

NORTH CAROLINA
WAKE COUNTY

BEFORE THE
GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE
OF THE
NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR
16G0946

IN THE MATTER OF)	
)	REPRIMAND
CHRISTOPHER D. LANE,)	
ATTORNEY AT LAW)	

On April 20, 2017 the Grievance Committee of the North Carolina State Bar met and considered the grievance filed against you by J. L. The grievance was assigned to a Subcommittee, which thoroughly reviewed the results of the State Bar staff's investigation of this matter.

Pursuant to Section .0113(a) of the Discipline and Disability Rules of the North Carolina State Bar, the Grievance Subcommittee conducted a preliminary hearing. After considering the information available to it, including your response to the letter of notice, the Grievance Subcommittee found probable cause. Probable cause is defined in the rules as "reasonable cause to believe that a member of the North Carolina State Bar is guilty of misconduct justifying disciplinary action."

The rules provide that after a finding of probable cause, the Grievance Committee may determine that the filing of a complaint and a hearing before the Disciplinary Hearing Commission are not required, and the Grievance Committee may issue various levels of discipline depending upon the misconduct, the actual or potential injury caused, and any aggravating or mitigating factors. The Grievance Committee may issue an admonition, a reprimand, or a censure to the respondent attorney.

A reprimand is a written form of discipline more serious than an admonition issued in cases in which an attorney has violated one or more provisions of the Rules of Professional Conduct and has caused harm or potential harm to a client, the administration of justice, the profession, or a member of the public, but the misconduct does not require a censure.

The Grievance Committee was of the opinion that a censure is not required in this case and issues this reprimand to you. As chairman of the Grievance Committee of the North Carolina State Bar, it is now my duty to issue this reprimand.

You agreed to work as the North Carolina "Regional Counsel" for "Williamson & Howard, LLP," a California law firm not licensed to practice law in North Carolina. While working in this capacity, you aided Williamson & Howard in providing legal services to North Carolina residents.

By providing legal services to North Carolina residents on behalf of Williamson & Howard, you aided in the unauthorized practice of law in violation of Rule 5.5(f). Moreover, by claiming in various letters to clients to practice law via an out-of-state entity that is not licensed to provide legal services here, you participated in making false or misleading statements about your services in violation of Rule 7.1(a). You also violated Rule 5.4(a) by sharing a fee with a nonattorney or an attorney not licensed in North Carolina by splitting fees collected by Williamson & Howard from North Carolina consumers.

In determining that a reprimand was appropriate in this case, the Committee took into account the harm that necessarily results whenever attorneys aid unregistered, out-of-state entities in the unauthorized practice of law, particularly when money exchanges hands, court appearances are made, and legal forms are drafted or filed on behalf of others. The Committee also considered that you had been previously disciplined for aiding others in the unauthorized practice of law and, in mitigation, the evidence you submitted suggesting that you had disassociated with Williamson & Howard after receiving a censure in 2015 for similar activity.

You are hereby reprimanded by the North Carolina State Bar for your professional misconduct. The Grievance Committee trusts that you will heed this reprimand, that it will be remembered by you, that it will be beneficial to you, and that you will never again allow yourself to depart from adherence to the high ethical standards of the legal profession.

In accordance with the policy adopted July 23, 2010 by the Council of the North Carolina State Bar regarding the taxing of administrative fees and investigative costs to any attorney issued a reprimand by the Grievance Committee, an administrative fee in the amount of \$350.00 is hereby taxed to you.

Done and ordered, this the 10th day of May, 2017.


DeWitt "Mac" McCarley, Chair
Grievance Committee

DM/lb