

OVERVIEW OF THE MUNICIPAL COURT ADMINISTRATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

During the last decade, the municipal courts of this State have undergone systemic Court Rule and statutory revolutions that have launched our courts on a journey of continuous change. The municipal courts now handle more complex matters and are increasingly indistinguishable from the rest of the judiciary. Professionalization of the municipal courts' human resources is now taking center stage. The legislature has changed the title of Court Clerk to Court Administrator. The Municipal Court Administrator job description and title series have been revised by the State Department of Personnel to further the professional development of administrators as members of the management component of each municipal court.

The professional status of administrators was recognized by the legislature through the enactment of N.J.S.A. 2B:12-11 creating the Municipal Court Administrator Certification Board. In January 1998, S-1931 was signed into law revising the tenure process for full-time Municipal Court Administrators. Previously, a Municipal Court Administrator was granted tenure in office after 10 or more years of continuous service. Under the provisions of S-1931, a Municipal Court Administrator gains tenure in office after 5 or more years of continuous service if the administrator has achieved certification.

Phase I is the initial training and educational component. As of January, 2004 all new applications for certification must satisfy approximately 120 contact hours of study in the Principles of Municipal Court Administration curriculum.

Level I - Introduction to the Courts.

Level II - Overview of Municipal Court Operations.

Level III - Advanced Principles of Municipal Court Administration.

Level IV - Management/Leadership Principles of Municipal Court Administration.

Phase II - Following completion of Phase I, the candidate will be eligible to enter Phase II. In this step of the certification process the candidate will be required to pass a written exam and achieve a grade of 80 percent or higher. Additionally, an oral examination before a panel of certified administrators and other court administration professionals will be part of this phase. The oral examination will take place following the candidate's successful passing of the written exam.

Phase III Certification candidates are required to develop a written court improvement project. The topic selected should be one that contributes generally to the administration of justice within the municipal courts and furthers a Court's interests as a part of the local community in some positive fashion. Phase III mentor groups have been established in the vicinage to support certification candidates' efforts to develop a court improvement project. Mentor groups are comprised of Certified Municipal Court Administrators and may include

the Municipal Division Manager from your vicinage. Working with a mentor group is encouraged, but not required, to complete the certification process. Any work of the mentor group is confidential.

Post-Certification Education Requirements The 15 annual contact hours* of continuing education credits are required after obtaining certification. These job-related education credits can be satisfied through participation in a wide variety of professional activities and educational programs, including professional association seminars or other vicinage-related training functions. Certified administrators must acquire a total of 45 hours of continuing education credits every 3 years.

Current Status of Certified Municipal Court Administrators

As of April 5, 2005, the New Jersey Supreme Court has granted Certification Status to 429 individuals.

Additional Details on Phase I

This phase is the educational and training component of the Certification Process. The Principles of Municipal Court Administration consists of four progressing levels of curriculum designed primarily for Municipal Court Directors, Municipal Court Administrators, and Deputy Court Administrators. The course is technically oriented and includes topics such as: Courts and the Community, The Executive Component of the Court, Financial and Case Management, Budgeting, Domestic Violence, as well as Traffic and Criminal Court Operations. The management component of the Principles Course includes topics such as Leadership, Managing Change, Team Building, and Performance Management. Total Quality Service, and Communication Skills are covered in detail. Phase I entails approximately 120 hours of course work.

Additional Details on Phase II

Following successful completion of Phase I, candidates are eligible to enter the testing component. Certification Candidates take a 100-question multiple-choice examination and must score at least 80% or higher before advancing to the Oral Examination. The subject area of the written examination consists of the following: New Jersey Judicial System, Courts and the Community, Customer Services, Security Issues, Judicial Code of Conduct, Domestic Violence, Caseflow Management, Criminal Matters in Municipal Court, Bail, Traffic Overview, Financial Fundamentals, Financial Management, ATS/ACS Processing, Leadership, Communication, Managing Change, Performance Management, Progressive Discipline, Employment Interviewing, Total Quality Service, and Team Building. If the candidate fails to pass the written examination, he or she cannot progress to the Oral Examination. The candidate may be re-examined at a later date.

The second prong of Phase II is the Oral Examination. The candidate must

successfully answer two (2) questions: one relating to Municipal Court Management and the other to Municipal Court Operations. The candidate is allowed 15 minutes to outline his or her response to each question and 15 minutes to respond to each question. The Oral Examination is given in a conversational setting before a panel of three (3) individuals. This panel consists of two (2) Certified Municipal Court Administrators and a Vicinage Municipal Division Manager. The candidate is evaluated as to content and presentation.

Additional Information on Phase III Court Improvement Project

Certain aspects of Phase III were recently modified to facilitate the candidate's learning experience. Municipal Divisions throughout the State have established mentor committees consisting of a Municipal Division Manager and two (2) Certified Municipal Court Administrators. Candidates entering Phase III are encouraged to contact this committee as a support group for assistance relating to development of project ideas or the project itself. Should the candidate decide to work with the mentor committee, the candidate will have the advantage of obtaining quicker access to opinions on the practical value or utility of the project within each vicinage.

Phase III mentor committees statewide support the MCACB in this area, by reviewing the project before submission to the Board to help ensure that its contents are in compliance with existing court rules, statutes, and procedures, as well as with vicinage policies and procedures. Candidates in Phase III will not be mandated to seek assistance of the mentor committee. They will, however, be advised of the opportunity to do so. Candidates will continue to have the option of pursuing current Phase III procedures by submitting a topic request and completed final projects directly to the Board's attention.

*The length of the course devoid of breaks determines a contact hour spent in classroom instruction