



Connecticut Committee on Judicial Ethics

Informal Opinion Summaries

2025-04 (August 21, 2025)

Advancing Private Interests; Event, attendance/appearance; Fundraiser; Prestige of Office; Rules 1.2, 1.3, & 3.7

Facts: A Judicial Official (JO) has been invited to participate in a fashion show benefiting a local medical center. The event, held at a nearby shopping center, will feature current and former patients of the medical center walking the runway. Each child will be paired with someone representing the profession they aspire to pursue. The JO has been asked to escort a child who hopes to become a judge and will be wearing a judicial robe for the occasion.

The fashion show is part of the medical center's fundraising and awareness efforts as it builds a new tower to expand its ability to perform transplants in Connecticut. According to the organizer's website states: "This nationwide runway tour shares the story of local children battling cancer and weaves their dreams for the future into a high-fashion, upscale event." The JO's admission and meal will be provided at no cost.

Issue: May a Judicial Official participate in a fundraising fashion show by appearing on the runway wearing a judicial robe?

Relevant Code Provisions:

Rule 1.2 (Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary)

A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety. The test for appearance of impropriety is whether the conduct would create in reasonable minds a perception that the judge violated this Code or engaged in other conduct that reflects adversely on the judge's honesty, impartiality, temperament, or fitness to serve as a judge.

Rule 1.3 (Avoiding Abuse of the Prestige of Judicial Office)

A judge shall not use or attempt to use the prestige of judicial office to advance the personal or economic interests of the judge or others or allow others to do so.

Rule 3.7 (Participating in Educational, Religious, Charitable, Fraternal, or Civic Organizations and Activities)

- (a) Subject to the requirements of Rule 3.1, a judge may participate in activities sponsored by organizations or governmental entities concerned with the law, the legal system, or

the administration of justice, and those sponsored by or on behalf of educational, religious, charitable, fraternal, or civic organizations not conducted for profit including, but not limited to, the following activities: . . .

(4) appearing or speaking at, receiving an award or other recognition at, being featured on the program of, and permitting his or her title to be used in connection with an event of such organization or entity, but if the event serves a fund-raising purpose, the judge may participate only if the event concerns the law, the legal system, or the administration of justice; . . .

Discussion:

Advisory opinions from Connecticut and other jurisdictions consistently caution against wearing judicial robes outside of official duties, particularly at fund-raising events.

Connecticut:

In Informal Opinion [2013-04](#), this Committee considered whether a judicial official may participate in a group photo to be taken in a courthouse lobby wearing their robe in support of Rare Disease Day. The Committee concluded that a judicial official may not participate in an activity that does not concern the law, the legal system or the administration of justice, by posing for a group photo (with or without a robe) as it would violate Rule 1.3's proscription against using the prestige of office to advance private interests.

New York:

The propriety of participating in a fundraising fashion show was considered by the New York Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics in [NY Opinion 15-91](#). In this opinion, the New York Committee concluded that a judge may help organize and attend the fashion show fundraising luncheon but may not act as a clothing model. In [NY Opinion 98-33](#), the New York Committee concluded that a town justice may not serve as a clothing model at a charitable event even though the judge is not identified as such and will not be collecting funds for the charity. In contrast, the New York Committee concluded in [NY Opinion 23-49](#) that a judge may wear a robe when giving a keynote address at a non-fundraising public high-school graduation ceremony.

Florida:

In [FL JEAC Opinion 2007-07](#), a local public library contemplated a promotional campaign that did not involve fundraising but would allow local "celebrities'" images to be added to billboards and in promotional literature. A majority of the Florida Committee concluded that "the judge's gavel-wielding, robe-adorned, photographic promotion of a discrete entity constitute[d] the impermissible promotion of the private interests of another in contravention of Canon 2B" even though the library was a public entity. On the other hand, the Florida Committee approved the use of a robe by a judge conducting a mock trial for purposes of educating police officers; see [FL JEAC Opinion 2018-10](#); but in so doing, the committee reasoned that this activity was consistent with the Code's encouragement that judges participate in the betterment of the legal system. In [FL JEAC Opinion 2022-09](#), the Florida Committee

concluded that wearing a judicial robe while promoting the book was not permissible because it was more closely aligned to the situation in [FL JEAC Opinion 2007-07](#).

Washington:

In [Washington Ethics Advisory Opinion 93-05](#), the WA committee held that a judicial officer may not appear as a model in a department store fashion show where admission proceeds go to charity.

California:

In a 1987 advisory opinion, the California Judge Association determined that it is improper for a judge to wear a robe while participating in a public education program involving a public health matter. The opinion offered a clear caution against robe use in non-court, public settings, including fund-raisers. [CA Opinion No. 36](#).

Virginia:

The Virginia Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee concluded in [VA Opinion No. 19-1](#) that a judge should not wear his or her judicial robe to the funeral service of another judge, where the judge is not attending the service in his or her official capacity, as doing so may improperly lend the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others.

Illinois:

The Illinois Judicial Ethics Committee was asked to opine on the propriety of wearing a judicial robe on a float in a civic parade for children. The committee found that it was not improper for a judge to appear in the judge's judicial robe in a parade to show the different kinds of work or professions that are possible for children where the parade is non-partisan and non-demeaning. IL Jud. Eth. Op. 94-3 (Ill. Jud. Eth. Comm.), 1994 WL 808084

Recommendation: Although the cause is laudable, the Committee unanimously agreed that the Judicial Official should not participate in a fund-raising activity that does not concern the law, the legal system or the administration of justice, by appearing in a fashion show (with or without a judicial robe) as it would violate Rule 1.3's proscription against using the prestige of office to advance private interests.

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