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ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT AMENDS CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION RULES

The Illinois Supreme Court has amended some of the rules regarding Minimum Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) for Illinois attorneys.

Among other things, the changes will provide greater flexibility to newly admitted attorneys who need to complete their initial MCLE requirements and make it more attractive for them to participate in an approved mentoring program as part of their initial MCLE requirements.

The Court also eliminated a \$20 fee which attorneys had been required to pay to claim credit for participation in non-traditional activities to meet the MCLE requirements.

The amended rules do not change the basic MCLE requirement that attorneys, other than newly admitted lawyers, earn 30 hours of CLE activity during two-year reporting periods beginning in 2012, and 24 hours of certified credit through the 2011 reporting period.

Previously, newly-admitted attorneys were required to take a 15-hour Basic Skills Course. New attorneys admitted after October 1, 2011 are still required to take a total of 15 hours of credit for their initial MCLE requirements but the amended rules give these attorneys more options to fulfill these requirements. New attorneys need to participate in six hours of professional responsibility credit either by attending a six-hour Basic Skills Course or by participating in a mentoring program pre-approved by the Commission on Professionalism. The additional nine MCLE hours can be according to the new lawyer's choosing and may include professional responsibility credits.

A change in the rules also allows attorneys to carry forward excess professional responsibility credits into the next reporting period. Under the prior rules, attorneys were not allowed to carry over professional responsibility credit. As before, experienced attorneys serving as mentors in a mentoring program may earn up to six professional responsibility CLE credits.

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Court Amends CLE Rules Add One

The new rules are more generous to newly admitted attorneys in carryover credit, allowing them to earn more carryover hours earlier in their careers. New attorneys may carry over as many as 15 CLE credits into the subsequent reporting period, including professional responsibility credits. They may also begin earning those carryover credits upon admission to the Illinois bar, rather than waiting until the completion of their initial MCLE requirements.

The Commission on Professionalism has embarked on a statewide effort to stimulate mentoring programs for newly admitted attorneys. Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride and Justices Rita B. Garman and Lloyd A. Karmeier have appeared in news conferences in Peoria, Springfield, Edwardsville and Carbondale this past summer to express support for a voluntary mentoring program; and additional events are planned in Chicago and the Second Judicial District.

The amended rules were proposed by the MCLE Board and the Commission on Professionalism.

The rules are available on the Illinois Supreme Court website www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/default.asp; the MCLE Board web site www.mcleboard.org; and the Commission on Professionalism's website www.ilscpc.org.

The Court announced the rule changes on September 27; they are effective immediately.

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