

Use of Police-type Law Enforcement Badges

Directive # 2-96
Issued by

May 3, 1996
Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz

The Supreme Court recently determined it to be inappropriate for Municipal Court personnel to wear, carry, or use badges or shields that resemble in shape, styling, or otherwise badges or shields used by law enforcement officers. The prohibition extends not only to the addressees of this memorandum, but to all Municipal Court personnel. It has long been the Court's clear and well-known policy that New Jersey's Municipal Courts are not police courts, and that neither the judge nor anyone serving the court in any capacity at any level should do anything that might foster the erroneous impression that they are police courts. The Supreme Court has directed that you immediately implement its policy determination on this in your court.

There are other potential impermissible consequences of the use of such badges by court personnel -- it may create the incorrect perception that the user indeed possesses law enforcement powers or the impression that the user is seeking or receiving preferential treatment. As deleterious as those mis-impressions may be, however, they need not be debated, for it is clearly impermissible for court personnel in any way to encourage the impression that they are somehow allied with law enforcement.

R.N.W.

EDITOR-S NOTE

Chapter 7 of the Rules Governing the Courts of the State of New Jersey governs practice in municipal courts. This chapter was substantially revised in 1997 and users of this compilation should consult the revised chapter for any changes that may affect these directives.