

Virginia State Bar Public Case Digest
2024 Fiscal Year
Updated April 22, 2024¹

I. DISHONESTY

[In the Matters of Christopher Louis Contreras](#)

VSB Docket Nos. 23-042-127395, 23-042-1274245, 23-042-127768, 23-042126886,
23-042-127699

Consent to Revocation

August 10, 2023

- Contreras did not use a trust account for advanced fees or costs and treated all flat fees as earned upon receipt. Contreras also did not keep records regarding advanced fees or provide accountings to clients.
- In one matter, Contreras scheduled an *ore tenus* hearing for a divorce but failed to appear for it and failed to confirm the date with his client. Contreras forged a judge's signature on a final divorce decree and provided the decree to his client. When responding to the bar complaint, Contreras said he was unsure what happened.
- In a second matter, the court authorized funds for Contreras to hire experts for a criminal defense client, but Contreras never retained an expert. Although Contreras took over the case from the public defender, he never discussed the case with the public defender or picked up the public defender's complete file. The client and the public defender asked Contreras to contact his client regarding filing an appeal. Contreras visited his client 28 days after the sentencing but misrepresented to the court that he had visited his client the previous week.
- In a third matter, Contreras represented a client on aggravated sexual battery charges and failed to file a discovery motion, respond to a motion regarding admission of hearsay statements, discuss with his client whether his client wanted a jury trial, thoroughly cross-examine complaining witness, cite law in his motion to strike, and properly advise witnesses regarding the Rule on Witnesses. The public defender subsequently obtained a new trial based on ineffective assistance of counsel.

¹ Disciplinary cases are included in these written materials shortly after the Memorandum Orders are published. For some matters, the time to note an appeal may not have expired, or an appeal may have been noted after a case was included. For recent information regarding pending appeals, check the Virginia State Bar's website.

Virginia State Bar ex rel Eighth District Committee v. Dale Reese Jensen

Case No. CL23-342

VSJ Docket Nos. 22-080-124753, 22-080-125016, 22-080-125134, 22-080-125221, 22-080-125485, 22-080-125529, 22-080-125496, 23-080-126976

Revocation

Hearing Before Three-Judge Court

October 26, 2023

- Despite existing law that defective indictments are procedural in nature and could be waived, Jensen developed a legal theory that a client has a constitutional right to a proper indictment, and therefore any convictions based on defective indictments are void.
- After losing this argument on behalf of a client in 2016, Jensen continued to charge other clients thousands of dollars to file similar motions, without advising those clients that the argument had been rejected by at least one Circuit Court, the Court of Appeals Virginia, and twice by the Supreme Court of Virginia and the United States Supreme Court.
- Jensen charged several advanced legal fees that he failed to place into trust. He also failed to keep proper receipts and disbursement journals and failed to properly reconcile his trust account. In some cases, where a client was due a partial refund, Jensen refused to provide one.
- In several of the cases, Jensen failed to keep his clients apprised of developments and missed deadlines to file pleadings.
- In some of the cases, Jensen provided the bar with timekeeping records that contained false statements of work he had performed. In particular, he billed for creating pleadings that were copied from past pleadings filed on behalf of other clients.
- Rules Violated (across all eight cases): 1.1 (Competence); 1.2(a) (Scope of Representation); 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-b) (Communication); 1.5(a-b) (Fees); 1.15(a)(1), (b)(3-5), (c)(1-4), (d)(2-4) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d-e) (Declining or Terminating Representation); 5.3 (a-c) (Responsibilities Regarding Nonlawyer Assistants); 8.1(a) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters); 8.4(a-c) (Misconduct).
- Respondent filed more than 30 pages of objections.

In the Matter of Chandra Harris Snyder

VSB Docket No. 23-010-128451

One-Year and One-Day Suspension

Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board

December 15, 2023

- Snyder accepted simultaneous employment with two different law firms. She did not disclose to either firm the fact that she was employed at another firm.
- After Snyder's dual employment was discovered and a bar complaint was filed, Snyder claimed that she disclosed her simultaneous employment to both firms; however representatives of both law firms disputed this.
- Snyder maintained client documents belonging to one law firm on a laptop owned by the other firm.
- Rules Violated: 1.6(d) (Confidentiality of Information); 8.1(a) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters); 8.4(b-c) (Misconduct).

In the Matter of Reginald Robert Yancey

VSB Docket No. 23-090-126593

One-Year and One-Day Suspension

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

September 28, 2023

- Yancey received a \$30,000 advanced legal fee to represent a client and his business in their bankruptcy proceedings but did not deposit the advanced fee in a trust account.
- Yancey then misrepresented the amount of the fee he had received to the bankruptcy court.
- During a four-month period in which Yancey filed approximately 35 bankruptcy cases, his trust account had a balance of \$33.92. Yancey acknowledged receiving advanced fees and/or costs from at least six clients during this timeframe, but he did not deposit any of those fees or costs into his trust account. During a subsequent 14-month period, Yancey filed more than 75 bankruptcy cases but did not deposit any fees or costs related to those cases into his trust account.
- Yancey made inconsistent representations regarding the nature of the fee he received and how it was applied. He also failed to maintain receipts and disbursements journals or a client ledger for at least one of his clients.
- Yancey agreed to resign from the bankruptcy court bar.

- Rules Violated: 1.15(a)(1), (b)(5), (c) (1-2), (4) (Safekeeping Property); 3.3(a)(1) (Candor Toward the Tribunal); 8.4(b-c) (Misconduct).

[In the Matter of John Kedrich Evans, III](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-130255

365-Day Suspension

Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board

January 11, 2024

- Reciprocal discipline from the District of Columbia.
- While working as a member of the Council of the District of Columbia and Chair of the Board for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Evans did not accurately report his financial interests.

[In the Matter of Jennifer Terrell Dilworth](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-021-129645

Public Reprimand Without Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

March 1, 2024

- Dilworth told her supervisor that she had filed a motion to withdraw in a case when she had not. The supervisor then contacted the presiding judge about the motion and proposed order, and the judge told the supervisor that no order had been entered.
- When Dilworth's supervisor questioned her about the motion, Dilworth said that the motion and proposed order must have been lost in the clerk's office. When the supervisor confronted Dilworth again, she admitted that she had never filed the motion and proposed order.
- Dilworth was terminated by her law firm.
- Rules Violated: 4.1(a) (Truthfulness in Statements to Others); 8.4(b-c) (Misconduct).

[In the Matter of Melissa D. Johnson](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-060-126832

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

April 8, 2024

- Johnson represented the beneficiaries of the trust, who sought the resignation of the trustee. Johnson revised a draft resignation for the trustee

and instructed her clients to give the draft directly to the trustee, even though Johnson knew that the trustee was represented in the dispute.

- The trustee signed the resignation outside of Johnson’s presence. Nonetheless, Johnson notarized the signature, stating that the document was “acknowledged before me.”
- Rules Violated: 4.2 (Communication with Persons Represented by Counsel); 8.4(a-b) (Misconduct).
- Terms: one year of probation, six hours of ethics CLE.
- Alternate Sanction: Certification for Sanction Determination.

II. SAFEKEEPING PROPERTY

[Virginia State Bar ex rel Sixth District Committee v. Brittani Nata’Lita Baldwin](#)

VSF Docket Nos. 23-060-126301, 23-060-126844, 23-060-126977, 23-060-126996, 23-060-127035, 23-060-127238, 23-060-128020

Case No. CL23001107-00

Revocation

Hearing Before Three-Judge Court

August 17, 2023

- Between 2020 and the end of 2022, Baldwin accepted more than \$40,000 in advanced legal fees from seven clients. She did not deposit any of the advanced fees into a trust account, nor did she provide those clients with itemized billing statements. She also failed to refund unearned legal fees to several clients.
- While representing some of these clients, Baldwin failed to perform essential aspects of the representation such as filing a complaint for divorce, serving discovery responses, and attending a settlement conference.
- Baldwin failed to respond to subpoenas duces tecum in four different cases, which led to the administrative suspension of her license.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.15(a)(1), (b)(3-5) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); 8.4(b) (Misconduct).

[In the Matter of Jessica Ralsten Casey](#)

VSF Docket No. 24-010-129976

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before District Committee
March 28, 2024

- Casey agreed to negotiate a Property Settlement Agreement for a flat fee of \$1,000.
- Casey deposited the flat fee into her trust account, but transferred the entire amount into a checking account before the representation was completed.
- The bar subpoenaed Casey's trust accounting records and she failed to produce a client ledger for the client.
- Casey delayed the negotiations and failed to communicate with her client, including failing to respond to a request for guidance for three months.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a) (Communication); 1.15(b)(5), (c)(2).
- Terms: six hours of CLE in trust accounting, read Lawyers and Other People's Money and Legal Ethics Opinion 1606.

[In the Matter of David Allen Downes](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-070-129608

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

March 15, 2024

- Downes was appointed as the administrator of a friend's estate.
- Downes failed to reconcile his IOLTA and an account he created for the estate, resulting in an IOLTA overdraft. Downes also kept personal funds in his IOLTA to keep it open.
- During the investigation, Downes provided the bar with updated ledgers and reconciliations for his IOLTA.
- Rules Violated: 1.15(a)(3), (c)(3), (d)(3) (Safekeeping Property).
- Terms: three years of probation as to trust accounting violation, unannounced reviews by VSB investigator.

Virginia State Bar ex rel Fifth District Committee v. Kerr Stewart Evans, Jr.

Case No. CL2023-04019

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Three-Judge Panel
July 26, 2023

- Evans failed to deposit an advanced legal fee into a trust account.
- Evans's client ledgers were incomplete and he failed to produce documentation reflecting that he reconciled his trust account.
- Rules Violated: 1.15(a)(1), (c)(2), (d)(3) (Safekeeping Property).
- Terms: read Lawyers and Other People's Money and Legal Ethics Opinion 1606, one year of trust account inspections.
- Alternate Sanction: 30-day suspension.

[In the Matter of Peter L. Goldman](#)

VSB Docket No. 22-070-125043

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

November 6, 2023

- In a litigation matter, Goldman charged his client a fixed fee of \$5,000, to be paid in installments during a four-month period. Goldman deposited the first installment into his business checking account.
- More than three years after Goldman was retained, the Court issued a notice that it was removing the case from the active docket because there had been "no orders or proceedings" for two years.
- Goldman sent correspondence to the client purporting to terminate the representation but did not file a motion to withdraw.
- Rules Violated: 1.15(a)(1) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation).
- Terms: One year of probation, six credits of MCLE in legal ethics.

[In the Matter of Weon Geun Kim](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-041-127801

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

October 16, 2023

- Kim maintained more than \$12,000 of his own funds in his trust account. He said that he did not remove funds from trust after he earned them.
- Kim also acknowledged that he deposited other client fees in his operating account before they were earned and kept client checks in a desk drawer.
- Rule Violated: 1.15(a)(1), (3).
- Terms: Read Rule of Professional Conduct 1.15, Lawyers and Other People’s Money, and Legal Ethics Opinion 1606, three hours of CLE in trust accounting.
- Alternate Sanction: Certification for Sanction Determination.

[In the Matter of Shalonda Michelle Tillman](#)

VSF Docket No. 22-021-125917

Public Admonition With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

October 12, 2023

- Tillman, who is licensed in both Virginia and the District of Columbia, represented a client in a custody and visitation matter in DC.
- The client paid a \$2,500 advanced legal fee, but Tillman did not maintain any of the advanced fee into a trust account.
- Rule Violated: DC Rule 1.15(a) (Safekeeping Property).
- Terms: Read Lawyers and Other People’s Money and Legal Ethics Opinion 1606, four hours of CLE in trust accounting, trust account reviews by VSB investigator.

[In the Matter of Robert E. Walker, Jr.](#)

VSF Docket No. 23-060-127352

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

August 2, 2023

- For representation in a criminal matter, Walker charged a “one-time flat fee” of \$3,500. Later in the fee agreement, Walker said that the “retainer fee is non-refundable.” Walker deposited the advanced fee in his personal bank account.

- The client already had court-appointed counsel, but Walker said he would appear at an upcoming hearing. Walker got stuck in traffic and missed the hearing but refunded only \$2,000 of the \$3,500 advanced fee. Walker said he earned the remaining \$1,500 by communicating with the client but did not provide an accounting.
- Walker also did not maintain a client ledger.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.15(a)(1), (b)(3), (c)(2) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation).
- Terms: one year of probation, return of entire flat fee, six hours of CLE in legal ethics.

In the Matter of Melissa Lynch Freeman

VSB Docket No. 22-060-125379

Public Admonition With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

September 6, 2023

- Freeman accepted a \$2,000 advanced fee to represent a client on child custody matters. At the time, Freeman did not have a trust account. Despite this, Freeman's invoices reflected that she had transferred payments "from trust."
- When the representation concluded, Freeman still had \$760 in unearned funds. She agreed to represent the client regarding another matter but failed to do so and stopped communicating with her client. Freeman also failed to refund the unearned \$760.
- At the time of the disposition, Freeman was subject to an Impairment suspension.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a) (Communication); 1.15(a)(1), (b)(5) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation).
- Term: Pay \$760 in restitution to client.
- Alternate Sanction: Certification for Sanction Determination.

III. COMPETENCE/DILIGENCE/COMMUNICATION/GENERAL NEGLIGENCE

In the Matter of Astrid Lockwood

VSB Docket No. 22-041-126015

Revocation of Privilege to Practice Law in Virginia

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

August 25, 2023

- Lockwood was not admitted to practice law in Virginia, but she worked for the Legal Aid Justice Center in Virginia, where she practiced immigration law via her Minnesota law license.
- Lockwood failed to perform contracted-for services for several immigration clients. For example, three clients retained Lockwood to apply for protection under the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) policy, for which they were *prima facie* eligible. Lockwood failed to act on their applications promptly, and in the meantime, a Texas federal court issued a ruling preventing adjudication of new DACA applications.
- Lockwood also missed a deadline to file a client’s asylum application and failed to file for work authorizations for at least three other clients, causing those clients to lose actual or potential income.
- Lockwood represented to her supervisors that she had filed applications for clients when she had not.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a-b) (Diligence); 1.4(b) (Communication); 8.4(c) (Misconduct).
- Mitigating Factor: no prior disciplinary record.
- Aggravating Factors: dishonest or selfish motive, pattern of misconduct, multiple offenses, vulnerability of the victims, and substantial experience in the practice of immigration law.

In the Matters of Duncan Kenner Brent

VSB Docket Nos. 23-052-126721, 23-052-128128

One-Year and One-Day Suspension With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board

October 25, 2023

- In the first of two matters, Brent obtained a default judgment on a client’s behalf but then failed to move forward with a damages hearing, ultimately nonsuiting the case without re-filing it. Brent also failed to respond to several of the client’s requests for information.

- In the second case, Brent acknowledged a chiropractor's liens in four different cases and settled at least one of them. Brent asserted that he had attempted to pay the chiropractor, but she asserted that she never received payment.
- In both cases, Brent failed to respond to a bar subpoena duces tecum, resulting in administrative suspensions. Brent also failed to respond to the bar investigator's attempts to interview him.
- Rules Violated: 1.1 (Competence); 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a), (c) (Communication); 1.15(b)(4) (Safekeeping Property); 8.1(c-d) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters).
- Terms: produce trust accounting records from January 1, 2020 to the present.
- Alternative Sanction: additional three-year suspension.²

[In the Matter of Matthew Gregory Finley](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-021-129303

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before District Committee

March 26, 2024

- While representing a client in a divorce, Finley charged a \$4,000 flat fee that he represented was "earned upon receipt." The fee agreement also required the client to agree that legal fees and costs "shall not be bankrupted or claimed on any petition to a bankruptcy court or proceeding from credit relief."
- During the representation, Finley failed to serve responses to the opposing party's discovery, failed to file a motion to compel responses from the moving party, and otherwise failed to take action to move the case forward.
- Finley also failed to communicate with his client for approximately six months, despite receiving communications from his client.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-b) (Communication); 1.5(a) (Fees).
- Terms: Four hours of CLE in legal ethics.

[In the Matter of Jason Meyer Krumbein](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-033-126850

² On April 26, 2024, the Disciplinary Board imposed the alternate sanction of an additional three-year suspension.

90-Day Suspension
Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board
September 19, 2023

- Krumbein agreed to represent a client who was being sued by American Express. Although the case was set for trial, Krumbein did not appear for his appearance with the court or contact the attorney for American Express.
- When the client contacted Krumbein for an update, Krumbein did not respond. He also did not appear for the trial or otherwise take action on his client's behalf. Default judgments were entered against his client, and Krumbein did not inform his client of the default judgment or respond to subsequent attempts to contact him.
- In response to the bar complaint, Krumbein said that his client failed to provide him with documents and that he had attempted to settle the case but had not received a response from opposing counsel. This was untrue.
- Rules Violated 1.2(a) (Scope of Representation); 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-c) (Communication), 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); 8.1(a) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters).

[In the Matter of Michael Ben Gunlicks](#)

VSJ Docket No. 23-031-127969
Public Reprimand Without Terms
Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee
October 10, 2023

- While representing a client in a personal injury case, Gunlicks filed suit on the day the statute of limitations expired and did not request service of process until six days before the one-year deadline to complete service.
- Service was posted on the defendants, who did not respond to the suit. Gunlicks then filed a motion for default judgment.
- At a hearing on a motion for default judgment, the court's notes reflected that Gunlicks requested and was granted leave to amend the suit to add an additional count. Gunlicks was to serve the amended suit on the defendants and then set a new hearing date. However, Gunlicks did not take any additional action for 3.5 years and did not seek leave to withdraw as counsel.
- The court removed the case from the docket due to inactivity. Gunlicks told the bar investigator that he planned to move to reinstate the case and then

seek leave to withdraw as counsel. The client has filed a malpractice suit against Gunlicks.

- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a) (Communication); 1.16(a)(2-3) (Declining or Terminating Representation).

[In the Matters of Adam Turner Kronfeld](#)

VSB Docket Nos. 23-051-128718, 22-051-125097

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

December 7, 2023

- In the first of two matters, Kronfeld received discovery responses from his client but did not serve the responses until more than two months later, on the eve of a hearing on a motion to compel. The court awarded the opposing party \$3,378 in attorneys' fees because of discovery violations.
- In the second matter, Kronfeld also did not submit timely discovery responses. He signed an agreed order in which he agreed to serve responses and pay \$900 in attorneys' fees. He paid the \$900 but failed to supplement the discovery as ordered. As a result, the court entered an order precluding his client from introducing any undisclosed evidence. Kronfeld did not inform his client of these developments.
- The court then entered an order striking an affirmative defense asserted by Kronfeld's client. The client found out about this ruling from the Commissioner of Sale of her marital home.
- On the trial date, Kronfeld mistakenly believed that the trial had been continued. He admitted to his client that he had "dropped the ball" and convinced her to settle. He said he had notified his firm and their malpractice carrier.
- In fact, Kronfeld had not notified his law firm. When his firm learned of some of these events, Kronfeld was terminated.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a-c) (Diligence); 1.4(a-c) (Communication); 3.4(d-e) (Fairness to Opposing Party and Counsel); 8.4(c) (Misconduct).
- Terms: Three years of probation, nine hours of CLE in ethics, JLAP evaluation and contract.
- Alternative Sanction: Certification for Sanction Determination.

In the Matters of Patrick Michael McGraw

VSB Docket Nos. 22-080-124934, 22-080-126082

Public Reprimand Without Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

August 22, 2023

- In the first of two cases, McGraw was retained to handle a motion to modify spousal support based on change in economic circumstances. He accepted a \$5,000 advanced legal fee without specifying whether it was a flat fee. McGraw advised his client to begin paying a reduced amount without the court making any modification to the order. McGraw also failed to tell his client that his ex-wife had filed a motion to hold the client in contempt for failing to pay the full amount of spousal support. McGraw also failed to produce trust account records to the bar on a timely basis.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-b) (Communication); 1.5(b) (Fees); 1.15(b)(3), (c) (Safekeeping Property).
- In the second case, McGraw was hired to collect outstanding child support for a client. When the client asked for the status, McGraw said he was waiting for the court to act on filings he had made, when in fact McGraw had not made any filings. When the client learned McGraw had not filed anything, the client terminated McGraw and demanded a refund, which McGraw issued shortly after the client filed a bar complaint.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-b) (Communication); 8.4(c) (Misconduct).

In the Matter of Henry W. McLaughlin, III

VSB Docket No. 23-031-127527

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

July 6, 2023

- McLaughlin accepted a personal injury case but failed to request the client's medical bills and failed to file suit within the statute of limitations.
- McLaughlin did not tell his client that he had not filed suit until more than two years after the statute of limitations expired.
- Meanwhile, McLaughlin agreed to represent the same client in a second personal injury case. McLaughlin filed suit and the defendant did not

respond. Nonetheless, McLaughlin took no action in the second lawsuit for more than a year.

- After McLaughlin disclosed that he missed the statute of limitations in the first case, he offered to represent the client for free in a third case regarding another incident. However, McLaughlin and the client subsequently agreed to a 10% contingency fee.
- After bar complaints were filed, McLaughlin moved to withdraw in both matters.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.7(a)(2) (Conflict of Interest); 1.16(a) (Declining or Terminating Representation).
- Terms: Six hours of CLE in personal injury litigation.

[Virginia State Bar ex rel Fifth District Committee v. Michael Christopher Miller](#)

Case No. CL2023-13042

VSB Docket No. 22-051-125554

Public Reprimand

Hearing Before Three-Judge Court

November 29, 2023

- Miller represented a client in her divorce. To conclude the divorce, the court entered a final divorce decree, orders for distribution of the client's husband's Thrift Savings Plan ("TSP), and a garnishment order for the TSP.
- Although Miller provided the client with a copy of the final divorce decree, he did not give her copies of the other orders, did not send the orders to the appropriate plan administrators, and did not inform his client that he had not sent the orders to the administrators. Meanwhile, the client's ex-husband liquidated the TSP.
- Rule Violated: 1.4(a) (Communication).

In the Matter of James W. Hilldrup

VSB Docket No. 23-060-128458

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

August 22, 2023

- Hilldrup accepted a matter to address title issues regarding real property. After accepting the representation and receiving documentation from his

client, Hilldrup performed no work for six months and did not communicate with his client.

- After speaking with the client and agreeing to move the matter forward, Hilldrup still took no substantive action for another four months. The client terminated Hilldrup and demanded a refund, which Hilldrup issued three months after it was requested.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a) (Communication); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation).
- Terms: one year of probation, six hours of CLE in legal ethics.

[In the Matter of Erik M. Helbing](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-032-128108

Public Reprimand

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

November 16, 2023

- Helbing has a self-described “national law firm” that provides debt negotiation services. Helbing said that his firm maintained “of counsel” relationships with attorneys in about 40 states who provide legal services when needed.
- Helbing estimated he had 2,000 clients.
- A Virginia client hired Helbing’s firm. Although Helbing listed a Virginia lawyer on the retainer agreement, the Virginia lawyer did not sign it and said he was unaware that he was identified on the agreement.
- The client paid Helbing’s firm the fee in monthly payments, a significant portion of which Helbing took as his fee and placed in his operating account.
- During the eight months the client was paying Helbing’s firm, the client never spoke with an attorney. After continuing to receive collections notices, the client said she negotiated settlement of her debts herself.
- Helbing asserted that his firm is no longer taking on new clients because the firm was not profitable.
- Rules Violated: 1.1 (Competence); 1.3(a) (Diligence); 1.4(a-b) (Communication); 1.15(a)(1), (b)(4-5) (Safekeeping Property).

[In the Matters of Ryan Douglas Huttar](#)

VSB Docket Nos. 23-070-127074, 23-070-127981
Public Reprimand With Terms
Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee
September 28, 2023

- In the first of two matters, Huttar accepted a \$3,500 advanced legal fee for estate administration. Huttar failed to produce evidence that he deposited it into a trust account and failed to work on the administration of the estate. Huttar closed his law practice without notifying his client. After the client filed a bar complaint, Huttar attempted to issue a refund, but it was initially returned due to insufficient funds. Huttar reissued the refund via cashier's check.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a-b) (Diligence); 1.4(a) (Communication); 1.15(b)(3-5), (c)(4) (Safekeeping Property); 1.16(d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); 8.1(d) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters).
- The second matter arose from an overdraft of Huttar's trust account. Huttar did not keep sufficient records for his trust account, nor did he perform the required reconciliations. Huttar allowed an employee to issue trust account checks and issued draws to individuals not associated with his law firm.
- Rules Violated: 1.15(c)(1), (4), (d)(3) (Safekeeping Property); 5.3(b) (Responsibilities Regarding Nonlawyer Assistants).
- Terms: Read Lawyers and Other People's Money and Legal Ethics Opinion 1606, provide an accounting reflecting he had disbursed all client funds, complete professionalism court, probation for two years.

[In the Matter of James Randall Perkins](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-102-128665
Public Reprimand Without Terms
Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee
November 3, 2023

- In 2016, Perkins filed a partition lawsuit regarding a property dispute with the client's ex-husband.
- In March 2023, the client filed a bar complaint alleging that Perkins had failed to communicate with her about the lawsuit for about 17 months.
- Perkins initially did not respond to requests from intake counsel or bar counsel. Perkins responded only after a bar investigator contacted him.

- Perkins acknowledged he had failed to communicate properly with his client.
- Rules Violated: 1.4(a) (Communication); 8.1(c) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters).

[In the Matter of Thomas Joseph Robl](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-053-126874

Public Reprimand Without Terms

Agreed Disposition Before District Committee

November 13, 2023

- A stay-at-home-mother hired Robl to represent her in her divorce. Robl filed the divorce complaint without first allowing his client to review it, and the client asserted that the separation date was incorrect.
- The client urgently needed support payments on which to live. Robl filed a motion for pendente lite relief but withdrew it from the docket without rescheduling it. When asked why he did so, he said that he understood that the court no longer heard pendente lite motions, which was not true.
- Robl also failed to file timely responses to a counterclaim and to discovery.
- Rules Violated: 1.1 (Competence); 1.3(a) (Diligence).

[In the Matter of Thomas J. Robl](#)

VSB Docket No. 22-053-124907

Public Reprimand Without Terms

Hearing Before District Committee

August 23, 2023

- Robl represented a client who sought to collect an unpaid loan from her ex-husband.
- Robl testified that he planned to send the ex-husband a demand letter with a draft complaint, but he never did so.
- Nearly three years after he was retained, Robl filed suit against the ex-husband. The complaint contained a breach date that Robl acknowledged was incorrect but said was a typographical error. The complaint also listed an address for the ex-husband that Robl knew was not valid.
- Rule Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence).

[In the Matter of Robert Lee Jenkins, Jr.](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-042-130443

Public Admonition

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

February 9, 2024

- Jenkins qualified his law firm as the executor of an estate. Jenkins attempted to appoint the decedent's son as the attorney-in-fact for the estate and purported to assign all the executor's powers to the son. There was no authority for this, however.
- Jenkins filed the Inventory two months late. The Commissioner of Accounts notified Jenkins of deficiencies with the Inventory, but Jenkins neither responded to the Commissioner nor corrected the deficiencies. Jenkins also failed to timely file a required Affidavit of Notice.
- Jenkins then filed the First Account more than three months late, and only after the Commissioner issued a summons. The First Account also contained deficiencies. Jenkins also failed to timely file the Final Account, resulting in another summons.
- Although the Commissioner asked the court to remove Jenkins's law firm as fiduciary, the firm was not removed and, as of the date of the subcommittee's determination, the issues with the Commissioner were nearly resolved.

[In the Matter of Thomas Charles Mason, III](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-032-128934

Public Reprimand

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

January 10, 2024

- In a personal injury case, Mason failed to respond to defense counsel's discovery on time and failed to respond to a follow-up letter seeking the responses. Mason then failed to file a written opposition to a motion to compel and failed to appear for the motion to compel hearing.
- After his client was ordered to respond to the discovery within 15 days, Mason still did not provide discovery responses by the deadline. Mason responded to the discovery only after defense counsel filed a motion to dismiss for failure to comply with the court's order.

- After Mason did not provide a release that defense counsel requested, defense counsel then filed a second motion to compel. Mason did not appear for the hearing on the second motion to compel either, and it was granted.
- Mason did not file timely expert disclosures for his client. Defense counsel moved to dismiss, but the court extended the deadline for Mason to file the disclosure. An expert Mason disclosed was ultimately excluded.
- Mason attempted to withdraw from the representation, but the court would not allow it. Mason ultimately settled the case and waived his attorney's fee.
- Rules Violated: 1.3(a) (Diligence); 3.4(d-e) (Fairness to Opposing Party and Counsel).

IV. UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE OF LAW

[In the Matter of Nema Sayadian](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-053-128258

Consent to Revocation

December 27, 2023

- Sayadian, who was not barred in Virginia, maintained an office in Virginia. He was affiliated with a Virginia attorney whose license was suspended.
- When the Virginia lawyer's license was suspended, Sayadian was representing at least eight cases in Virginia matters. Sayadian was not admitted pro hac vice and did not retain substitute local counsel until several months after the original Virginia lawyer's license was suspended.
- Sayadian also signed and filed a summons with the Virginia court.

[In the Matter of John Vena, II](#)

VSB Docket No. 22-051-124531

Five-Year Suspension of Privilege to Practice Law in Virginia

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

May 19, 2023

- Vena, who was licensed to practice law in Connecticut only, appeared in the Fairfax County Circuit Court with a client of his law firm. Vena stood beside the client when the case was called, announced himself as "John Vena on behalf of the Plaintiff," and said he represented the client. The presiding judge determined Vena was not barred in Virginia and filed a bar complaint.

- Vena “repeatedly interrupted other parties and the Board, spoke while other parties were speaking, made rude and disrespectful comments while others were speaking, cursed at one witness, and continuously demonstrated contempt and disrespect for Bar Counsel and the Chair. Although repeatedly warned, the Respondent would not cooperate with requests to maintain decorum and respectful conduct during the hearing.”
- Rules Violated: 5.5(c) (Unauthorized Practice of Law); 8.4(b-c) (Misconduct).
- Aggravating Factors: bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceeding, deceptive practices during the disciplinary process, refusal to acknowledge the wrongful nature of his conduct, substantial experience in the practice of law.

[In the Matter of Denis Charles Englisby](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-032-128726

Three-Year Suspension

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

January 26, 2024

- Englisby’s license to practice law was suspended for two years in November 2022.
- While Englisby’s license was suspended, he attempted to collect an allegedly unpaid legal fee owed to Englisby’s son, Mark Englisby.
- Although Englisby’s original effort to collect the debt occurred just before Mark Englisby’s death, Englisby continued to attempt to collect the debt after Mark Englisby died, even though a Receiver had been appointed for Mark Englisby’s practice.
- When attempting to collect the debt, Englisby used invoices with the letterhead of “Englisby & Slone” and included remittance envelopes addressed to “Denis C. Englisby, Esq.” On one of the communications, Englisby told Mark Englisby’s former client that if he did not begin paying the debt, “I will have to sue you in May.”
- During the hearing, Englisby claimed that he was operating as a paralegal when he was attempting to collect the alleged debt on his son’s behalf.
- Rules Violated: 3.4(j) (Fairness to Opposing Party and Counsel); 5.5(c) (Unauthorized Practice of Law); 8.4(a-c) (Misconduct).

- Aggravating Factors: prior disciplinary record, multiple offenses, seriousness of recent violations, substantial experience, lack of remorse, refusal to acknowledge wrongful nature of conduct.

[In the Matter of Patrick Lynn Edwards](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-000-128305

60-Day Suspension

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

July 14, 2023

- Edwards was suspended for failing to respond to a subpoena *duces tecum* issued by the bar. Edwards was required to comply with the requirements of the Rules of Court, Part 6, § IV, ¶ 13-29, which include notifying his clients, opposing counsel, and judges of his suspension and providing the bar with proof that he had given the required notice.
- Edwards failed to advise certain clients, opposing counsel, and presiding judges of his suspension. He also failed to file proof of compliance with the bar.
- Aggravating factors: prior discipline, bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceedings, vulnerability of victim.
- Mitigating factor: absence of dishonest or selfish motive.

[Virginia State Bar ex rel Third District, Section III Committee v. Troy Bowlin](#)

VSB Docket No. 22-033-123299

Case No. CL23-005694

Public Reprimand

Agreed Disposition Before Three-Judge Court

February 14, 2024

- Bowlin, who is not admitted in Virginia, was retained to represent a client regarding an alleged sexual assault that took place in a Virginia jail. Bowlin and the client agreed to a 40% contingency fee. The agreement did not disclose that Bowlin was not licensed in Virginia or contemplate local counsel.
- After he was retained, Bowlin said that he tried to reach the client and could not, so he closed the file. However, months later a paralegal at Bowlin's firm successfully communicated with the client regarding a medical release.
- Bowlin provided his client with a form complaint to be filed in federal court. Bowlin said that the "facts you provided were placed on this form at your

request. We have not made any legal representations or interpretations and have not charged you any fee for this gratuitous act.”

- The client filed the complaint pro se and the defendants moved to dismiss. The client told the court that Bowlin had drafted the complaint. The court issued a show cause order to Bowlin, but Bowlin was not served and did not appear. Complainant ultimately hired new counsel.
- Rules Violated: 1.3 (a-c) (Diligence); 1.4(a-c), (e) (Communication); 1.5(a) (Fees); 1.15(a)(1), (d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); 5.5(c) (Unauthorized Practice of Law).

V. TERMS VIOLATION

[In the Matter of Charles Gregory Phillips](#)

VS B Docket No. 23-000-129036

Consent to Revocation

October 17, 2023

- Pursuant to a prior suspension order, Phillips was required to provide bar counsel with a list of current clients with active matters and to provide written notice of his suspension to all clients, opposing counsel, and presiding judges in pending litigation.
- Phillips did not provide the bar with a list of clients, and two clients notified the bar that Phillips had not notified them of his suspension.
- Phillips consented to imposition of the alternative sanction, which was revocation.

[In the Matter of William Hale Thompson](#)

VS B Docket No. 24-000-130322

Six-Month Suspension

Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board

December 11, 2023 (effective January 1, 2024)

- Pursuant to a prior public reprimand with terms, Thompson was required to take six hours of CLE in trust accounting or law office management, and to have an accountant review his recordkeeping and certify compliance with Rule 1.15.
- Thompson did not submit documentation of the CLE.

- Although Thompson engaged an accountant, the accountant determined that Thompson's records were not in compliance.
- Thompson agreed that he failed to comply with the terms of the prior disposition.

VI. CRIMINAL OR DELIBERATELY WRONGFUL CONDUCT

[In the Matter of Mark Alan Black](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-131157

Consent to Revocation

February 15, 2024

- Black pleaded guilty to conspiracy to produce child pornography and coercion.

[In the Matter of Joshua Nathaniel DeBold](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-131274

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

March 22, 2024

- DeBold, a former prosecutor for the Department of Justice, pleaded guilty to attempted assault on a law enforcement officer.

[In the Matter of Patrick Lynn Edwards](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-130799

Consent to Revocation

February 16, 2024

- Edwards pleaded guilty to burglary, grand larceny, and credit card fraud.

[In the Matter of Matt Clay Pinsker](#)

VSB Docket No. 21-033-122719

One-Year Suspension

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

November 20-21, 2023

- While serving as an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, Pinsker provided student internships at his law practice.
- One of his female student interns helped Pinsker move his office and drank alcohol with him. The next morning, the intern woke up alone in a closet in the new office. The intern did not remember having sexual relations with

Pinsker, but Pinsker later admitted to police that they did, although he claimed the sex was consensual.

- Pinsker entered an Alford plea to misdemeanor sexual battery and was sentenced to 12 months incarceration.
- Additional evidence revealed that Pinsker had inappropriate sexual conversations with two of his interns, including the intern with whom he had sex.
- At the hearing, Pinsker “continue[d] to maintain that he has been falsely accused, extorted and that he has felt the need for revenge.”
- Rule Violated: 8.4(b) (Misconduct).
- Aggravating Factors: selfish motive, pattern of misconduct, refusal to acknowledge wrongful nature of conduct, vulnerable victim.
- Mitigating Factors: no prior disciplinary record, only 10 years of experience, served five months of 12-month sentence.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS

[In the Matters of Robert Edwin Dean, II](#)

VSB Docket Nos. 23-080-126978, 23-080-128558

Consent to Revocation

July 31, 2023

- Dean met his client’s girlfriend’s sister (AZ) at a bond hearing. Dean invited AZ to meet him at his office twice, for what AZ believed was a job interview. During the second meeting, Dean offered to provide AZ with gifts and cash in exchange for sexual favors. After AZ declined and left the office, Dean sent her \$500 via CashApp. Dean later offered AZ \$1,000 for a massage.
- A second matter involved allegations that Dean was engaging in inappropriate sexual relationships with clients.

[In the Matter of Kelley Elizabeth Clements Keller](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-129579

One-Year and One-Day Suspension

Agreed Disposition Before Disciplinary Board

October 23, 2023

- Reciprocal disciplinary matter from Pennsylvania.
- Regarding her representation of six different clients, Keller stipulated to violating Pennsylvania rules regarding diligence, communication, fees, safekeeping property, terminating representation, unauthorized practice of law, and misconduct. Keller also stipulated to failing to provide proper notice of her administrative suspension and engaging in the unauthorized practice of law.
- Keller agreed to a one-year and one-day suspension in Pennsylvania, and she consented to the imposition of reciprocal discipline in Virginia.

[In the Matter of Denise Ann Daniels](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-000-129642

30-Day Suspension

Hearing Before Disciplinary Board

October 27, 2023

- Reciprocal disciplinary matter from District of Columbia Bar, which suspended Daniels for 30 days but required her to prove her fitness to practice before she could be readmitted.
- An attorney-in-fact notified the bar that Daniels was not in a position to contest the discipline. Because Daniels was unable to show cause why the same discipline should not be imposed, the Disciplinary Board imposed reciprocal discipline.

[In the Matter of Paul Robert Smollar](#)

VSB Docket No. 22-051-124275

Public Admonition With Terms

Hearing Before District Committee

July 26, 2023

- While representing a client in a custody proceeding, Smollar was served with discovery requests seeking medical records for his client. Smollar asked his client for responsive documents, but the client did not provide them.
- Opposing counsel issued subpoenas *duces tecum* for the medical records. After the subpoenas were issued, the client produced medical records to Smollar, of which Smollar conducted a “cursory and partial review.”

- Smollar moved to quash the subpoenas. The court denied the motion, finding that the records were “critical” to the proceedings. Nonetheless, Smollar did not produce them.
- Rule Violated: 3.4(e) (Fairness to Opposing Party and Counsel).

[In the Matter of Steven M. Oser](#)

VSB Docket No. 23-010-126950

Public Reprimand

Hearing Before District Committee

September 11, 2023

- While representing a client in a worker’s compensation claim against her employer, Oser called a representative of the employer and discussed the merits of the case.
- Oser said he called the client representative directly because he could not get in touch with the client’s attorney.
- Rule Violated: 4.2 (Communicating with Persons Represented by Counsel).

[In the Matter of John Edward Williams](#)

VSB Docket No. 24-041-129498

Public Reprimand

Agreed Disposition Before Subcommittee

February 20, 2024

- Williams charged a client \$1,890 for time spent responding to a bar complaint. Williams filed a lawsuit and obtained a default judgment against the client for a total of \$3,906.25, including the \$1,890 for responding to the bar complaint.
- In response to a question from Williams, the bar’s ethics hotline advised him that it was not appropriate to charge a client for responding to a bar complaint.
- The court granted the client’s subsequent motion to set aside the default judgment, and Williams filed a new lawsuit in which he no longer sought to recover for time spent responding to the bar complaint.
- Rule Violated: 1.5(a) (Fees).

Virginia State Bar ex rel Third District, Section III Committee v. Ernest M. Holleman, Jr.

VSB Docket No. 23-033-127783

Case No. CL 23-469

Public Reprimand With Terms

Agreed Disposition Before Three-Judge Court

January 23, 2024

- Even though he was not admitted in Arkansas, Holleman charged a client \$17,180.90 for basic legal research in connection with an Arkansas estate.
- In his written fee agreement, he purported to charge a contingency fee of 30% of a verdict or settlement, even though there was no possibility of a verdict or settlement in the estate matter.
- Rules Violated: Virginia and Arkansas Rules 1.5(a-c) (Fees); 8.4(b) (Misconduct).
- Terms: Holleman must stop taking new clients, stop all advertising, and take Retired status with the bar. Holleman was also required to refund \$17,180.90 to the client.
- Alternate Sanction: revocation.