

## Fla. judges, lawyers must 'unfriend' on Facebook

December 12 2009, By TAMARA LUSH , Associated Press Writer

---

(AP) -- Florida's judges and lawyers should no longer "friend" each other on Facebook, the popular social networking site, according to a ruling from the state's Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee.

At least one South Florida judge warned her pals with a Facebook status update that they could be "unfriended," and the ruling has prompted others to do the same. The committee ruled Nov. 17 that online "friendships" could create the impression that lawyers are in a special position to influence their judge friends.

The committee did conclude that a judge can post comments on another judge's site and that during judicial elections, a judge's campaign can have "fans" that include lawyers. And the ruling doesn't single out Facebook.

"Although Facebook has been used as an example in this opinion, the holding of the opinion would apply to any social networking site which requires the member of the site to approve the listing of a 'friend' or contact on the member's site," the opinion said.

A few on the committee dissented, saying judges should be allowed to have [Facebook friends](#) because those relationships are more like "a contact or acquaintance."

Although only the Florida Supreme Court can actually mandate what judges can do, most will likely follow the ruling out of an abundance of

caution, said Craig Waters, spokesman for the Florida Supreme Court.

Judge Thomas McGrady, the chief of the sixth judicial circuit in Pinellas County, said he understands why the committee came to its conclusion: Judges need to appear impartial.

"We as judges can still be good judges and still have friends. Part of our job is to not let that friendship interfere in any way with our decisions," he said. "But others in the public who see judges listing a lawyer as a friend on facebook, they may think that because they are your friend, they will be treated differently."

McGrady, who is sending a copy of the ruling to the 69 judges in his circuit, said this potential conflict of interest is why he doesn't have a Facebook page.

"If somebody's my friend, I'll call them on the phone," he said, chuckling.

*©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.*

Citation: Fla. judges, lawyers must 'unfriend' on Facebook (2009, December 12) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-fla-lawyers-unfriend-facebook.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.