideration of a complaint, including the papers, documents, and transcripts relating to the investigation, to the extent that disclosure is justified by special circumstances and is not prohibited by the Act. For example, disclosure may be made to judicial researchers engaged in the study or evaluation of experience under the Act and related modes of judicial discipline, but only where the study or evaluation has been specifically approved by the Judicial Conference or by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. Appropriate steps must be taken to protect the identities of the subject judge, the complainant, and witnesses from public disclosure. Other appropriate safeguards to protect against the dissemination of confidential information may be imposed.
- (9) Disclosure of Identity by Subject Judge.** Nothing in this Rule precludes the subject judge from acknowledging that he or she is the judge referred to in documents made public under Rule 24.
- (10) Assistance and Consultation.** Nothing in this Rule prohibits a chief judge, a special committee, a judicial council, or the Judicial Conference or its Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, in the performance of any function authorized under the Act or these Rules, from seeking the help of qualified staff or experts or from consulting other judges who may be helpful regarding the performance of that function.

- (c) **Disclosure of Misconduct and Disability.** Nothing in these Rules and Commentary concerning the confidentiality of the complaint process, or in the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees concerning the use or disclosure of confidential information received in the course of official duties, prevents a judicial employee from reporting or disclosing misconduct or disability.

Commentary on Rule 23

Rule 23 was adapted from the Illustrative Rules.

The Act applies a rule of confidentiality to “papers, documents, and records of proceedings related to investigations conducted under this chapter” and states that they may not be disclosed “by any person in any proceeding,” with enumerated exceptions. 28 U.S.C. § 360(a). Three questions arise: Who is bound by the confidentiality rule, what proceedings are subject to the rule, and who is within the circle of people who may have access to information without breaching the rule?

With regard to the first question, Rule 23(b)(1) provides that judges, employees of the judiciary, and those persons involved in recording proceedings and preparing transcripts are obliged to respect the confidentiality requirement. This of course includes subject judges who do not consent to identification under Rule 23(b)(9).

With regard to the second question, Rule 23(b)(1) applies the rule of confidentiality broadly to consideration of a complaint at any stage.

With regard to the third question, there is no barrier of confidentiality among a chief judge, a judicial council, the Judicial Conference, and the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. Each may have access to any of the confidential records for use in their consideration of a referred matter, a petition for review, or monitoring the administration of the Act. A district court may have similar access if the judicial council orders the district court to initiate proceedings to remove a magistrate judge from office, and Rule 23(b)(5) so provides.

In extraordinary circumstances, a chief judge, a judicial council, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability may disclose the existence of a proceeding under these Rules. The disclosure of such information in high-visibility or controversial cases is to reassure the public that the judiciary is capable of redressing judicial misconduct or disability. Moreover, the confidentiality requirement does not prevent a chief judge from “communicat[ing] orally or in writing with . . . [persons] who may have knowledge of the matter,” as part of a limited inquiry conducted by the chief judge under Rule 11(b).

Rule 23 recognizes that there must be some exceptions to the Act’s confidentiality requirement. For example, the Act requires that certain orders and the reasons for them must be made public. 28 U.S.C. § 360(b). Rule 23(b)(3) makes it explicit that written decisions, as well as dissenting opinions and separate statements, may contain references to information that would otherwise be confidential and that such information may be made public. However, subsection (b)(3) is subject to Rule 24(a), which provides the general rule regarding the public availability of decisions. For example, the name of a subject judge cannot be made public in a decision if disclosure of the name is prohibited by that Rule.

The Act makes clear that there is a barrier of confidentiality between the judicial branch and the legislative branch. It provides that material may be disclosed to Congress only if it is believed necessary to an impeachment investigation or trial of a judge. 28 U.S.C. § 360(a)(2). Accordingly, Section 355(b) of the Act requires the Judicial Conference to transmit the record of a proceeding to the House of Representatives if the Conference believes that impeachment of a subject judge may be appropriate. Rule 23(b)(6) implements this requirement.

The Act provides that confidential materials may be disclosed if authorized in writing by the subject judge and by the chief judge. 28 U.S.C. § 360(a)(3). Rule 23(b)(7) implements this requirement. Once the subject judge has consented to the disclosure of confidential materials related to a complaint, the chief judge ordinarily will refuse consent only to the extent necessary to protect the confidentiality interests of the complainant or of witnesses who have testified in investigatory proceedings or who have provided information in response to a limited inquiry undertaken pursuant to Rule 11. It will generally be necessary, therefore, for the chief judge to require that the identities of the complainant or of such witnesses, as well as any identifying information, be shielded in any materials disclosed, except insofar as the chief judge has secured the consent of the complainant or of a particular witness to disclosure, or there is a demonstrated need for disclosure of the information that, in the judgment of the chief judge, outweighs the confidentiality interest of the complainant or of a particular witness (as may be the case where the complainant is delusional or where the complainant or a particular witness has already demonstrated a lack of concern about maintaining the confidentiality of the proceedings).

Rule 23(b)(8) permits disclosure of additional information in circumstances not enumerated. For example, disclosure may be appropriate to permit prosecution for perjury based on testimony given before a special committee, where a special committee discovers evidence of a judge's criminal conduct, to permit disciplinary action by a bar association or other licensing body, or in other appropriate circumstances.

Under subsection (b)(8), where a complainant or other person has publicly released information regarding the existence of a complaint proceeding, the Judicial Conference, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, a judicial council, or a chief judge may authorize the disclosure of information about the consideration of the complaint, including orders and other materials related to the complaint proceeding, in the interest of assuring the public that the judiciary is acting effectively and expeditiously in addressing the relevant complaint proceeding.

Subsection (b)(8) also permits the authorization of disclosure of information about the consideration of a complaint, including the papers, documents, and transcripts relating to the investigation, to judicial researchers engaged in the study or evaluation of experience under the Act and related modes of judicial discipline. The Rule envisions disclosure of information from the official record of a complaint proceeding to a limited category of persons for appropriately authorized research purposes only, and with appropriate safeguards to protect individual identities in any published research results. In authorizing disclosure, a judicial council may refuse to release particular materials when such release would be contrary to the interests of justice, or when those materials constitute purely internal communications. The Rule does not envision disclosure of purely internal communications between judges and their colleagues and staff.

Under Rule 23(b)(10), any of the specified judges or entities performing a function authorized under these Rules may seek expert or staff assistance or may consult with other

judges who may be helpful regarding performance of that function; the confidentiality requirement does not preclude this. A chief judge, for example, may properly seek the advice and assistance of another judge who the chief judge deems to be in the best position to communicate with the subject judge in an attempt to bring about corrective action. As another example, a new chief judge may wish to confer with a predecessor to learn how similar complaints have been handled. In consulting with other judges, of course, a chief judge should disclose information regarding the complaint only to the extent the chief judge deems necessary under the circumstances.

Rule 23(c) provides that confidentiality as referenced in these Rules and Commentary is directed toward protecting the fairness and thoroughness of the process by which a complaint is filed or initiated, investigated (in specific circumstances), and ultimately resolved, as specified under these Rules. Nothing in these Rules concerning the confidentiality of the complaint process or the Code of Conduct for Judicial Employees concerning use or disclosure of confidential information received in the course of official duties prevents judicial employees from reporting or disclosing misconduct or disability.

Judges should bring such matters to the attention of the relevant chief district judge or chief circuit judge in accordance with Rule 4(a)(6). Judges should be mindful of Canon 3(B)(6) of the Code of Conduct for United States Judges, which provides in part that a judge “should take appropriate action upon receipt of reliable information indicating the likelihood that a judge’s conduct contravened the Code.”

24. Public Availability of Decisions

- (a) **General Rule; Specific Cases.** When final action has been taken on a complaint and it is no longer subject to review as of right, all orders entered by the chief judge and judicial council, including memoranda incorporated by reference in those orders and any dissenting opinions or separate statements by members of the judicial council, must be made public, with the following exceptions:
 - (1) if the complaint is finally dismissed under Rule 11(c) without the appointment of a special committee, or if it is concluded under Rule 11(d) because of voluntary corrective action, the publicly available materials generally should not disclose the name of the subject judge without his or her consent.
 - (2) if the complaint is concluded because of intervening events, or dismissed at any time after a special committee is appointed, the judicial council must determine whether the name of the subject judge should be disclosed.
 - (3) if the complaint is finally disposed of by a privately communicated censure or reprimand, the publicly available materials must not disclose either the name of the subject judge or the text of the reprimand.
 - (4) if the complaint is finally disposed of under Rule 20(b)(1)(D) by any remedial action other than private censure or reprimand, the text of the dispositive order must be included in the materials made public, and the name of the subject judge must be disclosed.

- (5) **the name of the complainant must not be disclosed in materials made public under this Rule unless the chief judge or the judicial council orders disclosure.**
- (b) **Manner of Making Public.** The orders described in (a) must be made public by placing the orders on the court’s public website and by placing them in a publicly accessible file in the office of the circuit clerk. If the orders appear to have precedential value, the chief judge may cause them to be published. In addition, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability will make available on the judiciary’s website, www.uscourts.gov, selected illustrative orders described in paragraph (a), appropriately redacted, to provide additional information to the public on how complaints are addressed under the Act.
- (c) **Orders of Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.** Orders of the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability constituting final action in a complaint proceeding arising from a particular circuit will be made available to the public in the office of the circuit clerk of the relevant court of appeals. The Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability will also make such orders available on the judiciary’s website, www.uscourts.gov. When authorized by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, other orders related to complaint proceedings will similarly be made available.
- (d) **Complaints Referred to Judicial Conference.** If a complaint is referred to the Judicial Conference under Rule 20(b)(1)(C) or 20(b)(2), materials relating to the complaint will be made public only if ordered by the Judicial Conference.

Commentary on Rule 24

Rule 24 is adapted from the Illustrative Rules and the recommendations of the Breyer Committee.

The Act requires the circuits to make available only written orders of a judicial council or the Judicial Conference imposing some form of sanction. 28 U.S.C. § 360(b). The Judicial Conference, however, has long recognized the desirability of public availability of a broader range of orders and other materials. In 1994, the Judicial Conference “urge[d] all circuits and courts covered by the Act to submit to the West Publishing Company, for publication in Federal Reporter 3d, and to Lexis all orders issued pursuant to [the Act] that are deemed by the issuing circuit or court to have significant precedential value to other circuits and courts covered by the Act.” Report of the Proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States, Mar. 1994, at 28. Following this recommendation, the 2000 revision of the Illustrative Rules contained a public availability provision very similar to Rule 24. In 2002, the Judicial Conference again voted to encourage the circuits “to submit non-routine public orders disposing of complaints of judicial misconduct or disability for publication by on-line and print services.” Report of the Proceedings of the Judicial Conference of the United States, Sept. 2002, at 58. The Breyer Committee Report further emphasized that “[p]osting such orders on the judicial branch’s public website would not only benefit judges directly, it would also encourage scholarly commentary and analysis of the orders.” Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 216. With these considerations in mind, Rule 24 provides for public availability of a wide range of materials.

Rule 24 provides for public availability of orders of a chief judge, a judicial council, and the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability, as well as the texts of memoranda incorporated by reference in those orders, together with any dissenting opinions or separate statements by members of the judicial council. No memoranda other than those incorporated by reference in those orders shall be disclosed. However, these orders and memoranda are to be made public only when final action on the complaint has been taken and any right of review has been exhausted. The provision that decisions will be made public only after final action has been taken is designed in part to avoid public disclosure of the existence of pending proceedings. Whether the name of the subject judge is disclosed will then depend on the nature of the final action. If the final action is an order predicated on a finding of misconduct or disability (other than a privately communicated censure or reprimand) the name of the subject judge must be made public. If the final action is dismissal of the complaint, the name of the subject judge must not be disclosed. Rule 24(a)(1) provides that where a proceeding is concluded under Rule 11(d) by the chief judge on the basis of voluntary corrective action, the name of the subject judge generally should not be disclosed, except where the complainant or another person has disclosed the existence of a complaint proceeding to the public. Shielding the name of the subject judge in this circumstance should encourage informal disposition.

If a complaint is dismissed as moot, or because intervening events have made action on the complaint unnecessary, after appointment of a special committee, Rule 24(a)(2) allows the judicial council to determine whether the subject judge will be identified. In such a case, no final decision has been rendered on the merits, but it may be in the public interest — particularly if a judicial officer resigns in the course of an investigation — to make the identity of the subject judge known.

Once a special committee has been appointed, and a proceeding is concluded by the full judicial council on the basis of a remedial order of the council, Rule 24(a)(4) provides for disclosure of the name of the subject judge.

Rule 24(a)(5) provides that the identity of the complainant will be disclosed only if the chief judge so orders. Identifying the complainant when the subject judge is not identified would increase the likelihood that the identity of the subject judge would become publicly known, thus circumventing the policy of nondisclosure. It may not always be practicable to shield the complainant's identity while making public disclosure of the judicial council's order and supporting memoranda; in some circumstances, moreover, the complainant may consent to public identification.

Rule 24(b) makes clear that circuits must post on their external websites all orders required to be made public under Rule 24(a). The judiciary will seek ways to make decisions on complaints filed in their courts more readily accessible to the public through searchable electronic indices.

Matters involving orders issued following a special-committee investigation often involve highly sensitive situations, and it is important that judicial councils have every opportunity to reach a correct and just outcome. This would include the ability to reach informal resolution before a subject judge's identity must be released. But there must also come a point of procedural finality. The date of finality — and thus the time at which other safeguards and rules such as the publication requirement are triggered — is the date on which the judicial council issues a Final Order. *See In re Complaint of Judicial Misconduct*, 751 F.3d 611, 617 (2014)

(requiring publication of a judicial council order “[e]ven though the period for review had not yet elapsed” and concluding that “the order was a final decision because the Council had adjudicated the matter on the merits after having received a report from a special investigating committee”). As determined in the cited case, modifications of this kind to a final order are subject to review by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.

25. Disqualification

- (a) **General Rule.** Any judge is disqualified from participating in any proceeding under these Rules if the judge concludes that circumstances warrant disqualification. If a complaint is filed by a judge, that judge is disqualified from participating in any consideration of the complaint except to the extent that these Rules provide for a complainant’s participation. A chief judge who has identified a complaint under Rule 5 is not automatically disqualified from considering the complaint.
- (b) **Subject Judge.** A subject judge, including a chief judge, is disqualified from considering a complaint except to the extent that these Rules provide for participation by a subject judge.
- (c) **Chief Judge Disqualified from Considering Petition for Review of Chief Judge’s Order.** If a petition for review of the chief judge’s order entered under Rule 11(c), (d), or (e) is filed with the judicial council in accordance with Rule 18, the chief judge is disqualified from participating in the council’s consideration of the petition.
- (d) **Member of Special Committee Not Disqualified.** A member of the judicial council who serves on a special committee, including the chief judge, is not disqualified from participating in council consideration of the committee’s report.
- (e) **Subject Judge’s Disqualification After Appointment of Special Committee.** Upon appointment of a special committee, the subject judge is disqualified from participating in the identification or consideration of any complaint, related or unrelated to the pending matter, under the Act or these Rules. The disqualification continues until all proceedings on the complaint against the subject judge are finally terminated with no further right of review.
- (f) **Substitute for Disqualified Chief Judge.** If the chief judge is disqualified from performing duties that the Act and these Rules assign to a chief judge (including where a complaint is filed against a chief judge), those duties must be assigned to the most-senior active circuit judge not disqualified. If all circuit judges in regular active service are disqualified, the judicial council may determine whether to request a transfer under Rule 26, or, in the interest of sound judicial administration, to permit the chief judge to dispose of the complaint on the merits. Members of the judicial council who are named in the complaint may participate in this determination if necessary to obtain a quorum of the council.
- (g) **Judicial-Council Action When Multiple Judges Disqualified.** Notwithstanding any other provision in these Rules to the contrary,

- (1) a member of the judicial council who is a subject judge may participate in its disposition if:
 - (A) participation by one or more subject judges is necessary to obtain a quorum of the judicial council;
 - (B) the judicial council finds that the lack of a quorum is due to the naming of one or more judges in the complaint for the purpose of disqualifying that judge or those judges, or to the naming of one or more judges based on their participation in a decision excluded from the definition of misconduct under Rule 4(b); and
 - (C) the judicial council votes that it is necessary, appropriate, and in the interest of sound judicial administration that one or more subject judges be eligible to act.
- (2) otherwise disqualified members may participate in votes taken under (g)(1)(B) and (g)(1)(C).
- (h) **Disqualification of Members of Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.** No member of the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability is disqualified from participating in any proceeding under the Act or these Rules because of consultations with a chief judge, a member of a special committee, or a member of a judicial council about the interpretation or application of the Act or these Rules, unless the member believes that the consultation would prevent fair-minded participation.

Commentary on Rule 25

Rule 25 is adapted from the Illustrative Rules.

Subsection (a) provides the general rule for disqualification. Of course, a judge is not disqualified simply because the subject judge is on the same court. However, this subsection recognizes that there may be cases in which an appearance of bias or prejudice is created by circumstances other than an association with the subject judge as a colleague. For example, a judge may have a familial relationship with a complainant or subject judge. When such circumstances exist, a judge may, in his or her discretion, conclude that disqualification is warranted.

Subsection (e) makes it clear that the disqualification of the subject judge relates only to the subject judge's participation in any proceeding arising under the Act or these Rules. For example, the subject judge cannot initiate complaints by identification, conduct limited inquiries, or choose between dismissal and special-committee investigation as the threshold disposition of a complaint. Likewise, the subject judge cannot participate in any proceeding arising under the Act or these Rules as a member of any special committee, the judicial council of the circuit, the Judicial Conference, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. The Illustrative Rule, based on Section 359(a) of the Act, is ambiguous and could be read to disqualify a subject judge from service of any kind on each of the bodies mentioned. This is undoubtedly not the intent of the Act; such a disqualification would be anomalous in light of the Act's allowing a subject judge to continue to decide cases and to continue to exercise the powers of chief circuit or

district judge. It would also create a substantial deterrence to the appointment of special committees, particularly where a special committee is needed solely because the chief judge may not decide matters of credibility in his or her review under Rule 11.

While a subject judge is barred by Rule 25(b) from participating in the disposition of the complaint in which he or she is named, Rule 25(e) recognizes that participation in proceedings arising under the Act or these Rules by a judge who is the subject of a special committee investigation may lead to an appearance of self-interest in creating substantive and procedural precedents governing such proceedings. Rule 25(e) bars such participation.

Under the Act, a complaint against the chief judge is to be handled by “that circuit judge in regular active service next senior in date of commission.” 28 U.S.C. § 351(c). Rule 25(f) provides that seniority among judges other than the chief judge is to be determined by date of commission, with the result that complaints against the chief judge may be routed to a former chief judge or other judge who was appointed earlier than the chief judge. The Rules do not purport to prescribe who is to preside over meetings of the judicial council. Consequently, where the presiding member of the judicial council is disqualified from participating under these Rules, the order of precedence prescribed by Rule 25(f) for performing “duties that the Act and these Rules assign to a chief judge” does not apply to determine the acting presiding member of the council. That is a matter left to the internal rules or operating practices of each judicial council. In most cases the most senior active circuit judge who is a member of the judicial council and who is not disqualified will preside.

Sometimes a single complaint is filed against a large group of judges. If the normal disqualification rules are observed in such a case, no court of appeals judge can serve as acting chief judge of the circuit, and the judicial council will be without appellate members. Where the complaint is against all circuit and district judges, under normal rules no member of the judicial council can perform the duties assigned to the council under the statute.

A similar problem is created by successive complaints arising out of the same underlying grievance. For example, a complainant files a complaint against a district judge based on alleged misconduct, and the complaint is dismissed by the chief judge under the statute. The complainant may then file a complaint against the chief judge for dismissing the first complaint, and when that complaint is dismissed by the next senior judge, still a third complaint may be filed. The threat is that the complainant will bump down the seniority ladder until, once again, there is no member of the court of appeals who can serve as acting chief judge for the purpose of the next complaint. Similarly, complaints involving the merits of litigation may involve a series of decisions in which many judges participated or in which a rehearing en banc was denied by the court of appeals, and the complaint may name a majority of the judicial council as subject judges.

In recognition that these multiple-judge complaints are virtually always meritless, the judicial council is given discretion to determine: (1) whether it is necessary, appropriate, and in the interest of sound judicial administration to permit the chief judge to dispose of a complaint where it would otherwise be impossible for any active circuit judge in the circuit to act, and (2) whether it is necessary, appropriate, and in the interest of sound judicial administration, after appropriate findings as to need and justification are made, to permit subject judges of the judicial council to participate in the disposition of a petition for review where it would otherwise be impossible to obtain a quorum.

Applying a rule of necessity in these situations is consistent with the appearance of justice. *See, e.g., In re Complaint of Doe*, 2 F.3d 308 (8th Cir. Jud. Council 1993) (invoking the rule of necessity); *In re Complaint of Judicial Misconduct*, No. 91-80464 (9th Cir. Jud. Council 1992) (same). There is no unfairness in permitting the chief judge to dispose of a patently insubstantial complaint that names all active circuit judges in the circuit.

Similarly, there is no unfairness in permitting subject judges, in these circumstances, to participate in the review of the chief judge's dismissal of an insubstantial complaint. The remaining option is to assign the matter to another body. Among other alternatives, the judicial council may request a transfer of the petition under Rule 26. Given the administrative inconvenience and delay involved in these alternatives, it is desirable to request a transfer only if the judicial council determines that the petition for review is substantial enough to warrant such action.

In the unlikely event that a quorum of the judicial council cannot be obtained to consider the report of a special committee, it would normally be necessary to request a transfer under Rule 26.

Rule 25(h) recognizes that the jurisdictional statement of the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability contemplates consultation between members of the Committee and judicial participants in proceedings under the Act and these Rules. Such consultation should not automatically preclude participation by a member in that proceeding.

26. Transfer to Another Judicial Council

In exceptional circumstances, a chief judge or a judicial council may ask the Chief Justice to transfer a proceeding based on a complaint identified under Rule 5 or filed under Rule 6 to the judicial council of another circuit. The request for a transfer may be made at any stage of the proceeding before a reference to the Judicial Conference under Rule 20(b)(1)(C) or 20(b)(2) or a petition for review is filed under Rule 22. Upon receiving such a request, the Chief Justice may refuse the request or select the transferee judicial council, which may then exercise the powers of a judicial council under these Rules.

Commentary on Rule 26

Rule 26 implements the Breyer Committee's recommended use of transfers. Breyer Committee Report, 239 F.R.D. at 214–15.

Rule 26 authorizes the transfer of a complaint proceeding to another judicial council selected by the Chief Justice. Such transfers may be appropriate, for example, in the case of a serious complaint where there are multiple disqualifications among the original judicial council, where the issues are highly visible and a local disposition may weaken public confidence in the process, where internal tensions arising in the council as a result of the complaint render disposition by a less involved council appropriate, or where a complaint calls into question policies or governance of the home court of appeals. The power to effect a transfer is lodged in the Chief Justice to avoid disputes in a judicial council over where to transfer a sensitive matter and to ensure that the transferee council accepts the matter.

Upon receipt of a transferred proceeding, the transferee judicial council shall determine the proper stage at which to begin consideration of the complaint — for example, reference to the transferee chief judge, appointment of a special committee, etc.

27. Withdrawal of Complaint or Petition for Review

- (a) Complaint Pending Before Chief Judge. With the chief judge’s consent, the complainant may withdraw a complaint that is before the chief judge for a decision under Rule 11. The withdrawal of a complaint will not prevent the chief judge from identifying or having to identify a complaint under Rule 5 based on the withdrawn complaint.**
- (b) Complaint Pending Before Special Committee or Judicial Council. After a complaint has been referred to the special committee for investigation and before the committee files its report, the complainant may withdraw the complaint only with the consent of both the subject judge and either the special committee or the judicial council.**
- (c) Petition for Review. A petition for review addressed to the judicial council under Rule 18, or the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability under Rule 22, may be withdrawn if no action on the petition has been taken.**

Commentary on Rule 27

Rule 27 is adapted from the Illustrative Rules and treats the complaint proceeding, once begun, as a matter of public business rather than as the property of the complainant. Accordingly, the chief judge or the judicial council remains responsible for addressing any complaint under the Act, even a complaint that has been formally withdrawn by the complainant.

Under subsection (a), a complaint pending before the chief judge may be withdrawn if the chief judge consents. Where the complaint clearly lacked merit, the chief judge may accordingly be saved the burden of preparing a formal order and supporting memorandum. However, the chief judge may, or be obligated under Rule 5, to identify a complaint based on allegations in a withdrawn complaint.

If the chief judge appoints a special committee, Rule 27(b) provides that the complaint may be withdrawn only with the consent of both the body before which it is pending (the special committee or the judicial council) and the subject judge. Once a complaint has reached the stage of appointment of a special committee, a resolution of the issues may be necessary to preserve public confidence. Moreover, the subject judge is given the right to insist that the matter be resolved on the merits, thereby eliminating any ambiguity that might remain if the proceeding were terminated by withdrawal of the complaint.

With regard to all petitions for review, Rule 27(c) grants the petitioner unrestricted authority to withdraw the petition. It is thought that the public’s interest in the proceeding is adequately protected, because there will necessarily have been a decision by the chief judge and often by the judicial council as well in such a case.

28. Availability of Rules and Forms

These Rules and copies of the complaint form as provided in Rule 6(a) must be available without charge in the office of the circuit clerk of each court of appeals, district court, bankruptcy court, or other federal court whose judges are subject to the Act. Each court must also make these Rules, the complaint form, and complaint-filing instructions available on the court's website, or provide an Internet link to these items on the appropriate court of appeals website or on www.uscourts.gov.

29. Effective Date

These Rules will become effective after promulgation by the Judicial Conference of the United States.

2024 ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

LOCAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLAINTS FILED UNDER THE JUDICIAL CONDUCT AND DISABILITY ACT OF 1980, 28 U.S.C. §§ 351-364

When filing a complaint, a complainant is encouraged to use the form provided on the court's website. The complaint must be written and must include a brief statement of facts containing the information described in Rule 6. It also must comply with the following additional requirements:

1. A separate complaint, with the required number of copies, must be filed for each judge complained about.
2. The complainant must submit the following number of copies of each complaint:

court of appeals judge – original and 3 copies
district court or magistrate judge – original and 4 copies
bankruptcy judge – original and 5 copies.
3. The envelope must be marked “COMPLAINT OF DISABILITY” or “COMPLAINT OF MISCONDUCT,” and must not show the name of any judge (for further information see Rule 6(e)).
4. The Statement of Facts **should not be longer than 5 pages** (five sides).

**Complaints should be mailed to:
Clerk of Court
United States Court of Appeals
Thurgood Marshall, U.S. Courthouse
40 Foley Square
New York, NY 10007**

AMERICAN BANKRUPTCY INSTITUTE

Judicial Council of the _____ Circuit

COMPLAINT OF JUDICIAL MISCONDUCT OR DISABILITY

To begin the complaint process, complete this form and prepare the brief statement of facts described in item 4 (below). The Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings, adopted by the Judicial Conference of the United States, contain information on what to include in a complaint (Rule 6), where to file a complaint (Rule 7), and other important matters. The Rules are available in federal court clerks' offices, on individual federal courts' websites, and on www.uscourts.gov.

Your complaint (this form and the statement of facts) should be typewritten and must be legible. For the number of copies to file, consult the local rules or clerk's office of the court in which your complaint is required to be filed. Enclose each copy of the complaint in an envelope marked "COMPLAINT OF MISCONDUCT" or "COMPLAINT OF DISABILITY" and submit it to the appropriate clerk of court. **Do not put the name of any judge on the envelope.**

1. Name of Complainant: _____
Contact Address: _____

Daytime telephone: (____) _____

2. Name(s) of Judge(s): _____
Court: _____

3. Does this complaint concern the behavior of the judge(s) in a particular lawsuit or lawsuits?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If "yes," give the following information about each lawsuit:

Court: _____

Case Number: _____

Docket number of any appeal to the ____ Circuit: _____

Are (were) you a party or lawyer in the lawsuit?

☐ Party ☐ Lawyer ☐ Neither

2024 ANNUAL SPRING MEETING

If you are (were) a party and have (had) a lawyer, give the lawyer's name, address, and telephone number:

4. **Brief Statement of Facts.** Attach a brief statement of the specific facts on which the claim of judicial misconduct or disability is based. Include what happened, when and where it happened, and any information that would help an investigator check the facts. If the complaint alleges judicial disability, also include any additional facts that form the basis of that allegation.

5. **Declaration and signature:**

I declare under penalty of perjury that the statements made in this complaint are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Signature)_____

(Date)_____

FAQs: Filing a Judicial Conduct or Disability Complaint Against a Federal Judge

Updated July 2021. Originally published June 2016.

This document contains questions and answers to assist with filing a complaint alleging a federal judge has committed misconduct or has a disability that interferes with the performance of their judicial duties.

The Judicial Conduct and Disability Act of 1980 (<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/28/part-I/chapter-16>) ("Act"), 28 U.S.C. §§ 351–364, and the Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings (</file/25751/download>) ("Rules") (pdf), as amended on March 12, 2019, govern this complaint process. You will likely want to consult the Act and the Rules before filing a complaint. Please visit the website of the appropriate court office, as described in the Rules and in question 3, to determine whether local rules apply and to obtain a complaint form.

Please also see the Graphical Overview (</file/19776/download>) (pdf) of the process for filing a judicial conduct or disability complaint against a federal judge.

The following information reflects the requirements expressed in the Act and the Rules. It does not amend or supersede the Act or the Rules in any manner.

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Who can I complain about?

You may file a complaint about a federal judge who you have reason to believe has committed misconduct or has a disability that interferes with the performance of their judicial duties. A federal judge includes a judge of a United States district court, a judge of a United States court of appeals (including the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit), a judge of a United States bankruptcy court, a United States magistrate judge, a judge of the Court of Federal Claims, and a judge of the Court of International Trade.

This process cannot be used to complain about anyone who is not a federal judge. If you have concerns about the behavior of a federal court employee other than a judge, you may report those concerns to the clerk of the court where that individual is employed.

What can I complain about?

You must allege that a federal judge has committed misconduct or is disabled, as defined in the Act. "Misconduct" is "conduct prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts." A "disability" is a temporary or permanent condition, either mental or physical, that makes the judge "unable to discharge all the duties" of the judicial office.

Examples of judicial misconduct may include the following:

- using the judge's office to obtain special treatment for friends or relatives;
- accepting bribes, gifts, or other personal favors related to the judicial office;
- engaging in improper ex parte communications with parties or counsel for one side in a case;
- engaging in partisan political activity or making inappropriately partisan statements;
- soliciting funds for organizations;
- violating rules or standards pertaining to restrictions on outside income or knowingly violating requirements for financial disclosure;
- engaging in unwanted, offensive, or abusive sexual conduct, including sexual harassment or assault;

- treating litigants, attorneys, judicial employees, or others in a demonstrably egregious and hostile manner;
- creating a hostile work environment for judicial employees;
- intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender, gender entity, pregnancy, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, age, or disability;
- retaliating against complainants, witnesses, judicial employees, or others for participating in the judicial conduct and disability complaint process, or for reporting or disclosing judicial misconduct or disability;
- refusing, without good cause shown, to cooperate in the investigation of a judicial conduct or disability complaint or enforcement of a decision under the Rules; and
- failing to call to the attention of the relevant district chief judge or circuit chief judge any reliable information reasonably likely to constitute judicial misconduct or disability.

This list does not include all the possible grounds for a complaint.

You may complain about actions taken by a judge outside their official role as a judge if “the conduct is reasonably likely to have a prejudicial effect on the administration of the business of the courts, including a substantial and widespread lowering of public confidence in the courts among reasonable people.”

You cannot use this process to obtain automatic disqualification of a judge presiding over a case. In addition, you cannot use this process to challenge the correctness of a judge’s decision in a case. **A judicial decision that is unfavorable to you does not alone establish misconduct or a disability.**

Under the Act, a complaint challenging the correctness of a judge’s decision will be dismissed. If you wish to challenge such a decision, you must do so before that court or on appeal, and not by filing a judicial conduct or disability complaint.

Where do I file my complaint?

You must file your complaint with the appropriate court office, as described in the Rules and any applicable local rules. **The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts will not accept or respond to judicial conduct or disability complaints.**

If your complaint is against a federal circuit judge, federal district judge, federal bankruptcy judge, or federal magistrate judge, you must file the complaint at the clerk’s office of the United States court of appeals for the regional circuit in which the judge serves.¹ If your complaint is against a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, you must file the complaint at the circuit executive’s office of that court. If your complaint is against a judge of the Court of International Trade or the Court of Federal Claims, you must file the complaint at the clerk’s office of that court.

You should not send your complaint to the judge you are complaining about or to anyone else in the Judiciary. Nor should you file your complaint in any ongoing case, even if your complaint relates to the judge overseeing that case. When you file a complaint, the circuit clerk or circuit executive will provide a copy of the complaint to the circuit chief judge and to the judge you are complaining about.

¹ Please see [Court Role and Structure \(/about-federal-courts/court-role-and-structure\)](/about-federal-courts/court-role-and-structure) for a discussion of the United States courts of appeals and the regional circuits.

How do I file my complaint?

You may use [the form \(/forms/other-forms/complaint-judicial-misconduct-or-disability\)](/forms/other-forms/complaint-judicial-misconduct-or-disability) reproduced in the Appendix to the Rules or a form designated by the appropriate court office, as described in the Rules and [in question 3](#), to file a judicial conduct or disability complaint. A form is not necessary to file a complaint.

Your complaint must be legible, and preferably typed. It must include a contact address, a description of the relevant events, a description of when and where the relevant events took place, and any other information that would help an investigator check the facts. Your complaint should contain as much relevant detail as possible (e.g., information that identifies transcripts and witnesses supporting your account of what happened). You must sign the complaint under penalty of perjury.

When you are ready to file your complaint, place the original and any required copies in an envelope marked "Complaint of Misconduct" or "Complaint of Disability." Do not write the name of the judge you are complaining about on the envelope. To find out whether you must file additional copies of the complaint, review any applicable local rules and check with the appropriate court office. Submit the envelope to the appropriate court office as provided under any applicable local rules or instructions from the appropriate court office.

Who will consider my complaint?

In most instances, the chief judge of the circuit where you filed your complaint (or the chief judge of the Court of International Trade or the Court of Federal Claims, if applicable) will consider your complaint (if you filed your complaint in the appropriate court office).

How will the circuit chief judge consider my complaint?

In determining what action to take, the circuit chief judge may conduct a limited inquiry into the facts you allege, which may include witness interviews and the review of additional information. You may or may not be contacted as part of this process.

What action can the circuit chief judge take on my complaint?

After considering your complaint, the circuit chief judge will dismiss or conclude your complaint (see questions [8](#) through [11](#)) or appoint a special committee of judges to investigate your complaint (see questions [12](#) through [14](#)). If the circuit chief judge dismisses or concludes your complaint, you will receive a copy of that order. If the circuit chief judge appoints a special committee, you will receive notice.

In what circumstances will a circuit chief judge dismiss or conclude my complaint?

The circuit chief judge must dismiss your complaint where it alleges conduct that, even if true, is not prejudicial to the effective and expeditious administration of the business of the courts and does not indicate a mental or physical disability resulting in the inability to discharge the duties of judicial office; is frivolous; is based on allegations lacking sufficient evidence to raise an inference that misconduct has occurred or that a disability exists; is based on allegations that are incapable of being established through investigation; or has been filed in the wrong circuit.

The circuit chief judge also must dismiss your complaint to the extent that it challenges the merits of a judge's decision in a case. **A judicial decision that is unfavorable to you does not alone establish misconduct or a disability.** If you wish to challenge the correctness of a judge's decision, you must do so before that court or on appeal, and not by filing a judicial conduct or disability complaint.

There are other circumstances where a circuit chief judge will dismiss your complaint, as explained in the Rules and the Commentary on the Rules.

The circuit chief judge may conclude your complaint if the judge you are complaining about voluntarily takes corrective action. The circuit chief judge may also conclude your complaint if intervening events have made further action unnecessary.

How do I seek review of the circuit chief judge's dismissal or conclusion of my complaint?

If the circuit chief judge dismisses or concludes your complaint, you will receive a copy of the order and you will be notified of your right to have the circuit judicial council, consisting of circuit and district judges, (or national court, if applicable) review that order.

You must petition the judicial council within 42 days from the date of the circuit chief judge's order. If you do not make a timely request for such review, the circuit chief judge's order will be the final action on your complaint.

Your petition for review must be addressed to the circuit clerk or circuit executive, as required under the Rules and any applicable local rules, in an envelope marked "Misconduct Petition" or "Disability

Petition.” The name of the judge must not be shown on the envelope. Your petition for review should be legible, and preferably typed, and should begin with “I hereby petition the judicial council for review of” It should state the reasons why the petition should be granted, and it must be signed.

Any subsequent judicial conduct or disability complaint challenging the correctness of the circuit chief judge’s decision to dismiss or conclude your original complaint will be dismissed as challenging the correctness of the circuit chief judge’s determination to dismiss your complaint.

What action can the judicial council take when it reviews the circuit chief judge’s dismissal or conclusion of my complaint?

After considering your petition for review, the judicial council can affirm the circuit chief judge’s dismissal or conclusion of your complaint, return the matter to the circuit chief judge for additional inquiry or for appointment of a special committee, or take other action, as discussed in the Rules. You will receive a copy of the judicial council’s order taking action on your complaint.

Do I have the right to seek review of the judicial council’s action on my complaint after it reviews the circuit chief judge’s dismissal or conclusion of my complaint?

If the judicial council unanimously affirms the circuit chief judge’s dismissal or conclusion of your complaint, your complaint is terminated and you have no right to further review.

If you request further review when you have no right to it, no action will be taken on your request.

If one or more judicial council members dissents from the circuit chief judge’s dismissal or conclusion of your complaint, you may request review by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. The requirements of a petition for review by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability are explained in question [14](#).

What happens if the circuit chief judge refers my complaint to a special committee?

If the circuit chief judge refers your complaint to a special committee, that special committee will investigate the complaint and report on it to the circuit judicial council. The special committee generally will consist of the circuit chief judge and an equal number of circuit and district judges.

The special committee may conduct interviews and hold hearings, but it is not required to do so. If you have relevant evidence that has not been presented to the special committee, you can briefly explain in writing the nature of that evidence. If the special committee determines you have additional

evidence that would assist the committee, a committee representative will interview you. You or your attorney may submit written argument to the special committee. The special committee may permit you or your attorney to argue before it, but it is not required to do so.

Upon concluding its investigation, the special committee will submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the judicial council. You will receive notice that the special committee has filed its report with the judicial council. The judicial council may, in its discretion, provide you with a copy of the report.

What action can the judicial council take once it considers a special committee's report?

After the judicial council considers a special committee's report, it will generally issue an order on your complaint and provide you with a copy of that order. The order may dismiss your complaint, or the order may conclude your complaint because appropriate corrective action has been taken or intervening events have made the proceeding unnecessary.

If the order does not dismiss or conclude your complaint, the order may sanction the judge by:

- censuring or reprimanding the judge, either by private communication or by public announcement;
- ordering that no new cases be assigned to the judge for a limited, fixed period;
- in the case of a magistrate judge, ordering the chief judge of the district court to take action specified by the judicial council, including the initiation of removal proceedings;
- in the case of a bankruptcy judge, removing the judge from office;
- in the case of a circuit or district judge, requesting the judge to retire voluntarily with the provision (if necessary) that ordinary length-of-service requirements be waived;
- in the case of a circuit or district judge who is eligible to retire but does not do so, certifying the disability of the judge so that an additional judge may be appointed;
- in the case of a circuit chief judge or district chief judge, finding the judge temporarily unable to perform chief-judge duties, with the result that those duties devolve to the next eligible judge; and
- recommending corrective action.

The judicial council may take other action, such as requesting the special committee conduct an additional investigation.

Federal judges appointed under Article III of the U.S. Constitution (e.g., circuit and district judges) hold office for life pending good behavior. Only Congress can remove an Article III judge from office. If the judicial council finds an Article III judge's conduct may warrant impeachment, it must refer that

finding to the Judicial Conference. On referral, the Judicial Conference will determine whether to certify the matter to Congress, which will then decide whether to initiate impeachment proceedings.

Do I have the right to seek review of the judicial council's action on my complaint after the council reviews a special committee's report?

When a judicial council issues an order after it considers a special committee's report, in most circumstances you may petition the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability for review of that order. You must file that petition for review within 42 days from the date of the judicial council's order.

A petition for review may be filed by sending a brief written statement to the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability at JCD_PetitionforReview@ao.uscourts.gov (mailto:JCD_PetitionforReview@ao.uscourts.gov) or to:

Judicial Conference Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability
Attn: Office of the General Counsel
Administrative Office of the United States Courts
One Columbus Circle, NE
Washington, D.C. 20544

Your petition must briefly state the facts of the complaint, the history of the complaint's consideration, and the reason or reasons you are seeking review. It must specify the date and docket number of the judicial council's order, and include a copy of that order. The petition should not normally exceed 20 pages plus any necessary attachments.

There is ordinarily no oral argument or personal appearance before the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability. In its discretion, the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability may permit written submissions. The Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability will conduct further investigation only in extraordinary circumstances. You have no right to review of any order issued by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability.

When will orders on my complaint be published?

The complaint process is confidential, with limited exceptions. Confidentiality under the Rules is intended to protect the fairness and thoroughness of the process by which a complaint is filed or initiated, investigated (in specific circumstances), and ultimately resolved, as specified under the Rules.²

Generally, orders regarding a complaint will be made public only after final action on the complaint has been taken and you have no additional right of review. Public orders usually will not disclose the

name of the complainant, and the subject judge's name generally will only be disclosed in specific circumstances (such as where the subject judge is sanctioned, as discussed in [question 13](#), other than by private censure or reprimand), as described in the Act and the Rules.

Such orders will be made publicly available on the website and in the clerk's office of the appropriate court office, as described in the Rules and [in question 3](#). Any decision by the Committee on Judicial Conduct and Disability will be available on www.uscourts.gov (<http://www.uscourts.gov>) and in the clerk's office of the appropriate court office, as described in the Rules.

²Nothing in the Rules concerning the confidentiality of the complaint process prevents a judicial employee from reporting or disclosing misconduct or disability.

What happens if you abuse the complaint process?

If you abuse the judicial conduct and disability complaint process by filing frivolous or repetitive complaints, you may be restricted from filing further complaints.

**Committee on Codes of Conduct Advisory Opinion
No. 58: Disqualification When Relative is Employed by a Participating Law Firm**

Questions often arise regarding recusal based on employment by a law firm of a relative of the judge. In most instances, the relative is the child of the judge. This opinion, however, applies to all relatives within the third degree of relationship to either the judge or the judge's spouse, as defined in Canon 3C(3)(a) of the Code of Conduct for United States Judges. It also applies to offers of employment, and to employment by individual lawyers. Additionally, for purposes of recusal, "considerations applicable to a judge's spouse should also be considered with respect to a person other than a spouse with whom the judge maintains both a household and an intimate relationship." Commentary to Canon 3C.

The Committee advises that if the relative participates in the representation of a party in a case before the judge or is an equity partner in a law firm that represents a party, the judge must recuse. Canon 3C(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) of the Code provide:

(1) A judge shall disqualify himself or herself in a proceeding in which the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned, including but not limited to instances in which:

* * *

(d) the judge or the judge's spouse, or a person related to either within the third degree of relationship, or the spouse of such person is:

* * *

(ii) acting as a lawyer in the proceeding;

(iii) known by the judge to have an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding[.]

The Committee concludes that an equity partner in a law firm generally has "an interest that could be substantially affected by the outcome of the proceeding" in all cases where the law firm represents a party before the court.

The typical and more difficult situation arises when the relative is employed by the firm as either an associate or a non-equity partner. For the purposes of this opinion, a non-equity partner is understood as one who receives a fixed salary, is not entitled to share in the firm's profits, and has no interest in the firm's client list or goodwill. If the relative is an associate or non-equity partner and has not participated in the preparation or presentation of the case before the judge, and the relative's compensation is in no manner dependent upon the result of the case, recusal is not mandated.

The judge, however, always must be mindful of Canon 2A, which directs that a judge should act at all times in a manner that “promotes public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary,” as well as the general command of Canon 3C(1) that a judge should recuse in a proceeding in which the “judge’s impartiality might reasonably be questioned.” Accordingly, although recusal may not be prescribed for participation by a relative who is an associate or non-equity partner, other circumstances may arise that in combination with the relative’s status at the firm could raise a question about the judge’s impartiality and thereby warrant recusal.

As a cautionary note, the Committee further observes that the remittal procedures of Canon 3D are not available if the judge’s relative is acting as a lawyer in the case or is a partner in the law firm representing a party before the court. Recusal is required. As discussed, recusal is not mandated if the firm representing a party before the court employs a judge’s relative as an associate or non equity partner and the relative has no involvement in the case. If nonetheless a judge is concerned that his or her impartiality might reasonably be questioned, the judge may invoke the remittal procedures of Canon 3D.

The Committee notes that recusal decisions are also governed by the recusal statutes, 28 U.S.C. §§ 455 and 144, and the case law interpreting them. Although the Committee is not authorized to render advisory opinions interpreting §§ 455 and 144, Canon 3C of the Code closely tracks the language of § 455, and the Committee is authorized to provide advice regarding the application of the Code.

June 2009

Committee on Codes of Conduct Advisory Opinion**No. 11: Disqualification Where Long-Time Friend or Friend's Law Firm Is Counsel**

This opinion addresses whether a judge should recuse in a case where one of the attorneys is either a long-time friend of the judge or from a long-time friend's law firm. As an example, we consider whether a judge should recuse in cases where one of the attorneys is a friend of long standing and is also a godfather of one of the judge's children. We further discuss whether the judge should sit in cases where a party is represented by a member or associate of that friend's firm.

The first question is not capable of answer by crisp formulation. Canon 2B prohibits a judge from allowing family, social or various other relationships to influence judicial conduct or judgment. It likewise directs judges not to convey or allow others to convey the impression that another person is in a special position to influence the judge. In a similar vein, Canon 3C requires a judge to recuse when "the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned, including but not limited to" a number of enumerated circumstances, including the appearance of relatives who are within the third degree of relationship as counsel or a party.

A godfather is not a "relative" within the meaning of Canon 3C(1)(d) and is not otherwise covered by any of the enumerated circumstances requiring recusal. Recusal may nonetheless be required if the circumstances are such that the judge's impartiality could reasonably be questioned. No such question would be raised if the relationship were simply one of historical significance, the godfather being merely within the wide circle of the judge's friends, and the obligation having been perfunctorily assumed. By contrast, if the godfather is a close friend whose relationship is like that of a close relative, then the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned. Ultimately, the question is one that only the judge may answer.

The question regarding members or associates of the firm of the friend and godfather poses no problem. We do not believe that judges must recuse from all cases handled by a law firm simply because judges have law firm members for friends. Although there may be special circumstances dictating disqualification, a friendly relationship is not sufficient reason in itself.

June 2009

**Committee on Codes of Conduct Advisory Opinion
No. 100: Identifying Parties in Bankruptcy Cases for Purposes of
Disqualification**

Canon 3C(1)(c) of the Code of Conduct for United States Judges requires recusal when the judge knows that the judge, the judge's spouse, or a minor child residing in the judge's household "has a financial interest . . . in a party to the proceeding." (The Committee notes that, for purposes of recusal, "considerations applicable to a judge's spouse should be considered with respect to a person other than a spouse with whom the judge maintains both a household and an intimate relationship." Commentary to Canon 3C.) Similarly, Canon 3C(1)(d) requires a judge to recuse if the judge, the judge's spouse, "or a person related to either within the third degree of relationship, or the spouse of such a person is: (i) a party to the proceeding, or an officer, director, or trustee of a party." In most matters filed in the federal courts, it is easy to identify who is "a party to the proceeding" by reviewing the caption of the pleadings and proofs of service. However, bankruptcy cases are quite different because such cases regularly involve creditors who may have some interest in the proceedings, but no intention of participating in a capacity akin to a party.

Identifying who is "a party to the proceeding" for purposes of recusal in bankruptcy cases is important not only to the bankruptcy courts, but also to the district courts sitting as bankruptcy courts after withdrawal of the reference, to the district courts sitting as appellate courts, to the bankruptcy appellate panels, and to the circuit courts of appeal. The Committee consistently has taken the position that simply being a creditor or an interest holder of a bankruptcy estate is not a sufficient interest to make that creditor "a party to the proceeding." In that same vein, the acts of filing a proof of claim, or submitting a ballot on a proposed plan of reorganization, are not in themselves sufficient to raise the creditor or interest holder to the status of a party. It takes something more.

The Committee has advised that if a creditor accepts appointment to a committee of creditors, that change in status is sufficient to make each such creditor or interest holder "a party" because of the statutory responsibilities assumed by acceptance of such an appointment. In addition, the following participants in bankruptcy proceedings should be considered parties for these purposes: the debtor; a trustee; parties to an adversary proceeding; and participants in a contested matter. These entities occupy a central role in the proceedings or are actively involved in matters requiring judicial adjudication. As a consequence, we advise that they are sufficiently akin to parties that they should be treated as such for purposes of judicial disqualification.

Part of the ethical challenge in bankruptcy cases lies in the fact that the identity of "a party to the proceeding" may change with any motion, objection, or adversary proceeding. When the issue arises in this fashion, and a participant becomes a party for these purposes, the question of recusal must be considered. Judges sitting in bankruptcy matters should be vigilant to the possibility that a creditor or interest holder's

status may at some time change to “a party.” The Committee has advised, however, that in the ordinary bankruptcy case a judge has no obligation to review the schedules of creditors and interest holders to look for possibly disqualifying circumstances.

Finally, the Committee notes that recusal decisions are also governed by the recusal statutes, 28 U.S.C. §§ 455 and 144, and the case law interpreting them. Although the Committee is not authorized to render advisory opinions interpreting §§ 455 and 144, Canon 3C of the Code closely tracks the language of § 455, and the Committee is authorized to provide advice regarding the application of the Code.

June 2009

Committee on Codes of Conduct Advisory Opinion**No. 24: Financial Settlement and Disqualification on Resignation From Law Firm**

This opinion addresses how a newly-appointed federal judge who is withdrawing from private practice at a law firm should address related financial settlement and disqualification issues. As an example, we consider the following situation: The newly-appointed judge is in active practice in a law partnership. The partnership agreement provides for payment of an agreed amount representing the retiring partner's interest in the firm. Some of the payments are to be paid in the years following the partner's appointment as a judge.

A partner who leaves a law firm to become a federal judge should, if possible, agree with the partners on an exact amount that the judge will receive for his or her interest in the firm, whether that sum is to be paid within the year or over a period of years.

Such agreed-upon payments may be made to the judge provided (1) it is clear that the judge is not sharing in profits of the firm earned after the judge's departure, as distinguished from sharing in an amount representing the fair value of the judge's interest in the firm, including the fair value of the judge's interest in fees to be collected in the future for work done before leaving the firm, and (2) the judge does not participate in any case in which any attorney in the former firm is counsel until the firm has paid the full amount the judge is entitled to receive under the agreement.

Apart from recusal during the period when the judge is receiving payments from a former law firm, there is a broader question of the appearance of impropriety in the judge's hearing cases involving that firm. Many judges have a self-imposed automatic rule of disqualification for a specified number of years after leaving the law firm. How long a judge should continue to recuse depends upon various circumstances, such as the relationship the judge had at the law firm with the lawyer appearing before the judge, the length of time since the judge left the law firm, and the relationship between the judge and the particular client, and the importance of that client to the firm's practice. The Committee recommends that judges consider a recusal period of at least two years, recognizing that there will be circumstances where a longer period is more appropriate. In all cases in which the judge's former law firm appears before the judge, the judge should carefully analyze the situation to determine whether his or her participation would create any appearance of impropriety.

June 2009

Committee on Codes of Conduct Advisory Opinion**No. 70: Disqualification When Former Judge Appears as Counsel**

This opinion addresses recusal considerations when former judges, including judges who resign pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 371(a), appear as counsel before the court in which they once held judicial office. It does not directly address the ethical obligations of the former judge who later appears as counsel, although these obligations may be relevant to whether the former judge or his or her law firm should be disqualified from representation. Those obligations are governed by the rules of professional responsibility applicable to attorneys in the relevant jurisdiction. See, e.g., Rule 1.12, ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct (“ABA Rule 1.12”).

The Code of Conduct for United States Judges and 28 U.S.C. § 455(a) require recusal when the impartiality of a judge might reasonably be questioned. The Code also directs recusal where an appearance of impropriety might exist. These principles govern the duties of the judge when a former colleague appears as counsel. See Canon 2A and Canon 3B(3). Although the Committee on Codes of Conduct is not authorized to render advisory opinions interpreting the recusal statutes, Canon 3C of the Code closely tracks the language of 28 U.S.C. § 455, and the Committee is authorized to provide advice regarding the application of the Code.

The Committee recommends that courts announce a policy that for a fixed period after the retirement or resignation of a colleague, judges recuse themselves in any case in which the former colleague appears as counsel. The Committee’s experience suggests that a recusal period of one to two years would be appropriate, depending on the size of the bench and the degree and nature of interactions among the judges. The advantage of such a policy is that it is evenhanded, can be cited as supplying an objective basis for recusal, and may be formulated without respect to particular individuals. Advance adoption of a policy also gives fair notice of the practice restrictions a judge will face after resignation or retirement.

Even though a fixed period may have expired, a judge may be required to recuse in a case in which counsel for a party is a former judge with whom the sitting judge had a particularly close association. The standard applied here is the same as when a former associate or partner in a law firm, or a close friend, is an attorney in the case. The relevant considerations are set forth in Advisory Opinion No. 11 (“Disqualification Where Long-Time Friend or Friend’s Law Firm Is Counsel”). We have suggested a two-fold test. First, does the judge feel capable of disregarding the relationship; second, can others reasonably be expected to believe the relationship is disregarded? In applying that test, the judge should consider the closeness of the relationship, the length of service together, the size of the bench, and the period that has elapsed since the former judge left the bench.

In a large court, personal or social associations may not have been close. If the former judge had been a colleague for a short time, it may be easier to disregard the

past relationship, and more likely that litigants will feel the relationship will play no part in the decision. When the association between the sitting and former judge has been long, close, and continuing, the judge's impartiality might reasonably be questioned, and the judge should consider recusal.

A discrete problem arises when a former judge appears as counsel in a case that was filed in his or her former court before he or she resigned. In such circumstances, the presiding judge should confirm that the attorney's representation is not in violation of the applicable rules of professional responsibility. Although the rules of some jurisdictions may allow waiver of conflicts resulting from an attorney's prior judicial service, the Committee concludes that waiver would not be appropriate to allow a former federal judge to represent parties in any case that had been assigned to the former judge's individual docket during his or her judicial tenure. See *generally* ABA Rule 1.12(a) ("[A] lawyer shall not represent anyone in connection with a matter in which the lawyer participated personally and substantially as a judge . . . unless all parties to the proceeding give informed consent, confirmed in writing."). Appropriate steps may include review of the docket sheet to insure the case was not previously assigned to the attorney during his or her judicial service or inquiry of the parties.

If the principles stated here are followed, the Committee finds no objection to appearances by former judges. That the former colleague may have superior knowledge of the viewpoints of the sitting judges does not require disqualification. The same information is available from a thorough study of the sitting judge's opinions, or from observation of the judge in the courtroom. Lawyers who frequently litigate before a particular judge may acquire the same type of information, yet no one would suggest recusal or disqualification in such cases.

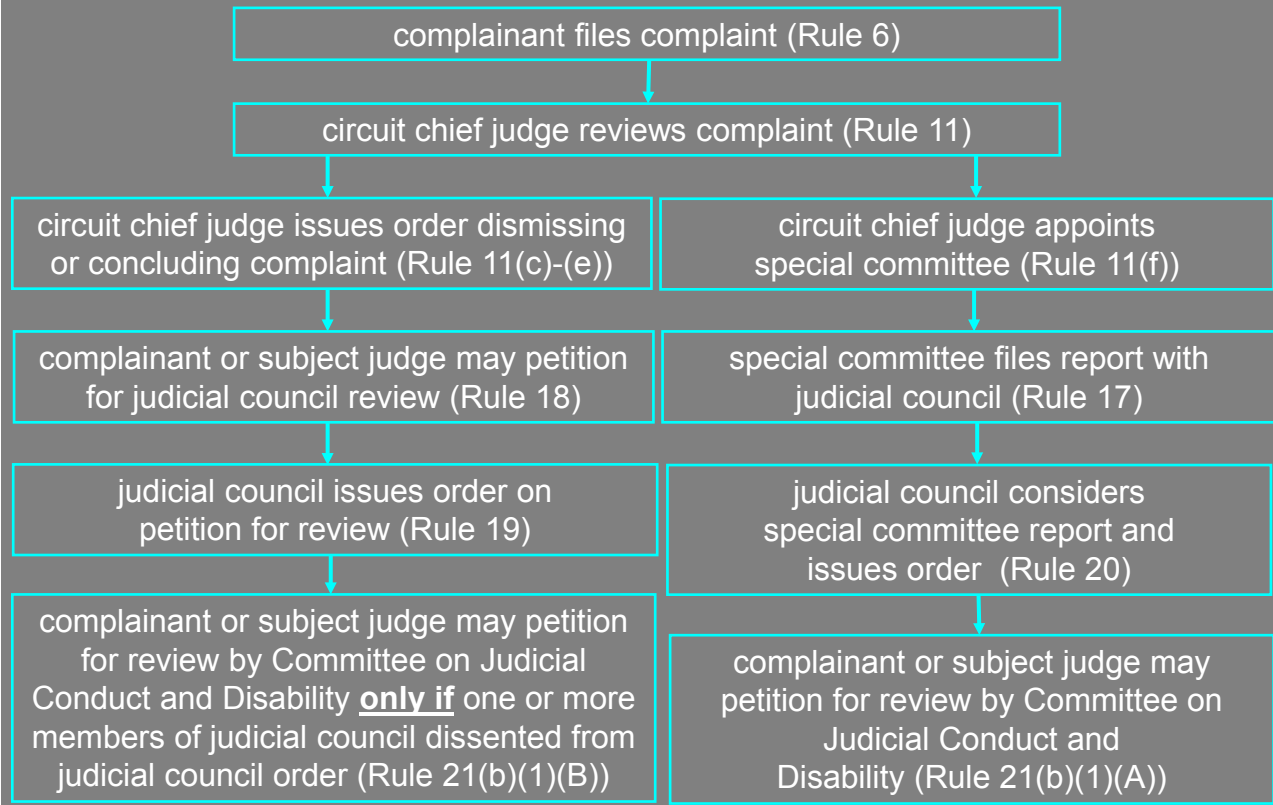
If a judge sits in a case in which a former colleague appears as counsel, care should be exercised in the courtroom to avoid using or permitting indications of familiarity. The former colleague should not use or be called by his or her former title. See Advisory Opinion No. 72 ("Use of Title 'Judge' by Former Judges"). First names and references to past association, events, or discussions should be avoided.

Absent special circumstances giving rise to reasonable questions regarding the impartiality of the sitting judge, the fact that a former judge is an associate or partner of the law firm appearing in the case, where the former judge does not appear or work on the case, does not of itself require recusal of the judge. Advisory Opinion No. 11, pertaining to the law firm of a close friend, sets forth the considerations here. The judge should, however, be alert to concerns relating to disqualification of the firm which, like disqualification of the former judge, is governed by the relevant jurisdiction's rules of professional responsibility. See, e.g., ABA Rule 1.12(c) ("If a lawyer is disqualified by paragraph (a), no lawyer in a firm with which that lawyer is associated may knowingly undertake or continue representation in the matter unless: (1) the disqualified lawyer is timely screened from any participation in the matter and is apportioned no part of the

fee therefrom; and (2) written notice is promptly given to the parties and any appropriate tribunal to enable them to ascertain compliance with the provisions of this rule ")

June 2009

Process for Filing a Judicial Conduct or Disability Complaint *



*This document does not represent every possible outcome in the judicial conduct and disability complaint process. Please consult the Judicial Conduct and Disability Act and the Rules for Judicial-Conduct and Judicial-Disability Proceedings for further guidance.

Faculty

Hon. Martin Glenn is Chief U.S. Bankruptcy Judge for the Southern District of New York in New York, initially sworn in on Nov. 30, 2006, and appointed Chief Judge on March 1, 2022. Previously, he was a law clerk for Hon. Henry J. Friendly, Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, from 1971-72, and he practiced law with O'Melveny & Myers LLP in Los Angeles from 1972-85 and in New York from 1985-2006, where he focused on complex civil litigation including securities, RICO, financial and accounting fraud, and unfair competition. Judge Glenn is a Fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy and a member of the American Law Institute, International Insolvency Institute, New York Federal-State Judicial Council, New York City Bar, National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, Federal Bar Council and ABI. He is a past member of the Committee on International Judicial Relations of the U.S. Judicial Conference and the Bankruptcy Judge Advisory Group of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. In addition, he is an adjunct professor at Columbia Law School, a contributing author to *Collier on Bankruptcy* and a frequent lecturer on bankruptcy-related issues. Judge Glenn received his B.S. from Cornell University in 1968 and his J.D. from Rutgers Law School in 1971, where he was an articles editor of the *Rutgers Law Review*.

Prof. Nancy B. Rapoport is a University of Nevada, Las Vegas Distinguished Professor, the Garman Turner Gordon Professor of Law at the William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and an Affiliate Professor of Business Law and Ethics in the Lee Business School at UNLV. Her specialties are bankruptcy ethics, ethics in governance, law firm behavior, and the depiction of lawyers in popular culture. Previously, she clerked for Hon. Joseph T. Sneed III on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit following law school, then practiced primarily bankruptcy law with Morrison & Foerster in San Francisco from 1986-91. Prof. Rapoport started her academic career at The Ohio State University College of Law in 1991, and she moved from assistant professor to associate professor with tenure in 1995 to associate dean for Student Affairs (1996) and professor (1998), just as she left Ohio State to become dean and professor of law at the University of Nebraska College of Law from 1998-2000. She then served as dean and professor of law at the University of Houston Law Center from July 2000-May 2006 and as professor of law from June 2006-June 2007, when she left to join the faculty at Boyd. She served as interim dean of Boyd from 2012-13, as senior advisor to the president of UNLV from 2014-15, as acting executive vice president and provost from 2015-16, as acting senior vice president for Finance and Business (for July and August 2017), and as special counsel to the president from May 2016-June 2018. Prof. Rapoport is admitted to the bars of the states of California, Ohio, Nebraska, Texas and Nevada and of the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2001, she was elected to membership in the American Law Institute, and in 2002, she received a Distinguished Alumna Award from Rice University. In 2017, she was inducted into Phi Kappa Phi (Chapter 100). She is a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and of the American College of Bankruptcy. In 2009, the Association of Media and Entertainment Counsel presented her with the Public Service Counsel Award at the 4th Annual Counsel of the Year Awards. In 2017, she received the Commercial Law League of America's Lawrence P. King Award for Excellence in Bankruptcy, and in 2018, she was one of the recipients of the NAACP Legacy Builder Awards (Las Vegas Branch #1111). She has served as the fee examiner or as chair of the fee review committee in such large bankruptcy cases as Zetta Jet, Toys 'R Us, Caesars, Station Casinos, Pilgrim's Pride and Mirant. Prof. Rapoport appeared in the Academy Award®-nominated movie *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (Magnolia Pic-

tures 2005) as herself. She received her B.A. *summa cum laude* from Rice University in 1982 and her J.D. from Stanford Law School in 1985.

Hon. Deborah L. Thorne is a U.S. Bankruptcy Judge for the Northern District of Illinois in Chicago, appointed on Oct. 22, 2015. Prior to joining the bench, she was a partner in the Chicago office of Barnes & Thornburg LLP, where she was a member of its Financial Insolvency and Restructuring Department. Her practice included the representation of creditors and other parties in insolvency proceedings, and she frequently served as a federal equity receiver in commodity fraud cases brought by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. In addition, she co-chaired the Women’s Initiative for the firm. Judge Thorne is past chair of the Chicago Bar Association Bankruptcy and Restructuring Committee and past chair of the Bankruptcy Committee for the Seventh Circuit Bar Association. She previously served as ABI’s Vice President-Communications and Information Technology and is the author of ABI’s *The Preference Defense Handbook: The Circuits Divided* and a co-author of its *Interrupted! Understanding Bankruptcy’s Effects on Manufacturing Supply Chains*. Judge Thorne is a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy. She served as Education Committee chair for the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges from 2019-20 and as its president from 2021-22. Judge Thorne is included in *The Best Lawyers in America* in the area of bankruptcy and creditor/debtor rights law, is recognized as a Leading Lawyer in Illinois, and has been recognized by *Illinois Super Lawyers* every year since 2003. For seven years, she chaired Women Employed, a Chicago nonprofit policy organization focused on improving the lives of low-wage women through enhancing access to post-secondary education and improving job quality. Judge Thorne received her B.A. from Macalester College, her M.A.T. from Duke University and her J.D. with honors from Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago-Kent College of Law.

Hon. Mary F. Walrath is a U.S. Bankruptcy Judge for the District of Delaware in Wilmington, appointed in 1998. She served as Chief Bankruptcy Judge from 2003-08. Judge Walrath previously clerked for Hon. Emil F. Goldhaber, Chief Bankruptcy Judge for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and was an attorney at Clark Ladner Fortenbaugh & Young in Philadelphia, concentrating in the areas of debtor/creditor rights and commercial litigation. In addition to speaking at numerous bankruptcy educational programs and panels throughout the country, Judge Walrath is a founding member and co-president of the Delaware Bankruptcy American Inn of Court, a member of the Delaware Chapter of the International Women’s Insolvency & Restructuring Confederation (IWIRC), a member of ABI and a Fellow in the American College of Bankruptcy. She is also an editor of the *Rutter Group Bankruptcy Practice Guide*. Judge Walrath is active in the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges (NCBJ), having served on its Board of Governors from 2007-12, as secretary from 2013-14, as chair of its Education Committee from 2014-15 and as president from 2016-17. Judge Walrath served as an associate editor and then business manager of the *American Bankruptcy Law Journal* from 2009-15. She also testified before the House Judiciary Committee on H.R. 1667, the Financial Institution Bankruptcy Act of 2017. Judge Walrath received her A.B. in history from Princeton University and earned her J.D. *cum laude* from Villanova University, where she was a member of the *Villanova Law Review* and was awarded the Order of the Coif.