

## Judicial Inquiry Commission

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The Judicial Inquiry Commission has considered your request for an opinion concerning the permissible scope of a judge's involvement in the testing of technologies designed for use in the courtroom and in case management. The judge is a member of a committee with the Administrative Office of Courts that is exploring the use of such technology and the judge proposes to participate in testing the technology. The judge proposes that the hardware, software, and training involved be acquired through donations, with only in-kind donations solicited or accepted. The targeted suppliers would include private sector manufacturers and vendors who do not have a case pending before the judge.

It is the opinion of the Commission that the judge may serve on the AOC committee and may participate in testing any technology obtained. The judge should not, however, be involved in the solicitation or procurement of the donated technology.

Canon 4C of the Alabama Canons of Judicial Ethics, permits a judge to serve as a member of a governmental agency "devoted to the improvement of the law, the legal system, or the administration of justice." The AOC Committee, which has the purpose of exploring the use of new technology to improve the delivery of judicial services, is within the permissible scope of Canon 4. The judge's service on the committee is clearly appropriate.

Likewise, a judge's participation in testing and evaluating new technology under the Committee's auspices is permissible. The AOC and the Committee are free to assign technological tools to counties or judges for evaluation.

With respect to the solicitation of donations of hardware, software, and training, the judge should not directly solicit such donations. Such solicitations are more appropriately handled by the administrative branch of the court system. By refraining from soliciting donations, the judge minimizes the risk of conflict with his or her judicial duties.

Yours very truly,

JUDICIAL INQUIRY COMMISSION