

Rule Change 2010 (13)

Colo.RPC 3.8. Special Responsibilities of a Prosecutor

(a) - (f) [No Change]

(g) When a prosecutor knows of new, credible and material evidence creating a reasonable probability that a convicted defendant did not commit an offense of which the defendant was convicted, the prosecutor shall within a reasonable time:

(1) disclose that evidence to an appropriate court or prosecutorial authority, and

(2) if the judgment of conviction was entered by a court in which the prosecutor exercises prosecutorial authority

(A) disclose the evidence to the defendant, and

(B) if the defendant is not represented, move the court in which the defendant was convicted to appoint counsel to assist the defendant concerning the evidence.

(h) When a prosecutor knows of clear and convincing evidence establishing that a defendant was convicted in a court in which the prosecutor exercises prosecutorial authority, of an offense that the defendant did not commit, the prosecutor shall take steps in the appropriate court, consistent with applicable law, to set aside the conviction.

COMMENT

[1] A prosecutor has the responsibility of a minister of justice and not simply that of an advocate. This responsibility carries with it specific obligations to see that the defendant is accorded procedural justice, ~~and~~ that guilt is decided upon the basis of sufficient evidence and that special precautions are taken to prevent and to address the conviction of innocent persons. The extent of mandated remedial action. Precisely how far the prosecutor is required to go in this direction is a matter of debate and varies in different jurisdictions. Many jurisdictions have adopted the ABA Standards of Criminal Justice Relating to the Prosecution Function, which ~~in turn~~ are the product of prolonged and careful deliberation by lawyers experienced in both criminal prosecution and defense. Competent representation of the sovereign may require a prosecutor to undertake some procedural and remedial measures as a matter of obligation. Applicable law may require other measures by the prosecutor and knowing disregard of those obligations or a systematic abuse of prosecutorial discretion could constitute a violation of Rule 8.4.

[2] and [3] [No Change]

[3A] A prosecutor's duties following conviction are set forth in sections (g) and (h) of this rule.

[4] - [6] [No Change]

[7] When a prosecutor knows of new, credible and material evidence creating a reasonable likelihood that a person outside the prosecutor's jurisdiction was convicted of a crime that the person did not commit, paragraph (g) requires disclosure to the court or other prosecutorial authority, such as the chief prosecutor of the jurisdiction where the conviction occurred. Consistent with the objectives of Rules 4.2 and 4.3, disclosure to a represented defendant must be made through the defendant's counsel, and, in the case of an unrepresented defendant, the prosecutor must take the affirmative step of making a request to a court for the appointment of counsel to assist the defendant in taking such legal measures as may be appropriate.

[7A] What constitutes “within a reasonable time” will vary according to the circumstances presented. When considering the timing of a disclosure, a prosecutor should consider all of the circumstances, including whether the defendant is subject to the death penalty, is presently incarcerated, or is under court supervision. The prosecutor should also consider what investigative resources are available to the prosecutor, whether the trial prosecutor who prosecuted the case is still reasonably available, what new investigation or testing is appropriate, and the prejudice to an on-going investigation.

[8] Under paragraph (h), once the prosecutor knows of clear and convincing evidence that the defendant was convicted of either an offense that the defendant did not commit or of an offense that involves conduct of others for which the defendant is legally accountable (see C.R.S. §18-1-601 et seq. and 18 U.S.C. §2), but which those others did not commit, then the prosecutor must take steps in the appropriate court. Necessary steps may include disclosure of the evidence to the defendant, requesting that the court appoint counsel for an unrepresented indigent defendant and, where appropriate, notifying the court that the prosecutor has knowledge that the defendant did not commit the offense of which the defendant was convicted.

[8A] Evidence is considered new when it was unknown to a trial prosecutor at the time the conviction was entered or, if known to a trial prosecutor, was not disclosed to the defense, either deliberately or inadvertently. The reasons for the evidence being unknown (and therefore new) are varied. It may be new because: the information was not available to a trial prosecutor or the prosecution team at the time of trial; the police department investigating the case or other agency involved in the prosecution did not provide the evidence to a trial prosecutor; or recent testing was performed which was not available at the time of trial. There may be other circumstances when information would be deemed new evidence.

[9] A prosecutor’s reasonable judgment made in good faith, that the new evidence is not of such nature as to trigger the obligations of sections (g) and (h), although subsequently determined to have been erroneous, does not constitute a violation of this Rule.

[9A] Factors probative of the prosecutor’s reasonable judgment that the evidence casts serious doubt on the reliability of the judgment of conviction include: whether the evidence was essential to a principal issue in the trial that produced the conviction; whether the evidence goes beyond the credibility of a witness; whether the evidence is subject to serious dispute; or whether the defendant waived the establishment of a factual basis pursuant to criminal procedural rules.

ANNOTATION

[No Change]

Amended and adopted by the Court, En Banc, June 17, 2010, effective July 1, 2010.

By the Court:

Michael L. Bender
Justice, Colorado Supreme Court

Nathan B. Coats
Justice, Colorado Supreme Court