

Final

ETHICS ADVISORY PANEL
OPINION 96-16, - REQUEST # 672
Issued - July 11, 1996

FACTS:

The inquiring attorney desires to list the names of "paralegals" and "legal assistants" employed by the inquiring attorney on his/her office letterhead. The inquiring attorney will separate the names of the "paralegals" and "legal assistants" from the inquiring attorney's name .

ISSUE PRESENTED:

The inquiring attorney asks if placing a non-lawyer's name on his/her letterhead is violative of the Rhode Island Rules of Professional Responsibility.

OPINION:

Yes, the listing of non-lawyers on letterhead is misleading to the public.

REASONING:

This Panel has opined in Rhode Island Ethics Advisory Panel Opinion 92-24 (Issued May 20, 1992) that :

"It is improper for a law firm to list non-lawyers' names on the law firm's stationery and the office directory. The listing of non-lawyer employees on legal stationery and in an office directory is in itself misleading to the public. This situation can easily create public confusion and a false impression of a partnership between lawyers and non-lawyers. The Panel agrees that only the names of attorneys who are either members or associates of the firm should be listed on the firm's stationery and office directory. See, also Digest of Ethics Advisory Opinion # 91-42 and Rhode Island Supreme Court, Guidelines For Use of Legal Assistants, Provisional Order No. 18, February 1, 1983.

The Panel affirms Ethics Advisory Panel Opinion # 92-24 and believes that only the names of attorneys who are members of or associated with the firm, should appear on the law firm's letterhead to avoid misleading the public.