

# New Jersey Law Journal

ALM Properties, Inc.

Page printed from: <http://www.njli.com>

[Back to Article](#)

## Cross-Examination: Municipal Court Practice Becomes a Certified Specialty

The new Municipal Court Certification program gets a look from Jeffrey Evan Gold, immediate past chair of the state bar's Municipal Court Practice Section.



Jeffrey Evan Gold

compensation law.

For many people, the only contact they ever have with the justice system is in the state's municipal courts, which handle nearly 6.5 million cases each year.

But for many years, municipal court was considered a bit of a legal backwater.

That has changed.

More than a decade ago, court rules were developed specific to issues that arise in municipal court. And now the Supreme Court has approved a "Municipal Court Trial Attorney" certification.

The concept is one the state bar association brought to the Court, saying municipal court practice is a unique area of law requiring specific expertise similar to the other categories the Judiciary already certifies, including matrimonial law, civil trial, criminal trial and workers

"Certification will help improve practice in municipal courts and will provide consumers a way to better identify highly qualified practitioners," State Bar President Susan A. Feeney said recently in a letter to Chief Justice Stuart Rabner.

Attorney certification programs are the result of the U.S. Supreme Court opinion allowing attorneys to advertise their services. In New Jersey, the certification program began in 1980. In order to become a certified attorney, lawyers must take continuing legal education courses for several years, show substantial involvement in litigation, have an unblemished reputation, and pass a written exam.

**Jeffrey Evan Gold** is the immediate past chair of the New Jersey State Bar Association's Municipal Court Practice Section and was active in the push to see the specialty recognized. Gold is one of the state's leading drunken-driving legal experts and was the first to challenge the introduction of Alcotest 7110, the breath test machine that replaced the Breathalyzer in New Jersey.

Gold, who practices in Cherry Hill, spoke recently about the Supreme Court's announcement that it would establish a municipal trial court to the list of specialties for which lawyers can be certified.

**Q: What does this new certification mean to the practice of municipal court law?**

**A:** We have gone from a time in the 1990s when there weren't even court rules specifically to govern municipal court practice and lawyers and judges had to try to make the criminal court rules fit, to today when the Court has recognized municipal court as one of only five law specialties. Certification will add to the professionalization of the practice area. Municipal court practice has come quite a long way in a short time.

**Q: Why did the bar association urge this certification?**

**A:** The bar association was in favor of it for the very reason that there are some things that we do that are unique. Municipal court is a different animal, particularly when it comes to dealing with driving while intoxicated (DWI) matters. This certification really recognizes municipal court, and DWIs in particular, take a specialized knowledge to practice at the highest levels, especially when it comes to trials.

**Q: What is the goal of the certification process?**

**A:** The point is so the public will have knowledge of who the Supreme Court recognizes is proficient in an area of law. Right now, insiders, the people who go to court know who is qualified to try a case and who isn't. This process allows the public to identify these individuals – just like they can see which surgeons are board certified. Certification may not be a perfect way to accomplish this, as there may be many lawyers who are competent but just don't bother with it. But it's a measure and that seems a good thing for the public.

**Q: What are the criteria for becoming certified?**

**A:** What the Court is trying to do is make sure people who are seeking to be certified really have a substantial municipal court practice and can try a case, if needed. Applicants must have fully prepared and litigated 30 municipal court cases a year for the past three years. The applicant must also have tried 10 cases since plenary admission, which must include six DWI or refusals. The applicant must take 12 continuing legal education credits every three years on DWI. And there will be an extensive written exam to pass. Once approved, the applicant will have to be re-certified every five years.

**Q: Will you seek certification?**

**A:** Frankly, I have been doing this work for about 30 years now and don't know if I would go through the process if I wasn't so involved in its formation. But I am, and so I will go through the process if only to see how the process works from the inside. If it helps me get business that will be a plus, of course.