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## **D.C. Courts Propose Changes to Code of Judicial Conduct**

The District of Columbia Courts is **looking for public comment on proposed changes** to the city's Code of Judicial Conduct. The current version has been in effect since 1995.

The bulk of the **draft code (PDF)** keeps much of the same substance as the **1995 version (PDF)**, but minor changes reflect the courts' growing focus on community outreach and new special courts, as well as the now-significant role that the Internet and other technology play in court proceedings.

The draft code, proposed by the D.C. Courts' Advisory Committee on Judicial Comment, closely follows the American Bar Association's Model Code of Judicial Conduct, which was adopted in 2007.

Public comments are being accepted by the advisory committee, which will make final recommendations to the **Joint Committee on Judicial Administration** in the District of Columbia, through Oct. 31. The joint committee will make the final decision on whether to adopt the revised code and make any additional changes.

Several new sections reflect changes in the city's local courts since the 1990s. The revised version, for instance, reflects that as of 2002, magistrate judges replaced what were previously known as "hearing commissioners."

In another section, the draft code includes a new section explaining how judges can help accommodate the needs of pro se litigants, "in light of the large and increasing number of persons who appear in court without a lawyer." The draft code explains the types of steps judges can take to make sure pro se litigants understand what's going on, from explaining the basics of court procedures to staying away from legal jargon.

Judges are already barred from independently investigating the facts of a case, but the draft code spells out that that prohibition extends to looking up information online.

Another new section allows judges who think that an attorney or a fellow judge is impaired – by drugs or alcohol, or some other condition – to take "appropriate action," such as a confidential referral to an assistance program.

Posted by Zoe Tillman