

Advisory Committee of the Supreme Court of Missouri

Formal Opinion 126

WAIVER OF POST-CONVICTION RELIEF

We have been asked whether it is permissible for defense counsel in a criminal case to advise the defendant regarding waiver of the right to seek post-conviction relief under Rule 24.035, including claims of ineffective assistance by defense counsel. We understand that some prosecuting attorneys have expressed intent to require such a waiver as part of a plea agreement.

It is not permissible for defense counsel to advise the defendant regarding waiver of claims of ineffective assistance of counsel by defense counsel. Providing such advice would violate Rule 4-1.7(a)(2) because there is a significant risk that the representation of the client would be materially limited by the personal interest of defense counsel. Defense counsel is not a party to the post-conviction relief proceeding but defense counsel certainly has a personal interest related to the potential for a claim that defense counsel provided ineffective assistance to the defendant. It is not reasonable to believe that defense counsel will be able to provide competent and diligent representation to the defendant regarding the effectiveness of defense counsel's representation of the defendant. Therefore, under Rule 4-1.7(b)(1), this conflict is not waivable.

We have also been asked whether it is permissible for a prosecuting attorney to require waiver of all rights under Rule 24.035 when entering into a plea agreement. We believe that it is inconsistent with the prosecutor's duties as a minister of justice and the duty to refrain from conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice for a prosecutor to seek a waiver of post-conviction rights based on ineffective assistance of counsel or prosecutorial misconduct. *See*, Rules 4-3.8 and 8.4(d).

We note that at least three other states have issued opinions consistent with our view.¹

We do not believe the Rules of Professional Conduct prohibit a defense counsel and prosecutor from entering into a plea agreement that involves waiver of other post-conviction rights, unless such a waiver violates the Constitution or other laws. Analysis of whether it would violate the Constitution or other laws is beyond the scope of this opinion.

May 19, 2009

¹ The North Carolina State Bar, RPC 129, January 15, 1993; Board of Professional Responsibility of the Supreme Court of Tennessee Advisory Ethics Opinion 94-A-549, November 30, 1994; Board of Commissioners on Grievances and Discipline of the Supreme Court of Ohio, Opinion 2001-6, December 7, 2001.