

ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON STANDARDS OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

OPINION NO. 8 - 2020

RE: Propriety of a Magistrate Court Judge serving as the state Judicial Outreach Liaison with the American Bar Association.

FACTS

A Magistrate Court Judge has been asked to serve as the State Judicial Outreach Liaison (SJOL) with the American Bar Association (ABA). According to the ABA, the purpose of the position is to improve judicial community outreach and promote confidence and trust in the judiciary. The specific position description states:

While remaining independent and impartial, the SJOL serves as a statewide resource for the judiciary and other members of the highway safety community dealing with highway-safety-related court cases, particularly cases involving impaired driving. The duties of the SJOL include serving as an educator, writer, community outreach advocate, consultant, and liaison, regarding impaired driving and other traffic issues for the American Bar Association and South Carolina.

The judge inquires as to whether serving in this capacity is proper.

CONCLUSION

A Magistrate Court Judge may serve as the State Judicial Outreach Liaison with the American Bar Association.

OPINION

Canon 4B states: “A judge may speak, write, lecture, teach and participate in other extra-judicial activities concerning the law, the legal system, the administration of justice and non-legal subjects, subject to the requirements of this Code.” The Commentary to that canon provides:

As a judicial officer and person specially learned in the law, a judge is in a unique position to contribute to the improvement of the law, the legal system, and the administration of justice, including revision of substantive and procedural law and

improvement of criminal and juvenile justice. To the extent that time permits, a judge is encouraged to do so, either independently or through a bar association, judicial conference or other organization dedicated to the improvement of the law.

The position of SJOL is designed to improve judicial community outreach and promote confidence and trust in the judiciary with highway-safety-related cases. As such, the judge can serve as the State Judicial Outreach Liaison with the ABA.

s/ Letitia H. Verdin  
LETITIA H. VERDIN, CHAIR

s/ Usha Jeffries Bridges  
USHA JEFFRIES BRIDGES

s/ Keith M. Babcock  
KEITH M. BABCOCK

July 6, 2020