

Maryland Judicial Ethics Committee

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Under Particular Circumstances, Judge May Lecture at Training Session of Attorneys in Law Firm

A judge has inquired as to the propriety of speaking “at an after-work training session for young associates” of a law firm. The training session would focus “on civil trial practice in the District Court.” The only payment involved would be a dinner that evening prior to the start of the training program.

Under the conditions noted in this opinion, we believe that such an activity is permitted by the Code of Judicial Conduct. Canon 4A of the Code allows a judge to “speak, write, lecture, and teach on ... legal ... subjects ... if so doing does not interfere with the proper performance of judicial duties [and] does not reflect adversely upon the judge’s impartiality.” Canon 2B admonishes a judge not to “convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence judicial conduct.”

So long as the judge remains reasonably available to accept similar invitations from other lawyers or law firms, and the judge’s participation with this one law firm is only occasional, no appearance of favoritism arises. Nor does the acceptance of a dinner in this context adversely reflect upon the judge’s impartiality.

Within the constraints indicated above, the Committee is of the opinion that the judge may participate in the training session.