



NEW YORK STATE
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Commission Issues Report on the Propriety of Judicial License Plates

The New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct has issued a report dated May 7, 2013, on the ethical and public policy implications of license plates that identify the owner of a motor vehicle as a judge. The Commission intends for the report to “generate a serious discussion” of the matter, with the “hope that every judge would weigh the issues carefully when considering whether to opt for judicial license plates.”

The report addresses various pros and cons of judicial license plates and reaches the following conclusions:

- Displaying a judicial license plate on a personal vehicle does not *per se* violate any ethics rules or create an appearance of impropriety.
- Asserting one’s judicial status in order to avoid the consequences of a lawful traffic stop subjects the judge to discipline.
- A judge should advise family and friends who may use the vehicle not to assert the owner’s judicial office if stopped for a traffic violation.

- For security or courthouse parking, alternatives such as dashboard placards should be made available for those judges who prefer them. However, abuse of such a placard, such as displaying it when not on official business but to park illegally, may subject the judge to a confidential caution or public discipline.

The report makes the following recommendation:

- The Office of Court Administration and the Judicial Institute should put the subject of judicial license plates on the agenda of judicial education and training programs, to facilitate informed decisions on whether to display them.

Dissenting and Concurring Statements

Commission Member Richard D. Emery dissented from the report, stating that the Commission was “ducking” the issues by “merely posing” questions without opposing the issuance of judicial plates, and opining among other things that driving a car with judicial plates facilitates favoritism, puts pressure on police to compromise their obligations, undermines public confidence in the fair and equal application of the law and “violates the rules governing judicial conduct because either the purpose or effect of displaying judicial plates appears to ‘lend the prestige of judicial office’ for the personal benefit of the judge.”

Commission Member David A. Weinstein concurred with the report, taking issue with Mr. Emery’s dissent and opining among other things that, because judicial plates are distributed by the Department of Motor Vehicles in accordance with state law, and since the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics has affirmed the permissibility of displaying judicial plates, the mere use of such plates does not violate the ethics rules.

Pertinent Facts

The report notes such pertinent information as follows.

- 12 states and the District of Columbia authorize judicial license plates on the personal vehicles of judges.
- 424 of the roughly 1,200 judges and justices serving in city courts and higher have been issued judicial license plates.

- 1,832 judicial license plates have been issued to members of the State Magistrates Association, whose membership consists of present and former justices of town and village courts.¹
- Judicial and other “vanity” plates annually cost the registrant \$31.25 more than a regularly-issued standard license plate.
- Annual revenue to the state from the sale of judicial license plates is approximately \$70,000.

The report is available on the Commission’s website: www.cjc.ny.gov.

Press Availability

Mr. Tembeckjian will be in New York City on May 8, 2013, and is available throughout the day by telephone: (646) 386-4800.

MEMBERS OF THE STATE COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL CONDUCT

Member	Appointing Authority	Term End
Hon. Thomas A. Klonick, Chair	Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman	March 31, 2017
Hon. Terry Jane Ruderman, Vice Chair	Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman	March 31, 2016
Hon. Rolando T. Acosta	Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman	March 31, 2014
Joseph W. Belluck, Esq.	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2016
Joel Cohen, Esq.	Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver	March 31, 2014
Jodie Corngold	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2015
Richard D. Emery, Esq.	Former Senate Minority Leader John L. Sampson	March 31, 2016
Paul B. Harding, Esq.	Former Assembly Minority Leader James Tedisco	March 31, 2017
Richard A. Stoloff, Esq.	Senate President Pro Tem Dean Skelos	March 31, 2015
Hon. David A. Weinstein	Governor Andrew M. Cuomo	March 31, 2014
Vacant	Governor	March 31, 2017

¹ According to the State Magistrates Association, approximately 1,000 former justices and about 90% of the 2,300 incumbent justices belong to the SMA.