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BEFORE THE DISCIPLINARY BOARD WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION DISCIPLINARY BOARD OF THE

SEP 1 0 2014

In re Public No. 14#00016 ANNE K. BLOCK

Lawyer (Bar No. 37640)

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND HEARING OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

On July 21, 2014 a hearing was held in accordance with Rule 10.13 of the Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct (ELC). Respondent Anne K. Block appeared telephonically at the hearing *pro se.* Linda Eide, Sr. Disciplinary Counsel (Disciplinary Counsel) appeared for the Washington State Bar Association (the Association). The hearing was held at the Washington State Bar Association, 1325 Fourth Avenue, Suite 600, Seattle, Washington.

#### I. FORMAL COMPLAINT

On February 14, 2014 the Association filed a Formal Complaint charging the Respondent with three courts of violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC):

COUNT 1 – By falsely certifying that no grievance investigation was pending when she attempted to resign, the Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c).

COUNT 2 - By failing to comply with the subpoena to produce records and/or by failing to appear at the deposition to provide testimony, the Respondent violated RPC8.4(1) by violating former ELC 1.5 and former ELC 5.5(c).

COUNT 3 – By representing to disciplinary counsel that she had noted motions for January 10, 2014 when she had neither filed nor noted such motions, the Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c).

## II. HEARING

Ms. Block had notified the association of a hearing loss and requested special accommodation at the hearing. The Association had given her several options and she chose to appear telephonically. Ms. Block answered the phone and immediately began with what she classified as an "a formal statement." She then stated there would be no hearing. The Hearing Officer began to put the introduction of the hearing on the record. The Respondent stated "this is illegal." The Respondent talked during the Hearing Officer's record and procedural history. The Hearing Officer asked the parties if there were any preliminary matters. Disciplinary counsel stated there were no preliminary matters. The Hearing Officer tried four times to interrupt the Respondent in her dialogue in order to ask her the same question. Ms. Block's comments could be clearly heard in the hearing room. Finally the Hearing Officer asked Disciplinary Counsel to begin her opening statement. At this point the volume was turned down very slightly so the court reporter could hear Disciplinary Counsel's opening statement. The Hearing Officer verified the Respondent as well as the court reporter could hear the speaker. *Record pg 32.* The Respondent spoke during Disciplinary Counsel's opening statement without pause.

The Hearing Officer then asked Ms. Block if she wanted to give an opening statement. She responded she had already given her statement that is part of the record as far as what the Washington State Bar here has done. The Hearing Officer then asked Disciplinary Counsel to begin her case. Respondent broke the connection at 9:22 a.m. The call was re-initiated to the same number that was used to initiate the hearing. A recording was reached verifying it was the correct number for the Respondent. I find the Respondent purposely discontinued the call in an effort to disrupt and/or terminate the hearing.

The hearing proceeded. Witnesses were sworn and presented testimony. Exhibits were admitted into evidence. Declarations were admitted according to ELC 10.13.

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Having considered the evidence and argument of counsel, the Hearing Officer makes the following findings of fact, conclusions of law and recommendation.

### III. FINDINGS OF FACT

The following facts were proven by a clear preponderance of the evidence:1

- 1. Respondent was admitted to the practice of law in Washington on July 10, 2006 and has no prior discipline.
- 2. John Pennington filed a Grievance Against a Lawyer with the Washington State Bar Association Office of Disciplinary Counsel (ODC) on May 22, 2013 alleging a pattern of harassment and intimidation against him and his family. Ex 2 He filed multiple supplemental information alleging post-grievance retaliation on May 30, 2013, June 4, 2013, June 10, 2013, June 20, 2013, July 2, 2013 and July 11, 2013. Ex 3,4,6,8,9,10.
- 3. The Respondent filed her response to the grievance on July 10, 2013. Ex 5. She filed supplemental information on June 19, 2013, July 2, 2013, September 3, 2013, September 7, 2013 and September 16, 2013. Ex 7,11,12,13
- 4. On November 15, 2013 Office of Disciplinary Counsel issued a Notice of Intent to Take Deposition and Subpoena duces tecum requiring the Respondent to appear on December 6, 2013 to testify under oath and to bring certain documents regarding the Pennington grievances and the allegations made in the supplemental filings by the Respondent. Ex 15, Ex 16
- 5. On November 21, 2013 Office of Disciplinary Counsel affected personal service of the Notice of Intent to Take Deposition and Subpoena duces tecum by personally serving Respondent's co-resident, Noel Frederick, at 313 Shelby Street, Gold Bar, Washington. Ex 17. ELC 4.1(b)(3)(B)(i)

ELC 10.14(b)

- 6. On November 24, 2013 Respondent acknowledged receipt of the subpoena but stated she had not received a copy of the investigation file. Ex 19. Disciplinary counsel responded by letter dated November 26, 2013 informing the Respondent no discovery is permitted in the investigative phase per ELC 3.1 & 3.2
- 7. On December 3, 2013 the Respondent notified Disciplinary Counsel she would not be appearing on Friday, December 6, 2013 for the deposition since she had canceled her membership, believed the deposition and subpoena duces tecum violated her First Amendment rights and since she had resigned, the association did not have jurisdiction.
  Ex24
- On December 6, 2013 Respondent did not appear for the 9:30 a.m. deposition.
   (Statement on the Record). Ex 31 I find the Respondent intentionally and knowingly did not appear at the scheduled deposition.
- 9. On December 2, 2013 Respondent attempted to resign her WSBA membership effective immediately by email and letter to WSBA, Membership Changes. Ex 21.
- 10. Also on December 2, 2013 Respondent sent the WSBA a notarized form entitled, Voluntary Resignation from Membership in the Washington State Bar Association, stating she intended to voluntarily resign from the WSBA. She certified "that there is no disciplinary investigation or proceeding pending against me and that I have no personal knowledge that the filing of a grievance of substance is imminent". A footnote on the form stated if there is a disciplinary investigation then pending against the member, or if the member had knowledge that the filing of a grievance of substance was imminent, resignation was permitted only under the provisions of the Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct. The Respondent added the following language to the footnote: "So long as the issue being investigated is pertains to a former client". Ex 21
- 11. The WSBA did not accept the Respondent's resignation. Ex 202

- 12. On December 3, 2013 Disciplinary Counsel responded that under the WSBA Bylaws, a member could not resign when any grievance is pending but that the Respondent could resign in lieu of discipline as provided in the ELC 9.3 but failing that disciplinary counsel expected to see the Respondent on December 6, 2013 for the deposition. Ex 24. The Respondent responded by stating she would seek a protective order and injunction for violation of her 1<sup>st</sup>. Amendment rights. Ex 25. The Respondent did not elect to resign under ELC 9.3. Matsamoto Declaration P.32
- 13. Respondent's deposition was scheduled for December 6, 2014. On December 5, 2013, Respondent emailed disciplinary counsel that she was "filing a couple of motions today and a copy will be provided to you." Ex 27. Later Respondent emailed that she had "attached motions" and "a copy of the injunction and related motions" purportedly noted for January 10, 2014, had been mailed to disciplinary counsel. The email message included no attachments. Ex 28
  - 14. On December 6, 2013 at 5:34 a.m. Disciplinary counsel emailed the Respondent that no motion was attached to her December 5, 2013 email and she expected to see her at the deposition scheduled at 9:30 a.m. that morning. Ex 29.
- 15. On December 6, 2013 at 3:32 p.m. Respondent's paralegal emailed disciplinary counsel, "Ms. Block's protective order and motion for injunctive relief. A copy has been placed in the mail." One motion had a Snohomish County Superior Court caption and the other motion had a federal district court caption. Neither motion included a case number. Ex 32.
- 16. The Respondent never filed either motion. The Respondent did not note either motion in either court for January 10, 2014. Ex 34. I find the Respondent intended the unfiled motions to mislead the Association and suspend the deposition and subpoena duces tecum.

- 17. On January 16, 2014 the Respondent emailed her willingness to draft a protective order if the Association would stipulate to a protective order. Ex 35 Disciplinary counsel responded asking for clarification on the following day. Ex 36 On January 30, 214 the Respondent asked Disciplinary counsel for a new deposition date. Ex 41. Disciplinary counsel responded on the same day with some suggested dates and times. Ex 42 On February 14, 2014 the Respondent stated she had received no new dates for the deposition. Ex 47 Disciplinary sent another copy by email and 1<sup>st</sup>. class mail. Ex 48, 49.
- 18. The Respondent never agreed to a new deposition date and the ODC never issued a new Notice of Intent to Take Deposition or Subpoena Duces Tecum. MD 32
- 19. On February 14, 2014 the Office of Disciplinary Counsel filed a Formal Complaint against the Respondent. Bar File #2

## IV. CONCLUSION OF LAW

- Count 1 Based on Findings of Fact 9 through 12, Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c) by engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation when attempting to resign from the Washington State Bar Association.
- Count 2 Based on Findings of Fact 4 through 8, Respondent violated RPC 8.4(I) by violating a duty imposed under the Rules for Enforcement of Lawyer Conduct in connection with a disciplinary matter.
- Count 3 Based on Findings of Fact 13 through 18, Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c) by engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation when falsely notifying the Disciplinary Counsel she had filed for a protective order.

## V. PRESUMPTIVE SANCTIONS

1. A presumptive sanction must be determined for each ethical violation. *In re* Anschell, 149 Wn.2d 484, 69 P.3d 844,852 (2003). The following standards of the American Bar

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Association's *Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions* (1991 ed. & Feb. 1992 Supp.) are presumptively applicable in this case.

2. When multiple ethical violations are found, the "ultimate sanction imposed should at least be consistent with the sanction for the most serious instance of misconduct among a number of violation." In re Petersen, 120 Wn.2d 833, 854, 846 P.2d 1330 (1993).

The hearing officer should consider four factors to recommend the appropriate sanction:

- 1) the duty violated
- 2) the lawyer's mental state
- 3) the potential or actual injury caused by the lawyer's misconduct; and,
- 4) the existence of aggravating or mitigating factors.

Count 1 - By falsely certifying that no grievance investigation was pending when she attempted to resign, the Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c).

a. Duty violated.

The Respondent violated a duty to maintain the integrity of the profession and a duty to the general public by engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud or to interfere with the administration of justice by falsifying information on the form to resign. The public expects a lawyer to exhibit high standards of honesty and integrity.

b. Mental state.

A lawyer breaches an ethical duty knowingly when the lawyer acts with conscious awareness of the nature or attendant circumstances of her conduct but without a conscious objective to accomplish a particular result. A lawyer acts intentionally when the Lawyer acts with the conscious objective or purpose to accomplish a particular result. In this matter I find Respondent acted intentionally by adding specific language to negate the restriction of having no grievance pending in order to maintain she had resigned from the Association.

c. Potential or Actual Injury caused.

Respondent used the fiction of having resigned from the Association to avoid the Notice of Deposition and Subpoena duces tecum. The grievant, Mr. Pennington set forth his grievances and the Respondent replied with a multitude of allegations against him and his family. The Respondent had no intention of testifying in a deposition or answering interrogatories regarding the allegations she made against the Grievant and others. Lawyers are officers of the court and held to the highest ethical standards. The public is entitled to a fair and candid investigation into allegation of lawyer misconduct and without that candid investigation the public questions the integrity of the entire legal system.

## d. Presumed Sanction -

The presumed sanction for an intentional violation of 8.4(c) by engaging in the dishonest misrepresentation of Respondent's certification to resign from the Washington State Bar Association is disbarment under 5.11(b)<sup>2</sup>, because, as in this case, the misconduct seriously adversely reflects on the lawyer's fitness to practice law.

<u>Count 2</u> - By failing to comply with the subpoena to produce records and by failing to appear at the deposition to provide testimony, the Respondent violated RPC 8.4(I) by violating former ELC 1.5 and former ELC 5.5(c).

## a. Duty violated -

Respondent violated a duty to maintain the integrity of the profession imposed by former ELC 1.5 and former ELC 5.5(c) by failing to comply with the duty to produce records and by failing to appear at a deposition set according to ELC 5.5. This prevented the Association from investigating an active grievance and responding to the serious concerns of a member of the public which is a violation of 8.4(l).

## b. Mental state.

Respondent represented to the Association she had filed a protective order in state and federal court in order to intentionally avoid the deposition and subpoena scheduled for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> ABA Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions

December 6, 2013. The Respondent had made specific allegations against the Grievant and others and demonstrated no intention of substantiating those claims.

# c. Potential or actual injury.

The practice of law is a self-governed profession. A lawyer must abide by rules and procedure contained in the RPC which shape the administration of justice in this state and instill confidence in the legal system for other lawyers and the public. Respondent refused to abide by this rule yet noted up several depositions and issued subpoena duces tecum of her own causing actual injury to the profession.

# d. Presumptive sanction.

The presumptive sanction for an intentional violation of RPC 8.4(I) is disbarment under 7.1<sup>3</sup>.

Count 3 – By misrepresenting to disciplinary counsel that she had noted motions for January 10, 2014 when she had neither filed nor noted such motions, the Respondent violated RPC 8.4(c).

# a. Duty violates.

Respondent failed to meet the expectations of the legal professional by engaging in deceitful conduct by falsely representing she had noted motions for protective orders to quash the subpoena and deposition, a violation of RPC 8.4(c).

## b. Mental state.

Respondent intentionally sent completed but not noted or filed motion for protective orders in both state and federal courts on the day of the scheduled deposition. She purposely did not appear as required. The respondent acted in her own interests and without regard to the honesty and candor owed by a Lawyer to the professional.

# c. Potential or actual injury caused.

 $<sup>^3</sup>$  id

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John Pennington filed a grievance against a lawyer practicing in the state of Washington. Respondent spent the next months responding to the grievant with professional and personal attacks against him and his family. She was asked by the Association to verify her responses and refused to do so by feigning legal documents to deny further investigation. These actions cause serious harm to the legal system in general and to Mr. Pennington specifically. It is my opinion Respondent did actual harm to this grievant and the investigation and this constitutes the most serious of the charges in this matter.

d. Presumptive sanction.

The presumptive sanction for intentionally violating RPC(c) is disbarment as outlined in 5.11(b)4

Also, or in the alternative. In re Disciplinary Proceeding Against Whitt, 149 Wn.2d 707, 719, 72 P.3d 173 (2003), applies ABA Standard 7.0 when, as in this case, the lawyer engages in dishonest conduct to circumvent the disciplinary process. Under this analysis the presumptive sanction is disbarment under ABA Standard 7.1. The benefit the Respondent hoped to obtain was escaping any potential sanction. Lawyer intransigence and stonewalling that prevents uncovering wrongdoing and protecting the public, threatens lawyer self-regulation and merits disbarment. In re Disciplinary Proceeding Against Scannel, 169 Wn.723, 745, 239 P.3d 332 (2010).

Based on the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law and application of the ABA Standards, the appropriate presumptive sanction is disbarment.

- 3. Existence of aggravating or mitigating factors.
  - I find the following matters are aggravating factors:
  - Bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceeding. A.

- on March 18, 2014 the Hearing Officer advised the Respondent that she "cannot accept exparte communication of any kind." Ex 59 Despite this directive from the Hearing Officer, the Respondent persisted in sending emails to the Hearing Officer. See Matsumoto Declaration Sec.40,41. In another email, the Respondent admitted that she had attempted to call the Hearing Officer 25 times in one week. Ex 146. I find Respondent's continued attempts of exparte communication with a hearing officer despite an explicit order to the contrary are an intentional bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceeding.
- On April 9, 2014, the Clerk served the Hearing Officer's Notice of Scheduling Conference set for April 23, 2014. BF 32. On April 22, 2014 the Respondent emailed the Clerk, Hearing Officer and Disciplinary Counsel that she had an "expedited administrative hearing" the next morning and would not be available for the scheduling conference. BF 37. The Hearing Officer reset the scheduling conference for May 7, 2014. BF 38. On April 25, 2014 the Respondent emailed the Hearing Officer and the Clerk that she was out-of-state in a remote place but would try to get to an area with available cell service for the scheduling conference. BR 39. On May 6, 2014 the Respondent emailed the Hearing Officer, Clerk and disciplinary counsel that she was "out of the state on business and will more than likely be available via telephone after 11 a.m. CST. Ex 74. On May 7, 2014 the Hearing Officer entered a second continuance of the scheduling conference noting that the number listed with the WSBA was not a working number and the Respondent did not answer the 206-326-9933 number listed on previous pleadings. The scheduling conference was reset for May 20, 2014 with the provision there would be no additional continuances. BF 45. On May 19, 2014 the Respondent emailed the Hearing Officer and disciplinary

counsel to set conditions for her participation in the scheduling conference. Ex 77 On May 20, 2104 the Hearing Officer could not reach the Respondent at the number she had provided and set the hearing for July 21, 2014. BF 47. On May 26, 2014 the Respondent emailed the Hearing Officer that she would be "coming for your telephone records." Ex 80. I find the Respondent's repeated delay of the scheduling conference as well as her failure to appear at the telephonic hearing constitutes a bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceeding.

- The Respondent insisted throughout these proceedings that no hearings will be recorded despite disciplinary counsel's explanation that all hearings are required to be recorded as set forth in ELC 10.13(d). Ex 84,86,87,169,170,182,201
- Respondent filed volumes of documents unrelated to the pending charges set forth in the formal complaint. These documents set forth accusations and information regarding the grievant and his family, Snohomish County officials and officials from the city of Gold Bar. Ex 90, 92, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102,100,103-109,115,126,130,133,150,154,157,171,188. The Respondent filed no supporting documents in defense of the allegations set forth in the Formal Complaint. I find the Respondent attempted to overwhelm and mislead the disciplinary process as well as use the disciplinary forum to make accusations against the grievant and others she had no intention of substantiating.
- On May 29, 2014 Respondent emailed the Hearing Officer, disciplinary counsel and Sean Reay from the Snohomish County Prosecutor's Office regarding her plans to depose the grievant. EX87. In February 2014, the Respondent filed suit against the City of Gold Bar, the grievant and others in United States District Court for the Western District of Washington under Case No. 14cv00235 RAJ, Block v Snohomish County et. Al., alleging 42 USC 1983 violations. See BF 67.

Using the disciplinary proceeding cause number, the Respondent served a Notice of Intent to Take Deposition of John Pennington and Subpoena Duces Tecum on the Snohomish County Auditor. Ex 96. The Respondent did not seek Hearing Officer approval for such discovery as required by ELC 10.11(c). Matsumoto Declaration Sec. 44. Disciplinary counsel moved for a protective order which was granted. BF 53, 56. I find the Respondent used the disciplinary cause number to schedule a deposition without using the mandatory discovery procedures under the ELC and based on its timing for use in another legal matter.

- The Respondent continued to attempt to engage the Hearing Officer in exparte communication. Ex 86. In late May 2014 she began emailing the Hearing Officer with "evidence" or "exhibits." Ex 90. The May 22, 2014 scheduling order, BF #47, page 2 specifically prohibited the parties from transmitting exhibits to the Hearing Officer. The Respondent continued to do so. Matsumoto Declaration Sec 41. On June 1, 2014 disciplinary counsel emailed the Respondent to remind her that the scheduling order specifically prohibited sending exhibits to the hearing officer. Ex 120. By this time the Respondent had sent about two dozen such emails. Ex 87, 90, 94, 95, 97-110, 113-119. The Respondent persisted and sent dozens more such emails. Ex 121, 122, 125, 126, 133-141, 145, 150, 151, 154, 155, 157-161, 163, 164, 166, 168-171, 176, 177, 179, 182-186, 189-192, 194 and 195. I find the exparte transmittal of exhibits and other emails without following the proper procedure was a deliberate attempt to obstruct the disciplinary process.
- B. Dishonest or selfish motive.

John Pennington, the grievant, filed a complaint. The Respondent made multiple allegations against him and many others. She attempted to obstruct the disciplinary process repeatedly as set forth above. She refused to respond directly to the allegations made in the formal complaint, BF 16. instead diverting her issues to the grievant, Snohomish County officials, WSBA staff, ODC staff, the Hearing Officer, the Chief Hearing Officer and City of Gold Bar officials. I find the Respondent never intended to be held accountable for the original allegations made against her by the Grievant and for the obstruction to the disciplinary process. I find the Respondent's actions in this matter to be intentional and to show a profound disregard for the basic principles of the legal system and of the level of skill and professionalism expected of Lawyers and deserved by the people of the state of Washington.

# C. Multiple charges.

The formal complaint alleged three violations of RPC 8.4. I find these three charges were proven by a clear preponderance of the evidence.

- D. Failure to acknowledge the wrongful nature of her conduct.
  - The Respondent has admitted no wrong in this action. She has personally attacked the WSBA and Linda Eide, Disciplinary Counsel. Ex 18, 88, 126, 135, 140, 153, 186, 190. The Respondent has threatened Linda Eide Ex 158, 159, 164, 176, 177 and Julie Shankland, Assistant General Counsel Ex 175. She has threatened Allison Sato with criminal action. Ex 193, 204. I find the Respondent's accusations and threats against the WSBA and its employees extremely unprofessional. The Respondent has never acknowledged any wrongdoing. She has exhibited no remedial action in this matter but instead has personally and professionally attacked WSBA employees.
  - The Respondent has shown profound disrespect for the WSBA, disciplinary counsel, Association staff and this Hearing Officer throughout this proceeding.

She has been accusatory and sarcastic. Her use of extreme foul language and threats is unprecedented to this writer. Ex 175, 193, 203. The Respondent has throughout, as set forth in this findings, conclusion and recommendations shown a complete lack of respect for the policy and procedures set forth by the legal profession and the publics' expectations for professional attorneys in the state of Washington.

The only mitigating factor is the absence of a prior disciplinary offense.

#### VI. RECOMMENDED SANCTION

I recommend disbarment.

Dated this 6<sup>th</sup>. Day of September, 2014.

Linda D. O'Dell,

**Hearing Officer** 

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that I caused a copy of the delivered to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel and to be mailed espondent/Respondent's Counsel postage prepaid on the

Clerk Coursel to the Disciplinary Board

And sent via anail: c