

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

WAKE COUNTY



BEFORE THE DISCIPLINARY HEARINGS COMMISSION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR 25 DHC 11

THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR, Plaintiff

v.

CHRISTOPHER C. SANDERS, Attorney, Defendant

CONSENT ORDER OF DISCIPLINE

THIS MATTER was considered by a hearing Panel of the Disciplinary Hearing Commission composed of Catherine Constantinou, Chair, W. David Mannheim, and Scarlett Hargis. Kelley DeAngelus and Elizabeth F. Starnes represented Plaintiff, the North Carolina State Bar. Christopher Sanders appeared pro se. Defendant waives a formal hearing in this matter.

The parties stipulate and agree to the findings of fact and conclusions of law recited in this Consent Order of Discipline. The parties consent to the discipline imposed by this Order. By consenting to this Order, Defendant knowingly, freely, and voluntarily waives his right to appeal this Consent Order of Discipline or to challenge in any way the sufficiency of the findings. Defendant understands and acknowledges that this Order is a public document.

Based upon the stipulated facts and upon the consent of the parties, the Hearing Panel hereby finds by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence the following:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Plaintiff, the North Carolina State Bar ("State Bar"), is a body duly organized under the laws of North Carolina and is the proper party to bring this proceeding under the authority granted it in Chapter 84 of the General Statutes of North Carolina, and the Rules and Regulations of the North Carolina State Bar (Chapter 1 of Title 27 of the North Carolina Administrative Code).

2. Defendant, Christopher C. Sanders, was admitted to the North Carolina State Bar in 1994, and is, and was at all times referred to herein, an attorney at law licensed to practice in North Carolina, subject to the laws of the State of North Carolina, the Rules and Regulations of the North Carolina State Bar and the Rules of Professional Conduct.

3. During all or part of the relevant periods referred to herein, Defendant was engaged in the practice of law in the State of North Carolina and maintained a law practice in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

CLAIM ONE

4. On June 11, 2020, at 2:01 p.m. J. Hood, legal assistant for the Mecklenburg County Public Defender's Office, emailed Defendant requesting his help to represent clients during involuntary commitment hearings on July 15, 2020 ("the hearings").

5. On June 11, 2020, at 3:24 p.m. Defendant responded to J. Hood's email agreeing to represent those clients during their July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings.

6. The June 11, 2020 email noted that the hearings would be conducted virtually, via WebEx and Zoom.

7. Attached to the June 11, 2020, email were two documents: a March 23, 2020 Administrative Order detailing remote attorney visits and remote civil commitment hearings during the COVID-19 state of emergency ("Order"), and a March 12, 2020 memo regarding involuntary commitment facility visitation and hearing protocol for remote and in-person civil commitment hearings ("Memo").

8. The Order provided:

- a. "All counsel appointed or employed to represent respondents during involuntary commitment proceedings may conduct any interview with the respondent by telephone or live video prior to any scheduled hearing[]";
- b. "All petitioning medical facilities shall make resources available that allow the patient's counsel to contact the patient by telephonic or video or other electronic means with the patient in a private area of the facility[]";
- c. "Whenever an in-person visit is needed, arrangements shall be made for that visit to be in a private and secure room proximate to the treatment unit with the treatment facility implementing the appropriate security and safety measures[]"; and
- d. "Each treatment facility shall provide a secure and accessible room for teleconferencing the court hearings with the judge and clerk at the Courthouse and the respondent attorney at a remote location."

9. The Memo provided: "[i]n-person interviews at the hospitals prior to or after court sessions will be replaced with telephone or live video"; and "[i]f an in-person visit is needed, then arrangements will be made for that visit to be in a private and secure room proximate to the housing unit."

10. Defendant responded to the June 11, 2020 email and agreed to represent the indigent clients appearing on the July 15, 2020 docket for involuntary commitment hearings. At the time Defendant agreed to represent the clients, he was not aware of how many clients would be assigned for the July 15, 2020 docket. Had Defendant known how many clients would have been assigned, he would not have agreed to the assignment.

11. On July 10, 2020, J. Hood advised Defendant that the client files for the hearings would be available for Defendant to pick up from the Public Defender's Office "between 11:30 -- 12:00[]" on July 14, 2020.

12. Defendant arrived outside the office building for the Public Defender's Office, which was closed to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and picked up the client files from a staff member around 12:00 p.m. on July 14, 2020.

13. The files that Defendant obtained from the Public Defender's Office included clients from three different hospitals: Behavioral Health Davidson, Behavioral Health Charlotte, and Presbyterian Hospital.

14. Defendant appeared at the July 15, 2020 hearings on behalf of the indigent clients held pursuant to involuntary commitment petitions, via WebEx, before Mecklenburg County District Court Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell.

Behavioral Health Davidson

15. Defendant did not meet with or otherwise communicate with his indigent clients receiving treatment at Behavioral Health Davidson ("Davidson clients") before he appeared on their behalf at their involuntary commitment hearings on July 15, 2020.

16. Defendant did not communicate with his Davidson clients' doctors or other hospital staff before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

17. Defendant did not inform his Davidson clients about their right to appear for their hearing, or their ability to waive their right to appear for their hearing, before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

18. Defendant did not inform his Davidson clients about their right to object to the continuation of their involuntary commitment hearing so that they could receive additional inpatient treatment, before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

19. Defendant's Davidson clients did not waive their right to appear for their hearings.

20. Defendant's Davidson clients did not consent to the continuation of their involuntary commitment petition hearings.

21. During the July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant about three of his Davidson clients.

22. Defendant represented to the court that he had obtained waivers from his Davidson clients regarding their right to appear for their hearings.

23. Defendant's statements referred to in paragraph 22 were material to the issues before the court in the involuntary commitment hearings.

24. Defendant's statements referred to in paragraph 22 were false.

25. At the time Defendant made the statements referred to in paragraph 22, he knew his statements were false.

26. Defendant's false statements referred to in paragraph 22 were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

27. During the hearing, Defendant also represented to the court that he obtained his Davidson clients' consent to continue their hearings in order to continue receiving inpatient treatment.

28. Defendant's statements referred to in paragraph 27 were material to the issues before the court in the involuntary commitment hearings.

29. Defendant's statements referred to in paragraph 27 were false.

30. At the time Defendant made the statements referred to in paragraph 27, he knew his statements were false.

31. Defendant's false statements referred to in paragraph 27 were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

32. Based on Defendant's false statements to the court at least two of Defendant's Davidson clients' involuntary commitments were continued from the July 15, 2020 docket and therefore extended a week to the July 22, 2020 docket without their knowledge or consent.

Presbyterian Hospital

33. Defendant did not meet with or otherwise communicate with his indigent clients receiving treatment at Presbyterian Hospital ("Presbyterian clients") before he appeared on their behalf at their involuntary commitment hearings on July 15, 2020.

34. Defendant did not communicate with his Presbyterian clients' doctors or other hospital staff before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

35. Defendant did not inform any of his Presbyterian clients about their right to appear at their involuntary commitment petition hearing, or their ability to waive that right, before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

36. Defendant did not inform his Presbyterian clients about their right to object to the continuation of their involuntary commitment petition hearing, before he appeared on their behalf at the hearings.

37. Defendant's Presbyterian clients did not waive their right to appear at their hearings.

38. Defendant's Presbyterian clients did not consent to the continuation of their involuntary commitment hearings so that they could receive additional inpatient treatment.

39. During the July 15, 2020 hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant about five of his Presbyterian clients.

40. Judge McKoy-Mitchell found that Defendant obtained his Presbyterian clients' consent to waive their right to appear for their involuntary commitment petition hearings.

41. The court's findings that Defendant obtained his Presbyterian clients' consent to waive their right to appear for their involuntary commitment petition hearings were based on false information that was either provided by or adopted as true by Defendant.

42. Whether Defendant obtained waivers from his Presbyterian clients to appear for their hearings were material to the issues before the court during the hearings.

43. At the time the court found that Defendant obtained waivers from his Presbyterian clients of their right to appear for their hearings, Defendant knew those findings were based on false information that was either provided by or adopted as true by Defendant.

44. Defendant failed to correct the false information that he either provided or adopted as true, which the court used in making its findings, as referenced in paragraphs 40 and 41.

45. The false information that Defendant provided, as referenced in paragraphs 40 and 41, were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

46. The false information that Defendant adopted as true, as referenced in paragraphs 40 and 41, were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

47. During the hearings, the court also found that Defendant obtained consent from his Presbyterian clients to continue their involuntary commitment hearings so that they could continue to receive inpatient treatment.

48. The court's findings that Defendant obtained consent from his Presbyterian clients to continue their involuntary commitment hearings so that they could continue to receive inpatient treatment were material to the issues before the court during the hearings.

49. The court's findings that Defendant obtained consent from his Presbyterian clients to continue their involuntary commitment hearings so that they could continue to receive inpatient treatment were based on false information that was either provided by or adopted as true by Defendant.

50. At the time that the court made its findings that Defendant obtained consent from his Presbyterian clients to continue their involuntary commitment hearings so that they could continue to receive inpatient treatment, Defendant knew that information was false.

51. Defendant failed to correct the false information referenced in paragraph 47.

52. The false information that Defendant provided, as referenced in paragraph 47, were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

53. The false information that Defendant adopted as true, as referenced in paragraph 47, were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

Waiver of Appearance Forms

54. During the July 15, 2020 hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant if he had submitted any waiver of appearance forms for the five clients receiving treatment at Presbyterian.

55. Defendant informed the court that he had not submitted waivers of appearance forms, but that he could submit the forms later that day.

56. Defendant's statement referred to in paragraph 55 was material to the issues before the court in the involuntary commitment hearings.

57. Defendant's statement to Judge McKoy-Mitchell was misleading, in that he had not met with the clients, the clients had not waived their right to appear at the hearing, and he had no waivers signed by the clients to provide.

58. At the time Defendant made the statement referred to in paragraph 55, he knew that his response was misleading.

59. Defendant's misleading statement referred to in paragraph 55 was a dishonest act reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

Communication with Physicians and Clients

60. Defendant did not meet with any of the Presbyterian clients' doctors or hospital staff prior to the clients' July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings.

61. During the July 15, 2020 hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell paused the proceedings and communicated with Presbyterian Hospital staff for additional information about Defendant's Presbyterian clients.

62. When Judge McKoy-Mitchell returned from pausing the proceedings, she advised Defendant that she received information that Defendant had not contacted any of the Presbyterian clients' physicians.

63. Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant if he spoke with any physicians from Presbyterian Hospital, or anyone else from Presbyterian Hospital to prepare for the July 15, 2020 hearings.

64. Defendant replied that he had not spoken to the physicians, but he did speak with the nurse on call.

65. Whether Defendant had spoken to the physicians and/or nurse on call for his Presbyterian clients was material to the issues before the court in the involuntary commitment hearings.

66. Defendant's statement to Judge McKoy-Mitchell as referred to in paragraph 64 was false.

67. At the time Defendant made the statement as referred to in paragraph 64, he knew his statement was false.

68. Defendant's false statement as referred to in paragraph 64 was a dishonest act reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

69. During the hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant if his clients' reported waivers of appearance and consents were based upon what Defendant's clients said to him.

70. In response to Judge McKoy-Mitchell's questions, Defendant affirmed that his clients reported waivers of appearance and consents were based upon what the clients said to him.

71. Defendant's affirmation as referred to in paragraph 70, was material to the issues before the court in the involuntary commitment hearing.

72. Defendant's affirmation to Judge McKoy-Mitchell, as referred to in paragraph 70, was false.

73. At the time Defendant affirmed that his clients' waivers and consents were based upon what his clients said to him, Defendant knew his affirmation was false.

74. Defendant's affirmation referred to in paragraph 70 was a dishonest act reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

75. Based on Defendant's false statements to the court at least nine of Defendant's Presbyterian clients' involuntary commitments were continued from the July 15, 2020 docket and therefore extended a week to the July 22, 2020 docket and at least one of without their knowledge or consent.

Behavioral Health Charlotte

76. During the July 15, 2020 hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell asked Defendant whether he had spoken with or had any contact with ten clients receiving treatment at Behavioral Health Charlotte ("Charlotte clients"), or their doctors.

77. Defendant admitted that he had not met with or otherwise communicated with the Charlotte clients, or their doctors, prior to the hearings.

78. Based on Defendant's false statements to the court at least ten of Defendant's Charlotte clients' involuntary commitments were continued from the July 15, 2020 docket and therefore extended a week to the July 22, 2020 docket without their knowledge or consent.

Communication Post-Hearings

79. After the hearings concluded, at 10:58 a.m. that day, Defendant emailed Judge McKoy-Mitchell, Assistant Public Defender Robert Ward, and J. Hood, stating that he was unprepared for the hearings due to a severe migraine that he was unable to manage with medication.

80. In that email, Defendant stated that he "should have sought coverage" for his clients.

81. Judge McKoy-Mitchell responded to Defendant's email on July 17, 2020, and stated that:

- a. During the hearings, Defendant "did not provide any explanation as to why [he] had failed to make contact with [his] clients, their doctors, or even the hospital administrative representatives[,] except for being overwhelmed[]";
- b. "Upon [the court's] pressing the issue of the discrepancies between what [Defendant] w[as] reporting and what was included in the files, [Defendant] finally admitted that [he] had not met with [his] clients or their doctors[]";
- c. During the hearings, Defendant "at no time reported being ill or experiencing any migraine[,] and only stated as an excuse that [he] w[as] overwhelmed[]"; and
- d. "After repeatedly asking [Defendant] about the existence of any waivers, contact with any of [his] patients or their doctors or administrative staff, [Defendant] finally acknowledged that [he] had not had that contact[,] and that the information [he] had provided to the Court on the record had not been true."

CLAIM TWO

82. The findings of fact in paragraphs 1 through 81 above are reincorporated as if set forth herein.

83. As a result of Defendant's conduct during the hearings, Judge McKoy-Mitchell referred Defendant to the Mecklenburg County Indigent Representation Committee ("the committee").

84. Defendant gave the committee a written report of his conduct during the July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings.

85. In his report, Defendant stated that he "had not been provided any advance notice by the Public Defender's Office or anyone else about how these [involuntary commitment] hearings were to be conducted."

86. Defendant's statement as set forth in paragraph 85 was false.

87. At the time Defendant made the statement as set forth in paragraph 85, he knew his statement was false.

88. As discussed in paragraphs 4 through 10, Defendant was notified about the protocols, procedures, and logistics for the July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment proceedings by an email from J. Hood on June 11, 2020.

89. In his report, Defendant also wrote that he “was not informed whether the hearings would be remote or in person at BHC Charlotte or Presbyterian Hospital as they had been for many years.”

90. Defendant’s statement referred to in paragraph 89 was false.

91. At the time Defendant made the statement as set forth in paragraph 89, he knew his statement was false.

92. Defendant’s false statement referred to in paragraph 89 was a dishonest act reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

93. Defendant also wrote in his report that he “informed the [c]ourt that [he] had not met with or spoken to the clients as [he] had intended.”

94. Defendant’s statement as referred to in paragraph 93 was misleading.

95. Defendant’s statement as set forth in paragraph 93 was misleading in that he told the court that he “had not met with or spoken to the clients” only after he had repeatedly stated to the court that he had spoken to the clients.

96. At the time Defendant made the statement as set forth in paragraph 93, he knew his statement was misleading.

97. Defendant’s misleading statement referred to in paragraph 93 was a dishonest act reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

98. Following the committee meeting, the committee removed Defendant from all indigent appointment lists.

CLAIM THREE

99. The findings of fact in paragraphs 1 through 98 above are reincorporated as if set forth herein.

100. Based upon the information referenced in paragraphs 1 through 98, the State Bar opened grievance file 20G0608 on August 18, 2020.

101. On January 6, 2022, Defendant accepted service of the Letter of Notice for grievance file 20G0608.

102. Defendant responded to the Letter of Notice on January 20, 2022.

103. In his response to the Letter of Notice, Defendant asserted that he had “no record of receiving” an email from J. Hood “explaining how the involuntary commitment hearings were to be handled pursuant to new Covid procedures[,]” and “was unaware that such major changes had been implemented.”

104. As discussed in paragraphs 4 through 10 above, Defendant was notified about the protocols, procedures, and logistics for the July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment proceedings by the June 11, 2020 email from J. Hood.

105. Defendant responded to J. Hood’s June 11, 2020 email notifying him about the protocols, procedures, and logistics for the July 15, 2020 hearings.

106. Defendant provided a copy of his response to J. Hood’s June 11, 2020 email as an exhibit to his response to grievance file 20G0608.

107. Defendant’s statements as referred to in paragraph 103 were material to the allegations in grievance file 20G0608.

108. Defendant’s statements as referred to in paragraph 103 were false.

109. At the time Defendant made the statements as referred to in paragraph 103, he knew his statements were false.

110. Defendant’s false statements as referred to paragraph 103 were dishonest acts reflecting adversely on his fitness as a lawyer.

111. Defendant also stated in his grievance response that “Covid restrictions prevented [him] from meeting any involuntary commitment clients[]” the day before the hearings.

112. Defendant’s statement as referred to in paragraph 111 was material to grievance file 20G0608.

113. Defendant’s statement as referred to in paragraph 111 was false.

114. At the time Defendant made the statement referred to in paragraph 111, he knew his statement was false.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. All parties are properly before the Hearing Panel and the Panel has jurisdiction over Defendant Christopher C. Sanders, and the subject matter.

2. Defendant's conduct as set forth in the findings of Fact above, constitutes grounds for discipline pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 84-28(b)(2) in that Defendant violated the Rules of Professional Conduct in effect at the time of the conduct as follows:

- a. By failing to communicate with his Davidson clients, Presbyterian clients, and Charlotte clients before their July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings, Defendant failed to act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing his clients in violation of Rule 1.3, failed to reasonably consult with his clients about the means by which his clients' objectives were to be accomplished in violation of Rule 1.4(a)(2), failed to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit his clients to make informed decisions regarding their representation in violation of Rule 1.4(b), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- b. By failing to communicate with his Presbyterian clients' physicians and/or hospital staff prior to their July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings, Defendant failed to act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing his clients in violation of Rule 1.3;
- c. By making statements to the court that his Davidson clients and Presbyterian clients waived their right to appear at their July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings without their knowledge or consent, Defendant failed to reasonably consult with his clients about the means by which his clients' objectives were to be accomplished in violation of Rule 1.4(a)(2), failed to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit his clients to make informed decisions regarding their representation in violation of Rule 1.4(b), made false statements of material fact to a tribunal in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1), engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- d. By failing to correct the false information that Defendant provided or adopted as true upon which Judge McKoy-Mitchell found that Defendant's Davidson clients and Presbyterian clients waived their right to appear for the hearings, Defendant failed to correct false statements of material fact previously made to the tribunal by the lawyer in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1), engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- e. By making the statement that Defendant had not submitted waivers of appearance forms on behalf of his Presbyterian clients but could do so that day, Defendant engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that

reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);

- f. By reporting to the court that Defendant's clients' waivers of appearance and consent to the continuation of their hearings on their involuntary commitment petitions were based on what his clients told him, Defendant made false statements of material fact to a tribunal in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1), engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- g. By making statements that his Davidson clients' and Presbyterian clients' consented to the continuation of their hearings on their involuntary commitment petitions and thus continued the matters without his clients' knowledge or consent, Defendant failed to reasonably consult with his clients about the means by which his clients' objectives were to be accomplished in violation of Rule 1.4(a)(2), failed to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit his clients to make informed decisions regarding their representation in violation of Rule 1.4(b), made false statements of material fact to a tribunal in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1), engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- h. By making the statement that he met with or otherwise communicated with the "nurse on call" for his clients who were receiving treatment at Presbyterian Hospital, Defendant made a false statement of material fact to a tribunal in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1), engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c), and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in violation of Rule 8.4(d);
- i. By stating to the committee that he was not notified that the involuntary commitment hearings would be conducted virtually, Defendant engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c);
- j. By stating to the committee that he informed Judge McKoy-Mitchell that he had not met with or spoken to his clients as he intended, without also telling the committee he initially represented to the court repeatedly that he had met with and spoke to his clients, Defendant engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation that reflects adversely on his fitness as a lawyer in violation of Rule 8.4(c).

- k. By falsely representing to the State Bar that he did not receive notice about how the July 15, 2020 involuntary commitment hearings would be conducted due to the Covid-19-related state of emergency, Defendant knowingly made a false statement of material fact in connection with a disciplinary matter in violation of Rule 8.1(a); and
- l. By falsely representing to the State Bar that the Covid-19-related state of emergency prevented Defendant from meeting with any of his involuntary commitment clients, Defendant knowingly made a false statement of material fact in connection with a disciplinary matter in violation of Rule 8.1(a).

FINDINGS OF FACT REGARDING DISCIPLINE

1. The findings of fact in paragraphs 1 through 114 above are reincorporated as if set forth herein.
2. Defendant is an experienced attorney, having been licensed to practice law in North Carolina since 1994, and has no prior discipline.
3. Defendant has accepted responsibility for his actions and expresses sincere remorse for his conduct.
4. Defendant has been cooperative with this Disciplinary Hearing Commission proceeding.
5. Since the conduct described in the Complainant and this Consent Order occurred, Respondent's health has declined, he has undergone multiple surgeries, and has been diagnosed with cancer.
6. Attorneys are officers of the court. As an officer of the court, the court is entitled to count on an attorney to present the full and accurate truth upon questioning by the court without having to make an independent investigation to ascertain the attorney's honesty.
7. An attorney's honesty with the court is a bedrock of the system of justice. The orderly and efficient administration of justice is undermined when attorneys are not forthright and truthful with the court. When attorneys are dishonest with the court, there is significant harm to the legal profession, the public's perception of the profession, the administration of justice, as well as the potential for significant harm to clients.
8. Clients who are subject to involuntary commitment petitions comprise some of society's most vulnerable population. Involuntary commitment is a forced hospitalization measure often used as a last resort to keep a person and/or the public safe due to a person's mental illness

and/or substance abuse status. Upon issuance of an involuntary commitment order, a person is detained for medical treatment without the ability to leave until authorized by order of the court.

9. By making false statements to the court during the involuntary commitment hearings, Defendant significantly undermined the foundation of honesty and trustworthiness of our judicial system and the legal profession and caused significant harm to the legal profession, the public's perception of the profession, and the administration of justice, as well as the potential for significant harm to clients.

10. It was foreseeable to Defendant that his false statements to the Court could cause significant harm to the legal profession, the public's perception of the profession, the administration of justice, and to clients.

11. Defendant's false statements to the Mecklenburg County Indigent Representation Committee also significantly undermined the foundation of honesty and trustworthiness of the legal profession and caused significant harm and potential significant harm to the legal profession and the administration of justice.

12. It was foreseeable to Defendant that his false statements to the Mecklenburg County Indigent Representation Committee could cause significant harm to the legal profession and administration of justice.

13. The State Bar is entrusted with the privilege of the regulation of the profession and relies upon the members of the Bar to participate in the profession's self-regulation honestly and with integrity.

14. Defendant's false statements to the State Bar during the grievance process caused harm to the administration of justice by creating additional work for the State Bar in its investigation to ascertain the accurate facts, and caused potentially significant harm to the profession and administration by creating the risk that the State Bar would be misled in its investigation.

15. Defendant made the false statements at issue in this case in an effort to avoid personal negative consequences, including having to admit to the Court that he did not meet with the clients or those clients' medical staff that he had agreed to represent at their involuntary commitment proceedings.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING DISCIPLINE

1. The Hearing Panel carefully considered all the different forms of discipline available to it and has considered all the factors enumerated in 27 N.C. Admin. Code § 1B.0116(f).

2. The Hearing Panel concludes that the following factors from 27 N.C. Admin. Code § 1B.0116(f)(1), which are to be considered in imposing suspension or disbarment, are present in this case:

- a. Factor (B) intent of the defendant to commit acts where the harm or potential harm is foreseeable;
- b. Factor (C) circumstances reflecting the defendant's lack of honesty, trustworthiness, or integrity;
- c. Factor (D) elevation of the defendant's own interest above that of the client;
- d. Factor (E) negative impact of defendant's actions on client's or public's perception of the profession;
- e. Factor (F) negative impact of the defendant's actions on the administration of justice;
- f. Factor (I) acts of dishonesty, misrepresentation, deceit, or fabrication

3. The Hearing Panel concludes that the following factors from 27 N.C. Admin. Code 1B.0116(f)(2), which require consideration of disbarment, are present in this case:

- a. Factor (A) acts of dishonesty, misrepresentation, deceit, or fabrication

4. The Hearing Panel concludes that the following factors from 27 N.C. Admin. Code 1B.0116(f)(3), which are to be considered in all cases, are present in this case:

- a. Factor (C) dishonest or selfish motive;
- b. Factor (N) submission of false evidence, false statements, or other deceptive practices during the disciplinary process;
- c. Factor (R) vulnerability of the victims;
- d. Factor (S) degree of experience in the practice of law.

5. The Hearing Panel has considered admonition, reprimand, and censure as potential discipline but finds that admonition, reprimand or censure would not be sufficient discipline because of the gravity of the harm and potential harm to the public, clients, the administration of justice, and profession in the present case.

6. In light of the foregoing, the Hearing Panel concludes that no discipline short of suspension of Defendant's law license will adequately acknowledge the seriousness of the offense Defendant committed and send the proper message to attorneys and the public regarding the conduct expected of members of the Bar of this State.

Based upon the foregoing Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, Findings of Fact Regarding Discipline, and Conclusions Regarding Discipline, the Hearing Panel enters the following:

ORDER OF DISCIPLINE

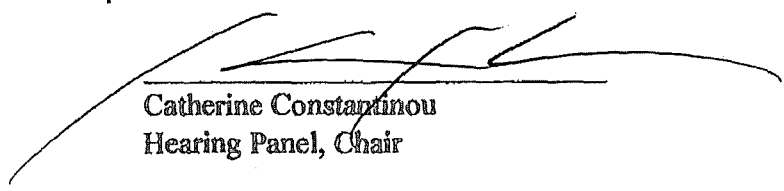
1. Defendant, Christopher C. Sanders, is hereby suspended from the practice of law for six months, beginning from the date of service of this order upon Defendant.
2. Defendant shall submit his license and membership card to the Secretary of the North Carolina State Bar no later than 45 days following service of this order upon Defendant.
3. Defendant shall comply with the wind down provisions contained in 27 N.C. Admin. Code § 1B.0128 ("Obligations of Disbarred or Suspended Attorneys"). As provided in 1B.0128(d), Defendant shall file an affidavit with the Secretary of the North Carolina State Bar within 10 days of the effective date of this order, certifying he complied with the wind down rule.
4. The administrative fees and costs of this action, including those associated with all depositions in this matter, are taxed to Defendant. Defendant must pay the costs of this action within 30 days of service upon him of the statement of costs by the Secretary.
5. Within 30 days of service of this Order, Defendant shall provide the State Bar's Office of Counsel with an address and telephone number at which clients seeking their files can communicate with Defendant.
6. Defendant shall promptly return client files in her possession, custody, or control to clients within five days after receiving a client's request for the file. Defendant will be deemed to have received a client's request for his or her file three days after the date the request is sent if the request is sent to the address Defendant provides to the State Bar pursuant to paragraph 5 above.
7. Defendant shall respond to all communications from the State Bar within thirty days of receipt or by the deadline stated in the communication, whichever is sooner.

8. Defendant shall keep the State Bar Membership Department advised of Defendant's current physical address, telephone number, and email address and shall notify the State Bar of within ten days of any change during the period of suspension.

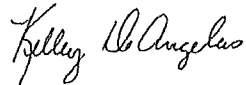
9. Defendant shall not violate the Rules of Professional Conduct, the law of the United States, or the laws of any other state or local government during the period of suspension.

10. The Disciplinary Hearing Commission will retain jurisdiction of this matter pursuant to §§ .0118 and .0129(b) of the North Carolina State Bar Discipline and Disability Rules throughout the period of the suspension and until all conditions set forth above are satisfied.

Signed by the undersigned Chair with the knowledge and consent of the other members of the Hearing Panel, this the 30th day of September, 2025.


Catherine Constantinou
Hearing Panel, Chair

WE CONSENT:



Kelley DeAngelus, Deputy Counsel
Attorney for Plaintiff

09/12/2025

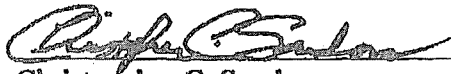
Date



Elizabeth F. Starnes, Deputy Counsel
Attorney for Plaintiff

09/12/2025

Date



Christopher C. Sanders
Defendant

9/11/25

Date