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June 11, 2018

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**BY FIRST-CLASS AND
CERTIFIED MAIL NO. 9414 7266 9904 2091 4464 40**

Stephanie Marie Ruiter, Esquire
c/o Rani Rolston, Esquire
Alan Lescht and Associates, P.C.
1050 17th Street, N.W.
Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036

In re Stephanie M. Ruiter, Esquire
(D.C. Bar Registration No. 1012323)
Bar Docket No. 2014-D331

Dear Ms. Ruiter:

The Office of Disciplinary Counsel has completed its investigation of this matter. We find that your conduct reflected a disregard of certain ethics standards under the Maryland Attorneys' Rules of Professional Conduct (the MD Rules).¹ We are issuing you this Informal Admonition pursuant to District of Columbia Court of Appeals Rules Governing the Bar (D.C. Bar R.) XI, §§ 3, 6, and 8.

We conclude that you violated MD Rule 1.1.

Disciplinary Counsel's Investigation

We docketed this investigation after two clients of your former law firm alleged that your law firm mishandled their personal injury trial arising from an automobile accident in late 2011. The clients retained your firm in September 2012, and, after attempts at settlement were unsuccessful, the firm transferred their matter to its litigation department. You drafted a lawsuit that was signed and filed by your supervising attorney – the head of the litigation department – on the clients' behalf. You were intermittently involved in the case until it was assigned to you to try. You had handled some aspects of

¹ Because the case was brought in a Maryland state court, pursuant to District of Columbia Rule of Professional Conduct 8.5(b)(1) (choice of law), the Maryland Rules apply.

discovery before getting the file back to prepare for trial, but forgot or overlooked certain details that proved critical to proving the case and establishing all the damages. As a result, the clients were unable to prove causation at trial and lost. You concede that you made mistakes in the representation.

Legal Analysis

Based upon our investigation of this matter, we conclude that you violated MD Rule 1.1, which state, that "[A]n attorney shall provide competent representation to a client. Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation." MD Ct. Rule 19-301.1. We conclude that you did not provide your clients with competent representation in that you failed to marshal all the evidence necessary to prove their claim in Maryland and establish their full damages.

Mitigating Factors

We have determined an Informal Admonition is appropriate rather than instituting formal proceedings because (1) you have taken responsibility for your actions by accepting it, (2) you have no prior discipline, (3) that the prejudice to your clients were remediated by settlement of any malpractice action they were considering (after they were advised to consult independent counsel), (4) you were a relatively new practitioner, (5) you have expressed remorse for your mistakes, and (6) within one year of this letter's date, you agree to take a continuing legal education course approved by Disciplinary Counsel designed to prevent similar mistakes in the future.

Disciplinary Counsel believes that the settlement with your clients combined with your commitment to avoid further ethics problems by undertaking continuing legal education to avoid making similar mistakes, sufficiently discharges the disciplinary system's obligations to protect the integrity of the court, the consuming public, and deter similar misconduct by you or other practitioners.

Conclusion

Disciplinary Counsel issues this Informal Admonition pursuant to D.C. Bar R. XI, §§ 3, 6, and 8, and it is public when issued. Attached to this letter of Informal Admonition is a statement of its effect and your right to have it vacated and have a formal hearing before a hearing committee.

If you change your mind and would like to have a formal hearing, you must submit a written request to the Office of Disciplinary Counsel, with a copy to the Board on Professional Responsibility, within 14 days of the date of this letter, unless Disciplinary Counsel grants an extension of time.

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If you request a hearing, this Informal Admonition will be vacated, and Disciplinary Counsel will institute formal charges pursuant to D.C. Bar R. XI, § 8(c). The case will then be assigned to a hearing committee, and a hearing will be scheduled by the Board on Professional Responsibility. D.C. Bar R. XI, § 8(d).

A hearing could result in a recommendation to dismiss the charges against you or a recommendation for a finding of culpability, in which case the sanction recommended by the hearing committee is not limited to an Informal Admonition.

Truly yours,

Hamilton P. Fox, III
Disciplinary Counsel

HPF:TMT:adlt

Encl.: Attachment to Letter of Informal Admonition

cc: SB and IW