



## Committee on Professional Ethics

Opinion #294 - 6/28/73 (11-73) Topic: Mobile Law Office

Digest: Use of mobile law office is proper where there is dignified procedure and careful adherence to ethical considerations.

Code: Canon 2  
DR 2-102

### QUESTION

May a lawyer outfit a bus as a mobile law office, park, hang out a sign indicating that he is an attorney and do business with clients coming to him?

### OPINION

Canon 2 provides that a lawyer should assist the legal profession in fulfilling its duty to make legal counsel available. In meeting this obligation to the poor and the disadvantaged, the bar has not only produced willing lawyers but through the neighborhood and the "store front" law office has brought legal services within the physical reach of those who need them.

No less should be our obligation to those who are willing to pay for legal services but who find the time and expense of travel to a distant lawyer to be a heavy burden. In some rural counties a lawyer may be twenty to thirty miles away. Branch law offices have been approved. ABA Inf. 959 (1966); ABA Inf. 1082 (1968). What is now proposed is a branch office but one that is mobile instead of affixed to the ground.

The key to the propriety of this proposal is found in the following statement in ABA 320 (1968):

"It is not only the right but the duty of the profession as a whole to utilize such methods as may be developed to bring the services of its members to those who need them, so long as this can be done ethically and with dignity.

"As society changes, these methods must necessarily change; otherwise, the profession will become dormant and static and fail to fulfill its proper function".

This is as applicable to the individual lawyer as it is to the bar as a whole. There is a great danger that a mobile law office would take on the coloration of its commercial counterparts and appear to be a commercial peddler of legal services, to the discredit

OVER----

**NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION**  
**Professional Ethics Committee Opinion**

Opinion #294

-2-

of the profession, but if such a project is handled carefully and with dignity, with due regard for all the ethical considerations relating to advertising, signs, announcements, etc., as set forth in DR 2-102, such a project would not be improper provided the guidelines set forth below are followed.

Essentially the mobile law office should aim at the same dignity as a branch office established in a building in the community. A few guidelines may be established. The lawyer must also have a fixed address for service of papers, communications, etc. The mobile unit should be conservative in appearance. It should have a fixed location in the community to be served, appropriate and fitting for a law office, not simply selected for its advertising value. The lawyer should carefully avoid the appearance of impropriety in moving his unit from place to place as though he were advertising or soliciting business. The lawyer's sign should be such as would be approved for any law office. It should not be displayed when the unit is travelling but only at the fixed location and only on days when the office is open. At all times the lawyer must keep in mind that to achieve the propriety which makes the mobile law office acceptable under appropriate ethical standards, the rules must be adhered to with special strictness.

-----