

NORTH CAROLINA  
WAKE COUNTY

BEFORE THE  
GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR  
15G0488

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

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On October 22, 2015, the Grievance Committee of the North Carolina State Bar met and considered the grievance filed against you by the North Carolina State Bar. 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.

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

The Grievance Committee believes that a hearing before the Disciplinary Hearing Commission is not required in this case and issues this censure to you. As chairman of the Grievance Committee of the North Carolina State Bar, it is now my duty to issue this censure.

In April 2013, you agreed to provide services to North Carolina residents on behalf of "Prince Law, LLC," a Florida law firm not authorized to practice law in North Carolina. Prince Law advertised on the internet that it could provide bankruptcy representation for North Carolina clients. None of the principals of the law firm were licensed in North Carolina. You signed a "Class B Partner" agreement with Prince Law. Under this agreement, you had no say in the management of the firm, the acceptance of clients, and you did not share in the profits or losses of the partnership. Instead, you were an independent contractor and were paid a portion of the fee collected by Prince Law. Your role in representation of the client was minimal.

You began providing services for Prince Law's North Carolina bankruptcy clients in mid-2013. Ultimately, you admit to working on sixty-seven (67) North Carolina cases for Prince Law, making approximately \$40,000.00. Twenty-one (21) of these cases were completed prior to Prince Law being registered as an interstate law firm in North Carolina, and fifteen (15) were completed after you received a reprimand for aiding another out-of-state company in the unauthorized practice of law. By agreeing with Prince Law to be identified as its North Carolina attorney, you allowed Prince Law to hold out as authorized to practice law in North Carolina when it was not and to collect fees from North Carolina citizens that far exceeded the amounts you were paid.

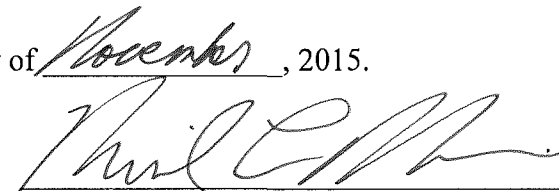
By accepting fees from Prince Law out of a portion of the fees Prince Law charged the clients, you shared a fee with a nonlawyer in violation of Rule 5.4(a). By working with Prince Law, an entity not licensed to practice law in North Carolina, to provide legal services to North Carolina residents, you assisted another entity in the unauthorized practice of law in violation of Rule 5.5(f) (formerly 5.5(d)). By allowing yourself to be identified as a member of Prince Law when you were an independent contractor merely sharing fees with Prince Law, you provided false or misleading statements about your services to the public in violation of Rule 7.1.

In determining that a censure 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 the length of time you worked for Prince Law, the number of North Carolina residents harmed as a result of your relationship with Prince Law, the amount of money you earned through your association with Prince Law, and the fact that you have been previously and recently reprimanded for this precise behavior.

You are hereby censured by the North Carolina State Bar for your violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct. The Grievance Committee trusts that you will ponder this censure, recognize the error that you have made, and that you will never again allow yourself to depart from adherence to the high ethical standards of the legal profession. This censure should serve as a strong reminder and inducement for you to weigh carefully in the future your responsibility to the public, your clients, your fellow attorneys and the courts, to the end that you demean yourself as a respected member of the legal profession whose conduct may be relied upon without question.

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 censure by the Grievance Committee, an administrative fee in the amount of \$350.00 is hereby taxed to you.

Done and ordered, this 15<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2015.



Michael L. Robinson, Chair  
Grievance Committee  
The North Carolina State Bar