

THIS REPORT IS NOT A FINAL ORDER OF DISCIPLINE*

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT OF APPEALS
BOARD ON PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
AD HOC HEARING COMMITTEE



FILED

Apr 17 2026 3:27pm

In the Matter of: :
: :
LAURENCE L. SOCCI, :
: :
Respondent. : Board Docket No. 25-ND-003
: Disciplinary Docket No. 2024-D145
: :
A Member of the Bar of the :
District of Columbia Court of Appeals :
(Bar Registration No. 241318) :

Board on Professional Responsibility

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
OF THE AD HOC HEARING COMMITTEE
APPROVING AMENDED PETITION FOR NEGOTIATED DISCIPLINE

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

This matter came before this Ad Hoc Hearing Committee on March 19, 2026, for a limited hearing on an Amended Petition for Negotiated Discipline (the “Amended Petition”). The members of the Hearing Committee are Chair Thomas Urban, II, Esquire, Public Member Margaret Shapiro, and Attorney Member Andrea McBarnette, Esquire. The Office of Disciplinary Counsel was represented by Assistant Disciplinary Counsel Dru Foster, Esquire. Respondent, Laurence L. Socci, Esquire, appeared *pro se*.

The Hearing Committee has carefully considered the Amended Petition signed by Disciplinary Counsel and Respondent, the supporting Amended Affidavit (“Amended Affidavit”) submitted by Respondent, and the representations during the

* Consult the ‘Disciplinary Decisions’ tab on the Board on Professional Responsibility’s website (www.dcattorneydiscipline.org) to view any subsequent decisions in this case.

limited hearing made by Respondent and Disciplinary Counsel. The Hearing Committee has fully considered the written statement submitted by the complainant.¹ The Hearing Committee additionally has fully considered the Chair's *in camera* review of Disciplinary Counsel's files and records and his *ex parte* communications with Disciplinary Counsel which were memorialized in a Confidential Memorandum provided by Disciplinary Counsel. For the reasons set forth below, the Hearing Committee finds that the negotiated discipline of a sixty-day suspension, fully stayed in favor of one year of probation with conditions, is justified and recommends that it be imposed by the Court.

II. FINDINGS PURSUANT TO D.C. BAR RULE XI, § 12.1(c)
AND BOARD RULE 17.5

The Hearing Committee, after full and careful consideration, finds that:

1. The Amended Petition and Amended Affidavit are full, complete, and in proper order.

2. Respondent is aware that there is currently pending against him an investigation involving allegations of misconduct, the nature of which are set forth in the Amended Petition. Tr. 19;² Amended Affidavit ¶ 2.

3. The allegations that were brought to the attention of Disciplinary Counsel are that Respondent violated District of Columbia Rules of Professional Conduct ("D.C. Rules" or "Rules") 1.3(a) and (c) (diligence and reasonable

¹ The complainant submitted a written statement which was made part of the record. See Tr. 30-34; Board Rule 17.4(g).

² "Tr." refers to the transcript of the limited hearing held on March 19, 2026.

promptness), 1.4(a) and (b) (failing to keep client reasonably informed and failing to explain matter), and 1.15(a) (commingling and failing to maintain complete records of entrusted funds). Amended Petition at 5.

4. Respondent has freely and voluntarily acknowledged that the material facts and misconduct reflected in the Amended Petition are true. Tr. 20-24, 28; Amended Affidavit ¶ 6. Specifically, Respondent stipulates to the following facts:

1. In December 2021, E.M. posted a landlord-tenant question on Rocket Lawyer, an online legal platform that offers legal services to individuals. Respondent answered E.M.'s question and the two continued exchanging messages about the issue until February 2024.

2. In February 2024, E.M. hired Respondent to assist him with evicting a tenant in D.C. The fee agreement stated that, for a flat fee of \$1,000, Respondent would represent E.M. in the eviction matter, including case correspondence, document preparation, legal research, court appearances and other tasks necessary to complete the case. The agreement also stated that the fees would be earned on an hourly basis at \$250/hour. E.M. paid Respondent \$1,000 via LawPay, which Respondent deposited directly into his operating account. At the time of the deposit, Respondent had only earned \$400.

3. In late February 2024, Respondent prepared a notice of nonpayment and possible eviction. The notice was served on the tenant on March 25, 2024. Respondent advised E.M. that if the tenant did not

pay rent or move out of the property, the complaint for eviction could be filed on April 30, 2024.

4. On April 30th, Respondent emailed E.M. asking if the tenant had paid her rent. E.M. responded the same day stating she had not, which would have permitted filing the complaint of eviction; however, Respondent did not file it. Instead, on May 15, 2024, Respondent told E.M. that he was preparing a second notice to quit. E.M. asked Respondent why a second notice to quit was required, but Respondent never provided an answer. For more than a month, E.M. sent Respondent emails and tried calling him to ask questions so E.M. could better understand the eviction process, but Respondent did not respond.

5. On June 26, 2024, Respondent finally sent E.M. a copy of the complaint of eviction for review. E.M. returned the complaint the same day and asked Respondent to quickly move forward with filing, but Respondent did not file the complaint. On July 24th, E.M. fired Respondent because he had failed to file the complaint and ignored his calls, text messages and emails. Respondent immediately transferred the case file to E.M.'s successor counsel, who negotiated a cash-for-keys agreement (i.e., E.M. paid the tenant in exchange for leaving the property and returning the keys).

6. E.M. filed a disciplinary complaint against Respondent, alleging several Rule violations. In response to the complaint, Respondent provided a copy of his office file for E.M.'s matter. Respondent's records indicated that he deposited E.M.'s entire flat fee in his operating account, despite only having earned \$400 when the deposit was made. Respondent also admitted that he deposited other flat fees into his operating account rather than his trust account between January and August 2024.

7. Disciplinary Counsel subpoenaed bank records for Respondent's trust and operating account[s] during the relevant period, as well as Respondent's own financial records. Respondent did have records for many of the client matters including retainer agreements and invoices to clients for his time charges. The records Respondent kept and maintained, however, were not complete and prevented Disciplinary Counsel from auditing his handling of entrusted funds, even with the additional information that Respondent provided during the investigation.

8. Disciplinary Counsel could not prove that Respondent engaged in misappropriation of client funds.

9. Disciplinary Counsel also could not prove that any client or third party was prejudiced or harmed by Respondent's handling of entrusted funds and failure to maintain complete records of those funds.

10. Respondent has agreed to meet with the D.C. Bar's Practice Management [Advisory] Services program and take remedial measures to ensure he is complying with his ethical obligations.

11. Respondent's stipulated conduct violated the following D.C. Rules of Professional Conduct:

a. Rule 1.3(a) and (c) for failure to represent E.M. with diligence and failing to act with reasonable promptness;

b. Rule 1.4(a) and (b) for failure to keep E.M. reasonably informed about the status of the matter and failing to explain the matter so that E.M. could make informed decisions about the representation; and,

c. Rule 1.15(a) for engaging in commingling and failing to keep and maintain complete records of entrusted funds.

Amended Petition at 2-5 (Stipulation of Facts and Charges).

5. Respondent is agreeing to the disposition because Respondent believes that he cannot successfully defend against discipline based on the stipulated misconduct. Tr. 18-19; Amended Affidavit ¶ 5.

6. Disciplinary Counsel has made no promises to Respondent other than what is contained in the Amended Petition. Amended Affidavit ¶ 7. That promise is that Disciplinary Counsel will recommend a sixty-day suspension fully stayed in favor of one year's probation with conditions as part of the negotiated disposition. Amended Petition at 5. Respondent confirmed during the limited hearing that there

have been no other promises or inducements other than those set forth in the Amended Petition. Tr. 27-28.

7. Respondent is aware of his right to confer with counsel and is proceeding *pro se*. Tr. 11-12, 15; Amended Affidavit ¶ 1.

8. Respondent has freely and voluntarily acknowledged the facts and misconduct reflected in the Amended Petition and agreed to the sanction set forth therein. Tr. 20-28; Amended Affidavit ¶¶ 4, 6.

9. Respondent is not being subjected to coercion or duress. Tr. 28; Amended Affidavit ¶ 6.

10. Respondent is competent and was not under the influence of any substance or medication that would affect his ability to make informed decisions at the limited hearing. Tr. 12-13.

11. Respondent is fully aware of the implications of the disposition being entered into, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a) he has the right to consult with counsel prior to entering this negotiated disposition;
- b) he will waive his right to cross-examine adverse witnesses and to compel witnesses to appear on his behalf;
- c) he will waive his right to have Disciplinary Counsel prove each and every charge by clear and convincing evidence;
- d) he will waive his right to file exceptions to reports and recommendations filed with the Board and with the Court;
- e) the negotiated disposition, if approved, may affect his present and future ability to practice law;

f) the negotiated disposition, if approved, may affect his bar memberships in other jurisdictions; and

g) any sworn statement by Respondent in his affidavit or any statements made by Respondent during the proceeding may be used to impeach his testimony if there is a subsequent hearing on the merits.

Tr. 11-18; Amended Affidavit ¶¶ 1, 9-10, 12.

12. Respondent and Disciplinary Counsel have agreed that the sanction in this matter should be a sixty-day suspension, fully stayed, in favor of a one-year probation with conditions. Amended Petition at 6; Tr. 24-27. Respondent understands that the following conditions of this negotiated disposition are that he:

(a) shall refund E.M. \$900 by making monthly payments of \$100 no later than the 15th of each month and his obligation to make the payments will begin 30 days after approval of the Amended Petition by the D.C. Court of Appeals. Respondent may make payments prior to the approval by the Court and will provide written notice of each payment to Disciplinary Counsel;

(b) shall meet with Dan Mills, Manager of the Practice Management Advisory Service (“PMAS”) of the District of Columbia Bar. Respondent will execute a waiver allowing Mr. Mills and/or the assigned practice monitor to communicate directly with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel regarding his compliance. Mr. Mills and/or the assigned practice monitor will conduct a full assessment of Respondent’s practices, including but not limited to reviewing financial records, client files, engagement letters, and his supervision and training of staff. Mr. Mills and/or the assigned practice monitor shall take steps to ensure that Respondent is aware of and has taken

steps to comply with his obligations under Rules 1.3, 1.4, and 1.15(a), including maintaining complete records relating to client funds, and that Respondent complies with all of the practice monitor's recommendations;

(c) must be in full compliance with the practice monitor's recommendations for a period of twelve consecutive months. After the practice monitor determines that Respondent has been in full compliance for twelve consecutive months, Respondent shall sign an acknowledgement that he is in compliance with the practice monitor's recommendations and file the signed acknowledgement with the Office of Disciplinary Counsel. This must be accomplished no later than two years after the date of the Court's final order; and

(d) shall inform all clients, in writing, that he is serving a term of probation during the one-year probation.

See Tr. 24-27; Amended Petition at 6-7.

13. Respondent and Disciplinary Counsel have provided the following circumstances in mitigation, which the Hearing Committee has taken into consideration: (a) Respondent has no prior discipline; (b) Respondent has taken full responsibility for his misconduct and has demonstrated remorse; (c) Respondent has fully cooperated with Disciplinary Counsel, including meeting with Disciplinary Counsel and providing written responses, bank statements, and client records; and (d) prior to agreeing to this negotiated disposition, Respondent attended "Managing Money," an approved continuing legal education course related to the maintenance

of trust accounts, record-keeping, and/or safekeeping client property, and “Basic Training and Beyond,” a two-day course designed to help lawyers grow and manage small firms. Amended Petition at 10-11; Amended Affidavit ¶ 14; Tr. 28-30.

14. The complainant presented a written statement which is included in the record and which the Chair read into the transcript record during the hearing. Complainant’s Submission (March 14, 2026 emailed statement); *see* Tr. 30-34.

III. DISCUSSION

The Hearing Committee shall recommend approval of a petition for negotiated discipline if it finds:

- (1) The attorney has knowingly and voluntarily acknowledged the facts and misconduct reflected in the petition and agreed to the sanction set forth therein;
- (2) The facts set forth in the petition or as shown at the hearing support the admission of misconduct and the agreed upon sanction; and
- (3) The sanction agreed upon is justified.

D.C. Bar R. XI, § 12.1(c)(1)-(3); *see also* Board Rule 17.5(a)(i)-(iii).

A. Respondent Has Knowingly and Voluntarily Acknowledged the Facts and Misconduct and Agreed to the Stipulated Sanction.

The Hearing Committee finds that Respondent has knowingly and voluntarily acknowledged the facts and misconduct reflected in the Petition and agreed to the sanction therein. Respondent, after being placed under oath, admitted the stipulated facts and charges set forth in the Petition, and denied that he is under duress or has been coerced into entering into this disposition. *See supra* Paragraphs 8-9.

Respondent understands the implications and consequences of entering into this negotiated discipline. *See supra* Paragraph 11.

Respondent acknowledged that any and all promises that have been made to him by Disciplinary Counsel as part of this negotiated discipline are set forth in writing in the Amended Petition and that there are no other promises or inducements that have been made to him. *See supra* Paragraph 6.

B. The Stipulated Facts Support the Admissions of Misconduct and the Agreed-Upon Sanction.

The Hearing Committee has carefully reviewed the facts set forth in the Amended Petition and established during the hearing and concludes that they support the admission of misconduct and the agreed-upon sanction. Moreover, Respondent is agreeing to this negotiated discipline because he believes that he could not successfully defend against the misconduct described in the Amended Petition. *See supra* Paragraph 5.

With regard to the second factor, the Amended Petition states that Respondent violated D.C. Rules 1.3(a) and (c) (diligence and reasonable promptness), 1.4(a) and (b) (failing to keep client reasonably informed and failing to explain matter), and 1.15(a) (commingling and failing to maintain complete records of entrusted funds). The evidence supports Respondent's admission that he violated Rules 1.3(a) and (c) in that the stipulated facts describe how Respondent unnecessarily delayed taking action and then failed to file the complaint of eviction for his client. The evidence supports Respondent's admission that he violated Rules 1.4(a) and (b) in that the stipulated facts describe how Respondent did not respond to his client's email

messages and phone calls. Finally, the evidence supports Respondent's admission that he violated Rule 1.15(a) in that the stipulated facts describe how he commingled entrusted client funds with his personal funds by depositing clients' advanced fees into his operating account³ and failed to maintain complete records of entrusted funds from January to August 2024.

C. The Agreed-Upon Sanction Is Justified.

The third factor the Hearing Committee must consider is whether the sanction agreed upon is justified. *See* D.C. Bar R. XI, § 12.1(c); Board Rule 17.5(a)(iii) (explaining that hearing committees should consider “the record as a whole, including the nature of the misconduct, any charges or investigations that Disciplinary Counsel has agreed not to pursue, the strengths or weaknesses of Disciplinary Counsel's evidence, any circumstances in aggravation and mitigation (including respondent's cooperation with Disciplinary Counsel and acceptance of responsibility), and relevant precedent”); *In re Johnson*, 984 A.2d 176, 181 (D.C. 2009) (per curiam) (providing that a negotiated sanction may not be “unduly lenient”).

³ Respondent admitted that he commingled personal funds with entrusted client funds when he directly deposited the \$1,000 payment into his operating account in February 2024, when he had earned only \$400. Stipulated Fact 2; Tr. 22-23. Respondent also deposited other flat fees into his operating account rather than his trust account between January and August 2024. Stipulated Fact 6; *see In re Malyszek*, 182 A.3d 1232 (D.C. 2018) (per curiam) (commingling found where attorney deposited partially earned fee into operating account containing law firm funds); *In re Micheel*, 610 A.2d 231, 233 (D.C. 1992) (respondent “candidly admitted” that he was guilty of commingling).

Based on the record as a whole, including the stipulated circumstances in mitigation, the Hearing Committee Chair's *in camera* review of Disciplinary Counsel's investigative file and *ex parte* discussions with Disciplinary Counsel, and the Committee's review of relevant precedent, the written statement submitted by the complainant, and Disciplinary Counsel's Confidential Memorandum, the Hearing Committee concludes that the agreed-upon sanction is justified and not unduly lenient, for the following reasons:

First, as discussed in the Confidential Appendix, the Hearing Committee concludes that Disciplinary Counsel has fully investigated the matter and that Disciplinary Counsel reasonably determined that it could not prove, by clear and convincing evidence, additional Rule violations beyond which the parties have already stipulated. *See In re Teitelbaum*, 303 A.3d 52, 56 (D.C. 2023) (negotiated discipline "may generally omit to charge a violation" if after investigation, "there is a substantial risk that ODC would not be able to establish the violation by clear and convincing evidence").

Second, the Hearing Committee has considered the nature of Respondent's misconduct and the range of sanctions imposed in comparable cases. Sanctions for cases involving violations of Rules 1.3(a) and (c), 1.4(a) and (b), and 1.15(a) (commingling and record-keeping) range from a public censure to a brief suspension. *See, e.g., In re Douglass*, 745 A.2d 307 (D.C. 2000) (per curiam) (public censure for lack of competence, lack of diligence, failing to act with promptness); *In re Dory*, 528 A.2d 1247 (D.C. 1987) (per curiam) (thirty-day suspension and

restitution to client where the attorney neglected the case and failed to seek his client's legal objectives); *In re Iglehart*, 759 A.2d 203 (D.C. 2000) (per curiam) (thirty-day suspension for failing to maintain adequate trust account records and commingling personal funds with settlement proceeds); *In re Ukwu*, 712 A.2d 502 (D.C. 1998) (per curiam) (thirty-day suspension, fully stayed, in favor of probation with conditions for failing to maintain proper financial records and commingling client funds with personal funds). While the Committee takes Respondent's failures very seriously and takes into consideration the damage that the complainant asserts was done, the Committee believes that a more severe sanction would not be warranted given the mitigating factors. The Committee believes that based upon the applicable precedent, the proposed sanction is appropriate and not unduly lenient. The Committee feels that an unstayed suspension would have a significant and detrimental effect on Respondent's practice.

Third, the mitigating circumstances warrant consideration, and the Committee concludes that a fully stayed suspension, in favor of one year of probation, is appropriate. *See In re Villarreal*, 339 A.3d 99, 103-04 (D.C. 2025) (per curiam); *In re Rachal*, 251 A.3d 1038, 1043-44 (D.C. 2021) (per curiam). This was Respondent's first offense, he cooperated with Disciplinary Counsel, and he did take responsibility for his actions, which should all be taken into account.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

For the reasons stated above, it is the recommendation of this Hearing Committee that the negotiated discipline be approved and that the Court find that

Respondent violated Rules 1.3(a) and (c) (failing to act with diligence and reasonable promptness); Rules 1.4(a) and (b) (failing to keep client reasonably informed and failing to explain matter); and Rule 1.15(a) (commingling and record-keeping) and impose the sanction of a sixty-day suspension, fully stayed, in favor of one year of probation with conditions as noted above in Paragraph 12.

AD HOC HEARING COMMITTEE

Thomas F. Urban II

Thomas F. Urban, II
Chair

Margaret Shapiro

Margaret Shapiro
Public Member

Andrea McBarnette

Andrea McBarnette
Attorney Member