



CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT COMMITTEE ON JUDICIAL ETHICS OPINIONS

CJEO THE SOURCE

THE JUDICIARY'S GUIDE TO JUDICIAL ETHICS

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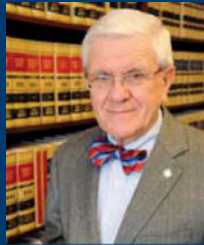


MESSAGE FROM THE COMMITTEE: JUDICIAL ETHICS FOR JUVENILE COURT JUDGES

The California Supreme Court Committee on Judicial Ethics Opinions (CJEO) is pleased to

bring you this edition of *The Source* with a spotlight on ethics for juvenile court judges.

These judicial officers are expected to undertake additional obligations inside and outside the courtroom that are not required of other judges. Yet juvenile court judges are still constrained by the same ethical rules. At times, these added responsibilities may appear to be at odds with ethical obligations in the California Code of Judicial Ethics.



Justice Ronald B. Robie
Chair



Justice Douglas P. Miller
Vice-Chair

This issue discusses some of these friction points so juvenile court judges know what to look out for and how to balance what may seem to be conflicting requirements. We invite you to read on to learn more.

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INTRODUCING CJEO'S NEWEST MEMBER

CJEO congratulates and welcomes Judge Michelle Williams Court, who joined the committee this year. She began her judicial career in 2012 with her appointment to the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, where she serves as a supervising judge of the Civil Division. Judge Court has also served her

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administrative committees, including the Superior Court of Los Angeles County's Primary Assignment Overview program in Family Law, the Operational Planning Committee, the Education Seminar Governing Committee, the Judicial Mentor Program Outreach Committee, and the Bench and Bar Committee.

Judge Court has been recognized for her service with awards including the California Association of Black Lawyers' Judicial Award of Excellence and the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles' Distinguished Service Award.



JUVENILE COURT JUDGES FACE UNIQUE ETHICAL CHALLENGES

Juvenile court judges are the linchpin of the juvenile justice system, responsible for oversight and implementation of the culture, policies, and practices that govern it. Despite their unique and interactive role, juvenile court judges are subject to the same ethical standards that apply to all judges. Neither the California Code of Judicial Ethics nor the ABA Model Code of Judicial Conduct addresses the specific ethical concerns that arise in the juvenile court landscape. As a result, juvenile court judges often find themselves navigating uncharted ethical terrain. This article and the accompanying interview discuss several common considerations faced by these judges.

Juvenile court judges have the same core duties as any judge—to fairly, promptly, and efficiently dispose of the legal issues before them. In addition, juvenile court judges are charged with protecting the well-being and safety of their communities, including individual minors, their families, and the public at large. Judges must provide for the care, treatment, and guidance of the minor while striving to preserve and strengthen family ties whenever feasible. In the juvenile justice context, judges must also ensure juveniles are held accountable for their actions. Further, juvenile court judges are charged with general oversight and “improv[ing] system performance in a vigorous and ongoing manner,” and are expected to engage in efforts to improve the law, including by making recommendations regarding civil procedure and developing programs that provide assistance to children.

[Read the full article.](#)



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JUDGE ROBERT J. TRENTACOSTA

Judge Robert J. Trentacosta has been a member of CJEO since 2013 and serves on the executive committee. Judge Trentacosta joined the Superior Court of San Diego County in 2001, where his judicial assignments have included criminal trials, domestic violence, drug courts, and the superior court writs and appellate panels. He has also held numerous leadership positions within the court, including presiding judge. He currently presides over a department in the juvenile court.

Below, Judge Trentacosta answers questions from Jody Vakili, CJEO staff attorney and editor of *The Source*, about judicial ethics in the juvenile justice landscape.

Q: You have held many assignments on the San Diego Superior Court bench. How did you come to be in juvenile court?

may request your assignment of choice. When my term concluded, I asked to be assigned to juvenile court. After many years handling adult criminal cases, I saw how the movie often ends. I wanted to see if early, positive intervention could change some of the sad, senseless endings that are part of daily life in adult criminal court. I was optimistic that many young people could be redirected toward a better path. My optimism was rewarded.

[Read the full article.](#)

DON'T MISS...

CJEO has created a first-of-its-kind resource for judges and members of the public searching for disciplinary decisions relating to judicial ethics in California. On the [CJEO website](#), judges can view [CJEO's California Code of Judicial Ethics annotated with CJP disciplinary decisions](#). This annotated code provides comprehensive annotations of CJP's public disciplinary decisions organized by canon. Designed to be used in conjunction with [CJP's Public Decisions Database](#), this robust research tool is an excellent companion to CJEO's other research publications, including [CJEO's California Code of Judicial Ethics annotated with CJEO opinions](#), the [CJEO opinions compendium](#), and the [CJEO opinions database](#). Click [here](#) for an instructional video on how to use this tool.

CJEO IN THE NEWS

- [Draft guidance aims to clarify judges' duty in case of attorney misconduct](#)—*The Daily Journal*
- [California Ethics Panel Tries Anew to Rein in Attorneys' Misconduct](#)—*Bloomberg Law*
- [Retired Judge Warned Against Moonlighting for Out-of-State Attorney General](#)—*Law.com*
- [How much can judges socialize with lawyers?](#)—*The Daily Journal*
- [Ethics Opinion Throws Wet Blanket on Judges' Party Attendance](#)—*Bloomberg Law*
- [Calif. Ethics Panel Adopts Guidelines for Outside Speakers](#)—*Law 360*

ABOUT US

CJEO is an independent California Supreme Court committee of 12 judicial officers, appointed by the court, with delegated constitutional authority to issue opinions on judicial ethics. Click [here](#) to learn more about CJEO's history, mission, and membership.



CJEO committee meeting, October 2023 - Back row from left: Judge Robert J. Trentacosta, Judge Michelle Williams Court, Judge Samantha P. Jessner, Justice Marla J. Miller, and Commissioner Belinda A. Handy. Front row from left: Committee Counsel Nancy Black, Justice Shama Mesiwala, Justice Ronald B. Robie, and Committee Staff Attorney Jody Vakili. On screen left to right: Judge Erica R. Yew, Justice Judith L. Haller (Ret.), Judge George J. Abdallah, Judge Michael T. Garcia (Ret.), and Justice Douglas P. Miller.

To speak with a judge on the CJA Judicial Ethics Committee for quick informal responses to questions about the Code of Judicial Ethics, judicial officers and candidates may call:

CJA Judicial Ethics Hotline: 916-239-4068

Toll free: 866-432-1CJA (1252)

Email: info@caljudges.org

Monday–Friday, 9a.m. to 5p.m., excluding holidays



Please see the CJA [website](#) ethics hotline page for more information.

Thank You to Our Readers from Our Members

[Justice Ronald B. Robie](#) (Chair), Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District
[Justice Douglas P. Miller](#) (Vice-Chair), Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division Two
[Judge George J. Abdallah, Jr.](#), Superior Court of San Joaquin County
[Judge Michelle Williams Court](#), Superior Court of Los Angeles County
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[Judge Erica R. Yew](#), Superior Court of Santa Clara County

Jody M. Vakili, CJEO Staff Attorney and Editor, *The Source*

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