
New Professionalism Program Ahead

The Wake County Bar Association and the 10th Judicial District Bar Association are sponsoring a pilot program for the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism (CJCP) referred to as the Professionalism Support Initiative (PSI). The purpose of PSI is to further enhance professionalism among North Carolina judges and attorneys by having members of the Wake County Bar Association and 10th Judicial District Bar Association assume an active role with professionalism-related problems among their peers.

The PSI includes an in-person confidential conference between local PSI volunteers and the attorney or judge in question. Complaints will come through the North Carolina State Bar, the Wake County Bar Association or the CJCP concerning unprofessional conduct of attorneys and judges. PSI will handle lawyer-judge, lawyer-lawyer, and client-lawyer complaints.

If a client, lawyer or judge believes a lawyer or judge involved in a case is acting in an unprofessional manner, rather than filing a grievance with the State Bar, he or she may contact the PSI to register a complaint. In the past, if conduct was unprofessional but did not rise to the level of an ethics violation under the State Bar Rules, little or nothing was done or could be done about the problem. For example: if a judge were not to come to court on time or were not to sign orders in a timely fashion, or if a lawyer is verbally abusive during a deposition or will not return client phone calls, those affected would have little recourse other than filing a grievance with the State Bar; such a grievance would most likely result in a finding of *no probable cause*.

Once a complaint is registered with the PSI, the volunteers will contact the lawyer or judge in question and request a conference to discuss the problem in his or her office. At that time, the volunteers will explain the complaint lodged against him or her and offer any counsel or assistance in order to rectify the unprofessional conduct as well as inform the attorney or judge about pertinent programs offered through the State Bar or the various voluntary bar associations.

The PSI is a complainant's "middle ground" for reporting unprofessional conduct. The program offers counsel or assistance to attorneys and judges through confidential conferences in order to keep the problem from escalating further into an ethics violation or a lawsuit.

John McShane of Dallas, a nationally known motivational speaker and trial lawyer, will be presenting a program in the conference room of Poyner & Spruill, Glenwood Avenue on November 10th at 10:00 a.m. for all volunteers of the PSI. At the conclusion of this 2-hour presentation and workshop, lunch will be provided at no cost to all attendees.

The Wake County Bar Association and 10th Judicial District Bar Association needs volunteers for the PSI in all areas of the law. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Alice Roman to register for both the program and the workshop on November 10th. If you would like more information about the program, please call David Long, Chair of the Professionalism Committee, at 783-2808 or Mel Wright, Executive Director of the CJCP, at 715-6055.