

NORTH CAROLINA

WAKE COUNTY

BEFORE THE  
GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR  
17G0336

---

IN THE MATTER OF	)	
	)	REPRIMAND
STEPHANIE L. VILLAVER,	)	
ATTORNEY AT LAW	)	

---

On July 27, 2017 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 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.

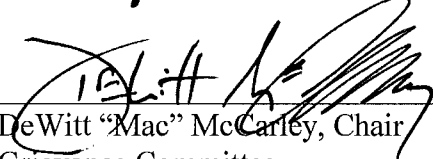
You advertised on your Facebook page that you specialized in personal injury claims “such as Auto Accidents, Slip & Falls, Worker’s Compensation & Wrongful Death Traffic and Criminal cases.” You cannot state that you specialize in an area of law since you are not certified by a specialization board as a specialist. Your use of the word specialize in your Facebook post violated Rule 7.4(b).

In your response to this grievance, you stated that you did not know that your consultant had used the word "specialize" in describing the delivery of your legal services on your Facebook page. You indicated that you omitted to tell the consultant about impermissible words or language in lawyer advertising. This omission is particularly significant since you were reprimanded by the Grievance Committee in February 2014 for advertising that you specialized in areas of the law, in violation of Rule 7.4(b). The Grievance Committee concluded that the buck stops with you as it relates to how your legal services are advertised.

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 5<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2017.

  
DeWitt "Mac" McCarley, Chair  
Grievance Committee

DM/lb