

CHAPTER 905

PRIVILEGES

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905.01 Privileges recognized only as provided. Except as provided by or inherent or implicit in statute or in rules adopted by the supreme court or required by the constitution of the United States or Wisconsin, no person has a privilege to:

- (1) Refuse to be a witness; or
 - (2) Refuse to disclose any matter; or
 - (3) Refuse to produce any object or writing;
- or
- (4) Prevent another from being a witness or disclosing any matter or producing any object or writing.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R101.

Note: Extensive comments by the Judicial Council Committee and the Federal Advisory Committee are printed with the rules in 59 W (2d). The court did not adopt the comments but ordered them printed with the rules for information purposes.

This section precludes courts from recognizing common law privileges not contained in the statutes, the supreme court rules, or the U.S. or Wis. constitutions. Privileges and confidentialities granted by statute are strictly interpreted. *Davison v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.* 75 W (2d) 190, 248 NW (2d) 433.

905.02 Required reports privileged by statute. A person, corporation, association, or other organization or entity, either public or private, making a return or report required by law to be made has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing the return or report, if provided by law. A public officer or agency to whom a return or report is required by law to be made has a privilege to refuse to disclose the return or report if provided by law. No privilege exists under this section in actions involving false swearing, fraudulent writing, fraud in the return or report, or other failure to comply with the law in question.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R109.

This section applies only to privileges specifically and unequivocally provided by law against the disclosure of specific materials. *Davison v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co.* 75 W (2d) 190, 248 NW (2d) 433.

905.03 Lawyer-client privilege. (1) DEFINITIONS. As used in this section:

(a) A "client" is a person, public officer, or corporation, association, or other organization or entity, either public or private, who is rendered professional legal services by a lawyer, or who consults a lawyer with a view to obtaining professional legal services from him.

(b) A "lawyer" is a person authorized, or reasonably believed by the client to be authorized, to practice law in any state or nation.

(c) A "representative of the lawyer" is one employed to assist the lawyer in the rendition of professional legal services.

(d) A communication is "confidential" if not intended to be disclosed to 3rd persons other than those to whom disclosure is in furtherance of the rendition of professional legal services to the client or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.

(2) **GENERAL RULE OF PRIVILEGE.** A client has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made for the purpose of facilitating the rendition of professional legal services to the client: (a) between himself or his representative and his lawyer or his lawyer's representative, or (b) between his lawyer and the lawyer's representative, or (c) by him or his lawyer to a lawyer representing another in a matter of common interest, or (d) between representatives of the client or between the client and a representative of the client, or (e) between lawyers representing the client.

(3) **WHO MAY CLAIM THE PRIVILEGE.** The privilege may be claimed by the client, his guardian or conservator, the personal representative of a deceased client, or the successor, trustee, or similar representative of a corporation, association, or other organization, whether or not in existence. The person who was the lawyer at the time of the communication may claim the privilege but only on behalf of the

client. His authority to do so is presumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

(4) **EXCEPTIONS.** There is no privilege under this rule:

(a) *Furtherance of crime or fraud.* If the services of the lawyer were sought or obtained to enable or aid anyone to commit or plan to commit what the client knew or reasonably should have known to be a crime or fraud; or

(b) *Claimants through same deceased client.* As to a communication relevant to an issue between parties who claim through the same deceased client, regardless of whether the claims are by testate or intestate succession or by inter vivos transaction; or

(c) *Breach of duty by lawyer or client.* As to a communication relevant to an issue of breach of duty by the lawyer to his client or by the client to his lawyer; or

(d) *Document attested by lawyer.* As to a communication relevant to an issue concerning an attested document to which the lawyer is an attesting witness; or

(e) *Joint clients.* As to a communication relevant to a matter of common interest between 2 or more clients if the communication was made by any of them to a lawyer retained or consulted in common, when offered in an action between any of the clients.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R111

Section is cited in discussion on general law and former statute. *Jax v. Jax*, 73 W (2d) 572, 243 NW (2d) 831.

Attorney-client privilege in Wisconsin. *Stover and Koester*, 59 MLR 227.

905.04 Physician-patient or psychologist-patient privilege. (1) **DEFINITIONS.** (a) A "patient" is a person who consults or is examined or interviewed by a physician or psychologist.

(b) A "physician" is a person as defined in s. 990.01 (28), or reasonably believed by the patient so to be.

(c) A communication or information is "confidential" if not intended to be disclosed to 3rd persons other than those present to further the interest of the patient in the consultation, examination, or interview, or persons reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication or information or persons who are participating in the diagnosis and treatment under the direction of the physician or psychologist, including the members of the patient's family.

(d) A "psychologist" means a licensed psychologist, as that term is defined in s. 455.01 (3), or a person reasonably believed by the patient to be a psychologist.

(2) **GENERAL RULE OF PRIVILEGE.** A patient has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to

prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made or information obtained or disseminated for purposes of diagnosis or treatment of the patient's physical, mental or emotional condition, among the patient, the patient's physician, the patient's psychologist or persons, including members of the patient's family, who are participating in the diagnosis or treatment under the direction of the physician or psychologist.

(3) **WHO MAY CLAIM THE PRIVILEGE.** The privilege may be claimed by the patient, by the patient's guardian or conservator, or by the personal representative of a deceased patient. The person who was the physician or psychologist may claim the privilege but only on behalf of the patient. The authority so to do is presumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

(4) **EXCEPTIONS.** (a) *Proceedings for hospitalization.* There is no privilege under this rule as to communications and information relevant to an issue in proceedings to hospitalize the patient for mental illness, if the physician or psychologist in the course of diagnosis or treatment has determined that the patient is in need of hospitalization.

(b) *Examination by order of judge.* If the judge orders an examination of the physical, mental or emotional condition of the patient, or evaluation of the patient for purposes of protective placement, communications made in the course thereof are not privileged under this section with respect to the particular purpose for which the examination is ordered unless the judge orders otherwise.

(c) *Condition an element of claim or defense.* There is no privilege under this section as to communications relevant to or within the scope of discovery examination of an issue of the physical, mental or emotional condition of a patient in any proceedings in which he relies upon the condition as an element of his claim or defense, or, after the patient's death, in any proceeding in which any party relies upon the condition as an element of his claim or defense.

(d) *Homicide trials.* There is no privilege in trials for homicide when the disclosure relates directly to the facts or immediate circumstances of the homicide.

(e) *Abused or injured child.* There is no privilege in situations where the examination of an abused or injured child creates a reasonable ground for an opinion of the physician that the condition was other than accidentally caused or inflicted by another.

(f) *Medical assistance.* 1. There is no privilege under this section as to communications or disclosures of information in response to requests by any federal or state governmental

entity, or its duly authorized agents, for information requested to disclose the extent of services provided to individuals receiving assistance under a state program for medical assistance under Title XIX of the federal social security act, or under s. 49.046. The act of disclosing such communications or medical records made in good faith under this subsection shall not give rise to civil liability or serve as the basis for criminal actions of a finding of unprofessional conduct.

2. Under no circumstances may the clinical records, including physicians' orders and nurses' notes, of a private pay patient not receiving any assistance under s. 49.46 or 49.47, be released or made available to any person without the express written waiver or consent of the patient or the patient's legal guardian.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R121; 1975 c. 393; 1977 c. 61, 418.

See note to Art. I, sec. 11, citing *State v. Jenkins*, 80 W (2d) 426, 259 NW (2d) 109.

Privilege under this section is not a principle of substantive law, but merely an evidentiary rule applicable at all stages of civil and criminal proceedings, except actual trial on the merits in homicide cases. 64 Atty. Gen. 82.

905.05 Husband-wife privilege. (1) GENERAL RULE OF PRIVILEGE. A person has a privilege to prevent his spouse or former spouse from testifying against him as to any private communication by one to the other made during their marriage.

(2) WHO MAY CLAIM THE PRIVILEGE. The privilege may be claimed by the person or by the spouse on his behalf. The authority of the spouse to do so is presumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

(3) EXCEPTIONS. There is no privilege under this rule:

(a) If both spouses or former spouses are parties to the action.

(b) In proceedings in which one spouse or former spouse is charged with a crime against the person or property of the other or of a child of either, or with a crime against the person or property of a 3rd person committed in the course of committing a crime against the other.

(c) In proceedings in which a spouse or former spouse is charged with a crime of pandering or prostitution.

(d) If one spouse or former spouse has acted as the agent of the other and the private communication relates to matters within the scope of the agency.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R130.

Cross Reference: As to testimony of husband and wife in action asserting illegitimacy of child born in wedlock, see 891.39.

A wife's testimony as to statements made by her husband was admissible where the statements were made in the presence of 2 witnesses. *Abraham v. State*, 47 W (2d) 44, 176 NW (2d) 349.

A wife can be compelled to testify as to whether or not he was working or collecting unemployment insurance, since

such facts are known to 3rd persons. *Kain v. State*, 48 W (2d) 212, 179 NW (2d) 777.

Wife's observation, without husband's knowledge, of husband's criminal act committed on public street was neither a "communication" nor "private" within meaning of (1). *State v. Sabin*, 79 W (2d) 302, 255 NW (2d) 320.

905.06 Communications to clergymen.

(1) DEFINITIONS. As used in this section:

(a) A "clergyman" is a minister, priest, rabbi, or other similar functionary of a religious organization, or an individual reasonably believed so to be by the person consulting him.

(b) A communication is "confidential" if made privately and not intended for further disclosure except to other persons present in furtherance of the purpose of the communication.

(2) GENERAL RULE OF PRIVILEGE. A person has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent another from disclosing a confidential communication by the person to a clergyman in his professional character as a spiritual adviser.

(3) WHO MAY CLAIM THE PRIVILEGE. The privilege may be claimed by the person, by his guardian or conservator, or by his personal representative if he is deceased. The clergyman may claim the privilege on behalf of the person. His authority so to do is presumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R135.

905.07 Political vote. Every person has a privilege to refuse to disclose the tenor of his vote at a political election conducted by secret ballot unless the vote was cast illegally.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R139.

905.08 Trade secrets. A person has a privilege, which may be claimed by him or his agent or employe, to refuse to disclose and to prevent other persons from disclosing a trade secret, owned by him, if the allowance of the privilege will not tend to conceal fraud or otherwise work injustice. When disclosure is directed, the judge shall take such protective measure as the interests of the holder of the privilege and of the parties and the furtherance of justice may require.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R140.

905.09 Law enforcement records. The federal government or a state or a subdivision thereof has a privilege to refuse to disclose investigatory files, reports and returns for law enforcement purposes except to the extent available by law to a person other than the federal government, a state or subdivision thereof. The privilege may be claimed by an appropriate representative of the federal government, a state or a subdivision thereof.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R142.

905.10 Identity of informer. (1) RULE OF PRIVILEGE. The federal government or a state or subdivision thereof has a privilege to refuse to disclose the identity of a person who has furnished information relating to or assisting in an investigation of a possible violation of law to a law enforcement officer or member of a legislative committee or its staff conducting an investigation.

(2) WHO MAY CLAIM. The privilege may be claimed by an appropriate representative of the federal government, regardless of whether the information was furnished to an officer of the government or of a state or subdivision thereof. The privilege may be claimed by an appropriate representative of a state or subdivision if the information was furnished to an officer thereof.

(3) EXCEPTIONS. (a) Voluntary disclosure; informer a witness. No privilege exists under this rule if the identity of the informer or his interest in the subject matter of his communication has been disclosed to those who would have cause to resent the communication by a holder of the privilege or by the informer's own action, or if the informer appears as a witness for the federal government or a state or subdivision thereof.

(b) Testimony on merits. If it appears from the evidence in the case or from other showing by a party that an informer may be able to give testimony necessary to a fair determination of the issue of guilt or innocence in a criminal case or of a material issue on the merits in a civil case to which the federal government or a state or subdivision thereof is a party, and the federal government or a state or subdivision thereof invokes the privilege, the judge shall give the federal government or a state or subdivision thereof an opportunity to show in camera facts relevant to determining whether the informer can, in fact, supply that testimony. The showing will ordinarily be in the form of affidavits but the judge may direct that testimony be taken if he finds that the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily upon affidavit. If the judge finds that there is a reasonable probability that the informer can give the testimony, and the federal government or a state or subdivision thereof elects not to disclose his identity, the judge on motion of the defendant in a criminal case shall dismiss the charges to which the testimony would relate, and the judge may do so on his own motion. In civil cases, he may make an order that justice requires. Evidence submitted to the judge shall be sealed and preserved to be made available to the appellate court in the event of an appeal, and the contents shall not otherwise be revealed without consent of the federal government, state or subdivision thereof. All counsel

and parties shall be permitted to be present at every stage of proceedings under this subdivision except a showing in camera at which no counsel or party shall be permitted to be present.

(c) Legality of obtaining evidence. If information from an informer is relied upon to establish the legality of the means by which evidence was obtained and the judge is not satisfied that the information was received from an informer reasonably believed to be reliable or credible, he may require the identity of the informer to be disclosed. The judge shall on request of the federal government, state or subdivision thereof, direct that the disclosure be made in camera. All counsel and parties concerned with the issue of legality shall be permitted to be present at every stage of proceedings under this subdivision except a disclosure in camera at which no counsel or party shall be permitted to be present. If disclosure of the identity of the informer is made in camera, the record thereof shall be sealed and preserved to be made available to the appellate court in the event of an appeal, and the contents shall not otherwise be revealed without consent of the appropriate federal government, state or subdivision thereof.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R143.

905.11 Waiver of privilege by voluntary disclosure. A person upon whom this chapter confers a privilege against disclosure of the confidential matter or communication waives the privilege if he or his predecessor while holder of the privilege voluntarily discloses or consents to disclosure of any significant part of the matter or communication. This section does not apply if the disclosure is itself a privileged communication.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R150.

905.12 Privileged matter disclosed under compulsion or without opportunity to claim privilege. Evidence of a statement or other disclosure of privileged matter is not admissible against the holder of the privilege if the disclosure was (a) compelled erroneously or (b) made without opportunity to claim the privilege.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R151.

905.13 Comment upon or inference from claim of privilege; instruction. (1) COMMENT OR INFERENCE NOT PERMITTED. The claim of a privilege, whether in the present proceeding or upon a prior occasion, is not a proper subject of comment by judge or counsel. No inference may be drawn therefrom.

(2) CLAIMING PRIVILEGE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF JURY. In jury cases, proceedings shall be conducted, to the extent practicable, so as to

facilitate the making of claims of privilege without the knowledge of the jury.

(3) JURY INSTRUCTION. Upon request, any party against whom the jury might draw an adverse inference from a claim of privilege is entitled to an instruction that no inference may be drawn therefrom.

(4) APPLICATION; SELF-INCRIMINATION. The foregoing subsections do not apply in a civil case with respect to the privilege against self-incrimination.

History: Sup. Ct. Order, 59 W (2d) R153