

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF FLORIDA
(Before a Referee)

THE FLORIDA BAR,
Complainant,

v.

MEREDITH DIANE JONES,
Respondent.

Supreme Court Case
No. SC22-1739

The Florida Bar File Nos.
2023-30,037(19A); 2023-30,038(19A);
and 2023-30,070(19A)

Received, Clerk, Supreme Court

MAR - 8 2023

REPORT OF REFEREE

I. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Pursuant to the undersigned being duly appointed as referee to conduct disciplinary proceedings herein according to Rule 3-7.6, Rules of Discipline, the following proceedings occurred:

On December 15, 2022, The Florida Bar filed its Complaint against respondent in these proceedings. On January 17, 2023, The Florida Bar filed a Motion for Default due to respondent's failure to answer the bar's Complaint. The bar's motion was granted, and on March 2, 2023, a Final Hearing as to Sanction was held in this matter. Respondent failed to appear for the Sanction Hearing after being properly noticed. All items properly filed including pleadings, recorded testimony (if transcribed),

exhibits in evidence and the report of referee constitute the record in this case and are forwarded to the Supreme Court of Florida.

II. FINDINGS OF FACT

Jurisdictional Statement. Respondent is, and at all times mentioned during this investigation was, a member of The Florida Bar, subject to the jurisdiction and Disciplinary Rules of the Supreme Court of Florida.

Narrative Summary Of Case.

Beginning in early 2022, respondent engaged in a course of conduct in which she repeatedly failed to appear in court, failed to communicate with clients and opposing counsel and ultimately abandoned her clients' legal matters. Additionally, on December 11, 2022, respondent sent correspondence to the bar that included The Florida Bar membership card issued to her and wrote that she has been struggling with physical and mental health problems and wanted to surrender her bar membership.

Count One **TFB File No. 2023-30,037 (19A)**

A. In or around October 2021, Ms. Allison hired respondent to represent her in a family law matter, Case No.: 56-2021-DR-002719, in the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit in St. Lucie County, Florida. In or around April 2022, respondent stopped communicating with Ms. Allison. Ms. Allison stated that respondent failed to inform her of important details regarding

her case and that respondent stopped responding to all of Ms. Allison's attempts at communication. Respondent ultimately abandoned Ms. Allison's family law matter.

B. On or about July 16, 2022, Ms. Allison filed a bar grievance against respondent. On or about July 20, 2022, The Florida Bar sent respondent a letter by First Class U.S. Mail to her record bar mailing address advising of Ms. Allison's complaint in this case and requesting that respondent provide a written response on or before August 4, 2022. Respondent failed to respond to the bar as requested in the letter of July 20, 2022. On or about August 15, 2022, The Florida Bar sent respondent a second letter to her record bar email address requesting that respondent provide a response to the complaint on or before August 26, 2022. Respondent again failed to respond to The Florida Bar and has not provided a written response to Ms. Allison's complaint.

Count Two
TFB File No. 2023-30,038 (19A)

C. This matter was referred to The Florida Bar by the presiding judge in Case No. 56-2021-DR-003209, in the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit in St. Lucie County, Florida. Respondent represented the wife, Ms. Southerland, in a family law matter. On June 14, 2022, respondent and her client failed to appear for a hearing. Subsequently, the court held a case

management conference on July 5, 2022, related to the respondent's failure to appear for the hearing.

D. On July 5, 2022, respondent failed to appear again but the client, Ms. Southerland, did appear. Ms. Southerland informed the court that she had attempted on numerous occasions to contact respondent without success and requested that the court remove respondent as her counsel of record in order to resolve the pending dissolution case. Additionally, counsel for the husband represented to the court that they have been unable to contact respondent for quite some time. The court's judicial assistant had also tried to contact respondent by telephone and was advised by respondent's office personnel that the last time they saw respondent was in June 2022.

E. On July 19, 2022, The Florida Bar sent respondent a letter by email to respondent's record bar email address advising of the complaint in this case and requesting that respondent provide a written response on or before August 3, 2022. On August 3, 2022, respondent provided a response by email to the bar explaining that she had some health issues but was improving and was not taking any new cases and attempting to handle the clients' matters that she currently had. After this response, the

bar did not hear from respondent any further during the investigation of this matter.

Count Three
TFB File No. 2023-30,070 (19A)

F. In or around March 2022, Ms. Kouns hired respondent to assist in a paternity matter, Case No.: 56-2022-DR-001216, in the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit in St. Lucie County, Florida.

G. Ms. Kouns stated that respondent failed to timely serve documents on the opposing party and that respondent failed to respond to Ms. Kouns' attempts at communication. Respondent ultimately abandoned Ms. Kouns' matter.

H. On or about July 21, 2022, Ms. Kouns filed a bar grievance against respondent. The Florida Bar personally served respondent on August 2, 2022, with a letter, dated August 1, 2022, advising of Ms. Kouns' complaint and requesting that respondent provide a response within 10 days of receipt of the letter. Respondent failed to respond to the bar as requested in the letter of August 1, 2022. The Florida Bar sent respondent a second letter to her record bar email address, requesting that respondent provide a response on or before August 26, 2022. Respondent again failed to respond and has not provided a written response to Ms. Kouns' complaint to The Florida Bar.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AS TO GUILT

I recommend that Respondent be found guilty of violating the following Rules Regulating The Florida Bar:

For Count One, TFB File No. 2023-30,037 (19A): 3-4.3 (Misconduct and Minor Misconduct); 4-1.4(a) and (b) (Communication); 4-1.16(a)(2) and (d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); and 4-8.4(d) and (g) (Misconduct).

For Count Two, TFB File No. 2023-30,038 (19A): 3-4.3 (Misconduct and Minor Misconduct); 4-1.3 (Diligence); 4-1.4(a) (Communication); 4-1.16(a)(2) and (d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); and 4-8.4(d) (Misconduct).

For Count Three, TFB File No. 2023-30,070 (19A): 3-4.3 (Misconduct and Minor Misconduct); 4-1.3 (Diligence); 4-1.4(a) and (b) (Communication); 4-1.16(a)(2) and (d) (Declining or Terminating Representation); and 4-8.4(d) and (g) (Misconduct).

IV. STANDARDS FOR IMPOSING LAWYER SANCTIONS

I considered the following Standards prior to recommending discipline:

4.4 Lack of Diligence

4.4(a) Disbarment. Disbarment is appropriate when: (a) a lawyer abandons the practice and causes serious or potentially serious injury to a client; or (b) a lawyer knowingly fails to perform services for a client and causes serious or potentially serious injury to a client; or (c) a lawyer engages in a pattern of neglect with respect to client matters and causes serious or potentially serious injury to a client.

7.1 Violations of Other Duties Owed as a Professional

7.1(a) Disbarment. Disbarment is appropriate when a lawyer intentionally engages in conduct that is a violation of a duty owed as a professional with the intent to obtain a benefit for the lawyer or another and causes serious or potentially serious injury to a client, the public, or the legal system.

3.2(b) Aggravating Factors

- (3) pattern of misconduct;
- (4) multiple offenses;
- (5) bad faith obstruction of the disciplinary proceeding by intentionally failing to comply with rules or orders of the disciplinary agency;
- (8) vulnerability of victim; and

(9) substantial experience in the practice of law.

3.3(b) Mitigating Factors

(2) absence of a prior disciplinary record;

(3) personal or emotional problems; and

(8) physical or mental disability or impairment or substance related disorder.

V. CASE LAW

I considered the following case law prior to recommending discipline:

In The Florida Bar v. Omer Ors, 2020 WL 5959709 (Fla. Oct. 8, 2020), the Court disbarred Ors, following a suspension for failing to respond to bar inquiries. Ors neglected several clients' legal matters and ultimately abandoned his law practice. Ors also failed to participate in the disciplinary proceeding.

In The Florida Bar v. Amanda C. Leary, 2020 WL 4015080 (Fla. July 16, 2020), the Court disbarred Leary. Leary was already suspended following an order to show cause for failing to respond to the bar's inquiries. Leary abandoned her law practice, failed to complete her clients' legal matters, and failed to communicate with the clients after taking legal fees for service. Despite service of pleadings and correspondence to Leary's record bar address, record bar email address, her home address, and

personal service by the bar's investigator, she failed to participate in the disciplinary proceedings and failed to appear at the final hearing.

In The Florida Bar v. Marquista Alexandria Shipman, 2018 WL 3689409 (Fla. August 2, 2018), the Court disbarred Shipman. Shipman abandoned her law practice and several pending client matters. Shipman failed to participate in the disciplinary proceedings, and she was already suspended for failing to respond to the bar's inquiries.

In The Florida Bar v. Carol Lynn Benson Kendall, 2017 WL 4217346 (Fla. Sept. 22, 2017), the Court disbarred Kendall and ordered her to pay restitution to a client in the amount of \$1,075.00. Kendall abandoned two separate clients' matters. In addition, during the disciplinary proceeding, Kendall failed to answer the bar's complaint and failed to respond to discovery requests. She was already suspended for failing to respond to an official bar inquiry.

VI. RECOMMENDATION AS TO DISCIPLINARY MEASURES TO BE APPLIED

I recommend that Respondent be found guilty of misconduct justifying disciplinary measures, and that she be disciplined by:

A. Order her immediate disbarment from the practice of law.

Respondent does not need a close out period because she is currently suspended in SC22-1251 as a result of her failure to respond in The Florida

Bar File Nos. 2023-30,037 (19A) and 2023-30,070 (19A) and her failure to respond to the Supreme Court of Florida's order to show cause after the bar filed its Petition for Contempt and Order to Show Cause.

B. Requiring respondent to eliminate all indicia of her status as an attorney on social media, telephone listings, stationery, checks, business cards office signs or any other indicia of respondent's status as an attorney, whatsoever;

C. Mandating that respondent will no longer hold herself out as a licensed attorney; and

D. Payment of The Florida Bar's costs in these proceedings.

VII. PERSONAL HISTORY, PAST DISCIPLINARY RECORD

Prior to recommending discipline pursuant to Rule 3-7.6(m)(1)(D), I considered the following:

Personal History of Respondent:

Age: 38

Date admitted to the Bar: April 26, 2012

Prior Discipline: None.

VIII. STATEMENT OF COSTS AND MANNER IN WHICH COSTS SHOULD BE TAXED

I find the following costs were reasonably incurred by The Florida Bar:

Investigative Costs	\$459.73
Court Reporters' Fees	\$130.00
Administrative Fee	\$1,250.00

TOTAL	\$1,839.73
-------	------------

It is recommended that such costs be charged to respondent and that interest at the statutory rate shall accrue and be deemed delinquent 30 days after the judgment in this case becomes final unless paid in full or otherwise deferred by the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar.

Dated this 7 day of MARCH, 2023.



Hon. Christopher Sprysenski, Referee

Original To:

Clerk of the Supreme Court of Florida; Supreme Court Building; 500 South Duval Street, Tallahassee, Florida, 32399-1927

Conformed Copies By Email To:

Meredith Diane Jones, Respondent, 207 S. 2nd St, Fort Pierce, FL 34950-4350, at mj@lawyermj.com;

Carrie Constance Lee, Bar Counsel, The Florida Bar, Orlando Branch Office, 1000 Legion Place, Suite 1625, Orlando, Florida 32801-1050, at clee@floridabar.org; and

Patricia Ann Toro Savitz, Staff Counsel, The Florida Bar, 651 E. Jefferson Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-2300, at psavitz@floridabar.org.