

STATE OF VERMONT
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAM

In re: William W. Cobb
PRB File No. 131-2025

DECISION No. 262

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW, AND ORDER

Based upon evidence received and the Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law jointly filed by the Petitioner and Disciplinary Counsel, the Hearing Panel finds, concludes, and orders as follows.

Findings of Fact

Testimony of William Cobb

1. Petitioner William Cobb graduated from Brooklyn Law School in 2000, (Tr. at 22-25.) and was admitted to the practice of law in Vermont in March 2005. (Tr. at 84:3-6.) He actively engaged in the practice of law between his admission and his suspension from practice on July 11, 2022. (Tr. at 84:7-23.) His practice was primarily focused on criminal defense and family law. (Tr. 84:13-14.) Between his admission and suspension, Petitioner met all of his continuing legal education requirements. (Tr. 84:10-11.)
2. Petitioner was suspended from practice for a period of 15 months on May 24, 2022. (Tr. 84:15-17.) The suspension was stayed until July 11, 2022. He applied for reinstatement in July 2023, but the petition was denied. (Tr.

84:18-23, 84:24-25.) As of the hearing date on the pending petition for reinstatement, Petitioner had been suspended for 36 months. (Tr. 85:3-6.)

3. Petitioner's underlying suspensions arose out of the handling of two cases and out of his interactions with Disciplinary Counsel related to one of those matters. (Tr. 85:7-85:13.)
4. Petitioner's misconduct fell under three general categories: (1) failure to provide competent and diligent representation to a client charged with a criminal offense; (2) disclosure of confidential information; and (3) misrepresentations made to Disciplinary Counsel. *See, In re Cobb*, PRB Decision No. 246, (May 24, 2022.)
5. In the May 2022 decision suspending Petitioner's license, the Hearing Panel found the following violations:
 - (a) Petitioner failed to provide competent representation to client M.K. by failing to obtain and review recorded statements of witnesses in a criminal proceeding;
 - (b) Petitioner failed to provide diligent representation to client M.K. by failing to file a motion to modify conditions of release in a criminal proceeding as requested by the client;
 - (c) Petitioner disclosed confidential juvenile court information in a related civil proceeding;
 - (d) Petitioner disclosed confidential client information; and
 - (e) Petitioner provided misleading information to Disciplinary Counsel

regarding the circumstances and substance of his timekeeping in a matter under investigation.

6. Petitioner understands how his conduct in the underlying disciplinary matters harmed his clients. (Tr. 85:7-88:5.) He also understands that his conduct in falsifying billing records and communicating dishonestly with disciplinary counsel was motivated by self-interest and was wrong. (Tr. 88:6-24.)
7. In order to address the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters, Petitioner took numerous continuing legal education classes which are set forth in certificates of completion. (Tr. 89:2-22; Exhibit 19.)
8. In order to address the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters, Petitioner reviewed and outlined the Rules of Professional Conduct. (Tr. 89:24-91:15; Exhibit 20.)
9. In order to address the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters, Petitioner wrote letters of apology to the people that he harmed. (Tr. 91:19-93:25; Exhibits 21- 24.)
10. In order to address concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters, Petitioner spoke with M.K., his former client, by phone and apologized for failing to obtain and review videos and failing to file a motion to amend his conditions of release. (Tr. 103:11-16.) Petitioner also reimbursed M.K. \$5,000 of the legal fees he had previously paid to Petitioner. (Tr. 103:9-104:9.)
11. In order to address the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary

matters, Petitioner engaged in counseling with Kristi Zola in Lyndonville, Vermont from September 2023 through March 2024. (Tr. 94:2-13.)

12. During these sessions, Petitioner and Ms. Zola discussed the violations, the conduct at issue in the underlying disciplinary matters, the causes of the violations, and the things that Petitioner could do to correct his conduct. They also discussed how he could improve as a person and take responsibility and accountability for his actions, including honesty in communications with Disciplinary Counsel. (Tr. 94:2-19.)

13. In order to continue addressing the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters, Petitioner engaged in thirteen counseling sessions with Shahla Gorovoy PhD., a psychologist in Middletown, New York from September 2024 until March 2025. (Tr. 94:20-21; 95:19-21.)

14. In order to address the concerns raised in the underlying disciplinary matters and to get a second opinion on whether he was suffering from ADHD, Petitioner also engaged in counseling with Dr. Qauzi Al-Tariq, a psychiatrist, in Middletown, New York during that same time period. (Tr. 94:20-21.)

15. Petitioner's counseling with Ms. Zola, Dr. Gorovoy, and Dr. Al-Tariq were aimed at addressing the conduct violations and the causes of the violations. They were also directed at the efforts that Petitioner was making to learn about himself, to understand what he had done, to assume accountability and responsibility, and to implement measures to

assist him to avoid misconduct in the future. (Tr. 95:6-18.)

16. During sessions with Dr. Gorovoy, they discussed the misconduct violations including how he had harmed the parties in each of the cases. They also discussed his dishonesty when dealing with Disciplinary Counsel including the misrepresentations he had made in falsifying time sheets. As well, they discussed the steps he needed to take to address the underlying conduct and to ensure that the conduct would not be repeated. (Tr. 96:3-23.)

17. Counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy helped Petitioner gain insight into the following matters: (1) that he allowed his busy practice to compromise his communication with his clients and their ability to participate in strategic decisions; (2) that he did not have a good system in place to ensure regular meetings and consistent communication with clients; and (3) that he did not give enough consideration to whether he was following the ethical rules. (Tr. 97:6-98:25.)

18. Petitioner sought to address these shortcomings through completing continuing legal education classes, resolving to be more selective in accepting cases, resolving not to take cases outside of his area of expertise, implementing a system to improve his organization, instituting a practice always to have a follow-up client meeting scheduled, and resolving to hire support staff. (Tr. 99:1-101:3.)

19. However, Petitioner acknowledged that some of his professional

misconduct “cannot be attributed to having too many cases or the wrong cases” because “in a few instances” he “knowingly and intentionally disregarded [his] ethical obligations.” (Tr. 152:7-14. 154:6-9, 157:7-11.)

20. When he practiced law in New York during his Vermont suspension, Petitioner did not handle any cases outside of criminal defense and traffic violations, his areas of expertise. (Tr. 144:7-145:10.) He testified that these measures greatly improved his communication with his clients and his analyses of the issues in his New York practice. (Tr. 101:4-103:4; 136:25-137:7.)

21. Petitioner testified that if he is readmitted to practice and found himself becoming too busy, he would take on fewer cases, would decline cases that are too far away geographically, and would hire additional staff to assist him in managing the cases, if necessary. (Tr. 105:19-106:17; 135:16-136:17; 137:8-11; 138:12-139:10; 150:23-152:6.)

22. During his counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy, Petitioner also discussed the fact that he shared confidential information about another client with M.K.’s successor counsel. (Tr. 106:22-107:3.)

23. During counseling with Dr. Gorovoy, Ms. Zola, and Dr. Al-Tariq Petitioner came to realize that, as a result of taking on too many cases, he had disclosed confidential information about another client because he had become accustomed to responding to issues quickly and without fully considering ethical implications. Also, he had wanted to stay involved in

M.K.'s case as co-counsel to serve his own financial self-interest. (Tr. 107:4-108:17, 153:14-24.)

24. Petitioner's counseling, his review of the rules, the apology letters to his clients, and his CLE classes will help him avoid misconduct in the future. (Tr. 109:8-12.)

25. During his counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy, Petitioner also reviewed and discussed his disclosures of confidential juvenile information in a motion for summary judgment in a related civil case. (Tr. 109:13-18.)

26. As a result of the counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy, Petitioner gained insight into the cause of his behavior and concluded that this was partially due to his accepting a case outside the area of his expertise. He realized that he should have either referred the case to another attorney or had another attorney serve as co-counsel on the case. (Tr. 109:18-110:5.)

27. In his counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy and at the hearing, Petitioner admitted that although he had consulted with colleagues about how to file a motion containing confidential information, he should have taken the time to conduct the research himself to ensure that his motion complied with legal requirements. (Tr. 110:6-21.) He has since educated himself as to how to properly handle confidential juvenile information in non-juvenile cases. (Tr. 110:22-111:12.)

28. Petitioner conceded that he intentionally, not just recklessly, revealed legally

confidential information and documents about a juvenile in a civil case. (Tr. 156:1-157:24.)

29. During counseling with Dr. Gorovoy, Petitioner discussed the fact that he had falsified his time entries for work on M.K.'s case in response to a request from Disciplinary Counsel and that his falsification of time was dishonest. (Tr. 111:13-18.)

30. During his counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy, Petitioner gained insight into the cause of his falsified communications with Disciplinary Counsel. He now understands that he prioritized his own interest in maintaining his practice and attempted to avoid misconduct charges. (Tr. 111:19-112:23.)

31. Petitioner was reciprocally suspended from the practice of law in the State of New York on March 26, 2025. (Tr. 115:3-5; 122:9-13); *See, Matter of Cobb*, Case No. 2024-0223, Opinion & Order, 2025 WL 908716 (N.Y. App. Div. 2d Dept. Mar. 26, 2025), (Exhibit DC- 1; Tr. 180.)

32. On April 11, 2022, Petitioner advised the Grievance Committee for the Ninth Judicial District of New York, the District in which he had been admitted, that he was facing disciplinary charges in Vermont. (Tr. 115:6-116:6 Exhibit 5.)

33. On July 8, 2022, Petitioner sent a letter to the Grievance Committee in New York, along with a copy of the order which suspended his Vermont license and a copy of the order which stayed the Vermont suspension.

Thus, he provided notice to the Grievance Committee that his license to practice law in Vermont was ordered suspended effective May 24, 2022. (Tr. 116:23-118:12; 203:23-204:10; Exhibit 6.)

34. Petitioner provided certified mail receipts showing that he mailed the July 8, 2022 correspondence to the Grievance Committee. (Tr. 118:14-22; 119:15-17; Exhibit 7.)

35. A date-stamped copy of the July 8 letter, obtained from the Grievance Committee showed that the document was received by the Grievance Committee on July 13, 2022. (Tr. 206:6-13; Exhibit 6.)

36. Nevertheless, the March 2025 New York Appellate Division Opinion and Order that reciprocally suspended Petitioner from practice in New York found that Petitioner “did not notify this Court or the Grievance Committee of the Vermont order of discipline, as required by 22 NYCRR 1240.13(d).” (Exhibit DC-1 at p. 4; Tr. 180.)

37. Petitioner maintains that this judicial finding of the New York Appellate Division is partially incorrect or mistaken insofar as he contends that “notice . . . was clearly given to the Grievance Committee.” (Tr. 178:14-23.)

38. Petitioner also sent letters to the United States District Courts for the Eastern District of New York, the Southern District of New York, the Northern District of New York, and the District of Vermont informing them of his Vermont suspension. (Tr. 118:23-119:11; 119:21-121:9;

Exhibits 8, 9 and 10.)

39. On November 14, 2023, Petitioner provided a completed questionnaire to the Grievance Committee again advising of his Vermont suspension, that the suspension was still in effect, and that a hearing date was scheduled on his petition for reinstatement. (Tr. 121:11- 122:7; 204:12-18; Exhibit 15.)

40. Petitioner obtained a date-stamped copy of his November 14, 2023 letter which indicated that the document was received by the Grievance Committee on November 17, 2023. (Tr. 206:6-13; Exhibit 15.)

41. The New York Supreme Court Appellate Division issued a show cause order to explain why his license to practice law in New York should not be suspended reciprocally as a result of the suspension of his Vermont law license. (Tr. 122:14-16.) Petitioner did not contest reciprocal suspension or otherwise respond to the show cause order because he did not plan to contest the reciprocal suspension. (Tr. 122:14-20.)

42. On April 4, 2024, Petitioner sent an email to Attorney Cipolone of the Grievance Committee seeking to confirm that the Grievance Committee had received his correspondence advising of the suspension of his Vermont license. (Tr. 122:21-123:11; Exhibit 17.)

43. By reply email on April 4, 2024, Attorney Cipolone confirmed receipt of the July 8, 2022 correspondence from Petitioner to the Grievance Committee which had enclosed a copy of the May 24, 2022 order

suspending Petitioner's Vermont license. (Tr. 122:21-123:11; Exhibit 17.)

44. Although he claimed that he properly notified the New York Grievance Committee of the suspension of his Vermont license, Petitioner conceded that he failed to notify the New York Appellate Division of the Vermont suspension as he was required to do by New York's Rules for Attorney Disciplinary Matters, N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. tit. 22, §1240.13(d). (Tr. at 125:14-21, 173:11-16, 178:14-23.)

45. Petitioner claimed that he did not know that separate notice to the Appellate Division was required at the time he initially sent notice to the Grievance Committee,. (Tr. 125:19- 21.)

46. Since the imposition of his Vermont suspension, Attorney Cobb has engaged in community service including serving as a guardian ad litem, volunteering to perform trail maintenance at Kingdom Trails in East Burke Vermont, and working at the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum bookstore, which raises money for the Athenaeum, a library. (Tr. 125:22-126:19.)

47. Petitioner does not have any objection to the recommendation made by his former psychiatrist Dr. Al-Tariq that, if reinstated, he should be assigned a professional mentor to monitor his legal practice for a period of time. (Tr. 149:15-21.)

Testimony of Shahla Gorovoy, PhD - psychologist

48. Shahla Gorovoy, PhD. is a licensed psychologist who is engaged in private practice in the State of New York and who specializes in forensic psychology. (Tr. 12:24-13:5, 22:25-23:7; 22:5-11.)
49. Dr. Gorovoy's work experience includes conducting mental health assessments, competency evaluations, and risk assessments. She also provides mental health treatment in homeless shelters, in the New York prison system, and at the Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center. (Tr. 17:6-18:3; 18:16-25; Exhibit 26.)
50. At the Mid-Hudson Psychiatric Center, Dr. Gorovoy participated in risk assessments and hospital forensic committees to determine the risk that patients would re-engage in negative behaviors if released into the community. (Tr. 19:13-19; 21:13-4.)
51. Dr. Gorovoy explained that "there is a psychological test for assessing the likelihood of repeating misconduct called the HCR," but conceded that she did not administer the HCR test to Petitioner. (Tr. 54:4-19.)
52. Dr. Gorovoy was qualified as an expert in the field of psychology, the diagnosis of ADHD and other mental health conditions, the assessment of whether a person is being truthful in certain health-related contexts, the assessment of whether a person has insight into his or her conduct, and the assessment of whether a person is at risk of repeating criminal conduct. (Tr. 25:6-26:3, 53:5-9, 54:24-25—55:1-13.)

53. In September of 2024, Petitioner sought counseling with Dr. Gorovoy to address the conduct underlying the suspension of his Vermont law license and to assess whether he had ADHD. (Tr. 26:6-27:25.) He attended 13 counseling sessions with Dr. Gorovoy between September 19, 2024, and April 29, 2025. (Tr. 28:5-12.)
54. In preparation for her counseling sessions with Petitioner, Dr. Gorovoy reviewed the decisions by the Vermont Professional Responsibility Board Hearing Panels and records from Kristi Zola, Joyce Vitaly (Petitioner's primary care physician), Patricia Dille, and Dr. Qauzi Al-Tariq, as well as letters from family members and co-workers. (Tr. 28:20; 29:14-17.)
55. During their counseling sessions, Dr. Gorovoy and Petitioner reviewed the decisions of the Vermont Professional Responsibility Board Hearing Panels related to his license suspension, the denial of his petition for reinstatement, and the conduct at issue in those decisions. (Tr. 33:8-13; 33:22-24.)
56. During their counseling sessions Dr. Gorovoy and Petitioner spoke about what led Petitioner to engage in the behaviors at issue in the underlying disciplinary complaint. (Tr. 33:22-34:13.) Petitioner reflected on what he did and why his conduct was wrong. (Tr. 34:2-13.)
57. During the sessions, Petitioner discussed the allegations and the Panel decision which found that he had engaged in untruthful and misleading

conduct. He admitted to Dr. Gorovoy that he acted in a misleading and dishonest way in communicating with Disciplinary Counsel. (Tr. 34:14-24; 35:4-9; 65:21-66:7.)

58. Dr. Gorovoy believes that Petitioner is truly remorseful for engaging in the conduct underlying the petition of misconduct. (Tr. 35:13-14; 15-18; 23-25; 36:1-3; 39:4-7.)

59. Although Dr. Gorovoy believes that Petitioner was completely honest about the conduct underlying the disciplinary matters when speaking with her, she does not “claim expertise in being able to predict a patient or subject's propensity for future dishonesty.” (Tr. 35:15-21; 55:22-25-56:1.)

60. Dr. Gorovoy opined that Petitioner gained improved insight through counseling into the causes of the conduct underlying the disciplinary proceedings. She also opined that he learned that he: (1) needs to be more selective about the cases he takes; (2) needs to take more time to assess whether he has the appropriate level of expertise in taking on a case; (3) needs to refer cases out to another attorney when he does not have sufficient experience; (4) was over-extending himself by taking on too many cases; (5) was disorganized and needed to improve his case tracking; and (6) was not deliberating and researching enough before making decisions in his cases. (Tr. 36:4-39:4.)

61. However, Dr. Gorovoy “cannot say” whether Petitioner being

“overworked” somehow “caused him to make [an] intentional choice to commit misconduct.” (Tr. 57:15- 18.)

62. Dr. Gorovoy believes that Petitioner is unlikely to re-engage in the type of conduct underlying the Vermont disciplinary proceedings because of his improved insight and because of the painful consequences that he received as a result of his conduct. (Tr. 39:8-19; 59:25-62:11; 66:8-17.)

63. Dr. Gorovoy also concluded that Petitioner is unlikely to re-engage in the type of conduct underlying the disciplinary proceedings because he has various protective factors in place, including: (1) his completion of continuing education in law and ethics, (2) an improved practice of pausing before making decisions; (3) peer support; (4) his long term relationship with and marriage to his wife; (5) his relationship to his children, (6) the support of his family; and (7) his intelligence and sense of remorse. (Tr. 64:1-18.)

64. However, Dr. Gorovoy conceded that Petitioner had all of these above-described “protective factors before when he committed misconduct back in 2020.” (Tr. 64:16-21.)

65. Dr. Gorovoy opined with very high certainty that Petitioner is unlikely to engage in untruthful conduct in the future, in part based upon his implementation of measures designed to improve his practice and behaviors. (Tr. 39:20-40:9; 42:7-10; 66:8-25.)

66. Dr. Gorovoy opined that Petitioner’s experience with this disciplinary

matter has changed him in a very profound way and that he is very focused on how to avoid repeating the same mistakes and facing disciplinary matters in the future. (Tr. 4314-24.)

67. During their counseling sessions, Dr. Gorovoy and Petitioner identified steps that Petitioner could take to ensure that he would not engage in unprofessional conduct in the future, including steps to improve his organization. (Tr. 40:10-41:1.)

68. Petitioner reported to Dr. Gorovoy that he successfully incorporated these measures into his New York practice. (Tr. 41:23-42:6.) However, she agreed that she was not “an expert in effective law practice, organization, or law practice management.” (Tr. 65:7-9.)

69. In Dr. Gorovoy’s opinion, Petitioner is psychologically fit to practice law and he has the correct systems and mindset in order to properly function as an attorney. (Tr. 42:25-43:16.)

Testimony of Qauzi Al-Tariq, M.D., psychiatrist

70. Dr. Qauzi Al-Tariq is a licensed and board-certified psychiatrist in good standing who has been a practicing psychiatrist since 1984. He is employed by the State of New York to run the Sullivan County Mental Health Unit in Middletown, New York and is also engaged in private practice. (Tr. 69:18-70:11; 72:19-25; Tr. 69:25; 71:10-12.)

71. Dr. Al-Tariq has experience and training with respect to diagnosing

ADHD. (Tr. at 73:1-4.)

72. Dr. Al-Tariq met with Petitioner on December 13, 2023, January 23, 2025, February 13, 2025, February 27, 2025, March 3, 2025, and April 29, 2025. (Tr. 73:12-17.) The purpose of the sessions was for Dr. Al-Tariq to evaluate whether Petitioner had ADHD and to provide counseling as to the behaviors at issue in the underlying disciplinary matters. (Tr. at 73:18-23.)

73. Based on his counseling sessions with Petitioner, Dr. Al-Tariq believes that Mr. Cobb has gained insight into the behaviors underlying his Vermont suspension and understands the cause of his behaviors. (Tr. 79:12-24.)

74. Dr. Al-Tariq conceded that he had never “before assessed the fitness of someone to practice as a lawyer” and that “this is the first time that I will be going or giving my opinion for a lawyer.” (Tr. 76:13-17.)

75. Dr. Al-Tariq recommended that, if Petitioner is reinstated, “another attorney” should “supervise him or guide him or mentorship,” which will “safeguard the legal system.” (Tr. 77:12-15.) Dr. Al-Tariq clarified that “[a]t this time, [Petitioner] should be allowed to practice law in the Vermont, and he can do it independently. But somebody can be a mentor for his cases,” which is “my simple, honest advice . . . not mandatory and “is just a suggestion.” (Tr. 79:1-4, 80:14-15, 81:1.)

Conclusions of Law

Rule 26 of the Supreme Court's Administrative Order No. 9, Permanent Rules Governing Establishment and Operation of the Professional Responsibility Program ("A.O. 9") provides that before an attorney who has been disbarred or suspended for six months or longer may resume the practice of law, he or she must submit a motion or petition to the Professional Responsibility Board ("PRB") seeking reinstatement to active practice. A.O. 9, Rule 26 D. At a subsequent hearing before a PRB Hearing Panel,

the respondent-attorney shall have the burden of demonstrating by clear and convincing evidence that the respondent has the moral qualifications, competency, and learning required for admission to practice law in the state, and the resumption of the practice of law will be neither detrimental to the integrity and standing of the bar or the administration of justice nor subversive of the public interest and that the respondent-attorney has been rehabilitated. . . .

A.O. 9, Rule 26 D; *See also In re Hunter*, 167 Vt. 219, 228, 704 A.2d 1154, 1159 (1997) (noting above A.O. 9 standards for reinstatement after suspension or disbarment).

Because of the Supreme Court's "duty . . . to shield the public" from attorney misconduct "and the concomitant responsibility to do all possible to maintain public confidence in the practicing Bar, [its] responses to petitions for reinstatement are thereby necessarily restricted." *Petition of Harrington*, 134 Vt. 549, 552, 367 A.2d 161, 163 (1976). Reinstatement may not be granted merely out of "sympathetic concern for a truly repentant former member of the

profession” or a belief that “a sufficient, or more than sufficient, penalty has already been exacted for his misbehavior.” *Id.*

“[R]ehabilitation sufficient to warrant reinstatement is not demonstrated *solely* by falling on one’s sword and thereafter avoiding personal or professional missteps—that is the bare minimum expected from a disbarred attorney before seeking reinstatement. Accountability must be more than superficial; it must be thorough and consistently reflected in a lawyer’s words and actions.” *In re Reinstatement of Sparks*, No. 23-71, 2025 WL 1466680, at *11 (W. Va. May 22, 2025). “However, repentance and rehabilitation are not the same.

Rehabilitation, the most important consideration in reinstatement proceedings, is a matter of one’s ‘return’ to a beneficial, constructive and trustworthy role.

Repentance is a matter of contrition and regret.” *In re Wigoda*, 395 N.E.2d 571, 574 (Ill. 1979).

Hearing panels in previous reinstatement cases have taken a common approach to their task.

In assessing the issue of rehabilitation, the Hearing Panels in *In re Lichtenberg*, PRB Decision No. 1 (December 1990) approved by Supreme Court Entry Order Docket No. 99-533 (January 2000), *In re Blais*, PRB Decision No. 58 (October 2003), approved by Supreme Court Entry Order, Docket No. 2004-010, (October 2003), and *In re Lane*, PRB Decision No. 108, (April 2008), approved by Supreme Court Entry Order, Docket No. 2008-153 (May 2008) considered the underlying causes of the disbarment or suspension in connection with its determination of the attorney’s rehabilitation.

In each of these cases it was important to identify the precipitating event or behavior that led to the charges of misconduct and to evaluate whether, at the time of the petition for reinstatement, the attorney had sufficient understanding of his situation and had made the necessary changes

to insure the Panel both that he had been rehabilitated and that when faced with similar situations upon return to practice, the attorney would not revert to prior behavior.

In re Neisner, PRB Decision No. 139 (March 2011) at *9, approved by Supreme Court Entry Order, 2011 VT 35 (April 2011).

To conclude that an attorney seeking reinstatement has been “fully rehabilitated,” the Hearing Panel will “need[] to be assured that Respondent understands and recognizes what led to his [professional ethical] violations . . . that he has truly changed his ways, and that his attitude toward the practice of law has changed.” *In re Blais*, PRB File No. 010-2010, Decision No. 58 at 6 (Oct. 1, 2003). In contrast, reinstatement is not appropriate when the attorney offers “no evidence” to aid the Hearing Panel “in better understanding the causes’ of the conduct at issue nor any evidence ‘that such circumstances, whether internal or external, have been addressed in a way that would make less likely the potential for a recurrence of this behavior.’” *In re Burgess*, 169 Vt. 533, 725 A.2d 302, 303 (1999) (citation omitted).

The conduct of the Petitioner which resulted in suspension of his license to practice law fell into three main categories: (1) failure to act diligently and competently when representing a client in a criminal matter; (2) disclosure of confidential information; and (3) providing false and misleading information to Disciplinary Counsel who was investigating complaints against him. The Petitioner has proved by clear and convincing evidence that he understands the nature and

cause of his shortcomings and that he has taken the steps necessary to ensure that no further misconduct will occur.

1. Failure to act diligently and competently.

Petitioner has provided clear and convincing evidence that the manner in which he operated his practice led him to the charged misconduct. Petitioner was over-extended. He permitted himself to engage in more cases than he could competently handle. It is obvious that competent representation requires a lawyer in a criminal proceeding to review witnesses' statements. It is clear that diligent representation requires a lawyer to file a motion to modify conditions of release in a criminal proceeding when so requested by a client. One does not require expert advice to be aware of these standards. The Panel concludes that Petitioner understands the conditions that led him to dereliction.

The Petitioner engaged in the practice of law for over twenty years before understood the obligations to his client and that he failed to fulfill them. As a result of counseling and introspection he has come to realize that his practice must be more organized and that he cannot permit himself to become over-extended. He is prepared to put into place office procedures that will ensure that he will not neglect obligations to his clients. He will limit the number of clients he accepts in order to ensure that he will have sufficient time to service each of them. Petitioner had already implemented many of these measures in his New York practice until he was reciprocally suspended in March 2025.

One of Petitioner's counselors, Dr. Qauzi Al-Tariq, recommended that he be mentored and monitored for a period of time after reinstatement. The Petitioner has embraced this concept as has Disciplinary Counsel. *See, Stipulation for Imposition of Probation in Conjunction with Reinstatement from Suspension*, dated September 23, 2025. The Panel agrees that the appointment of a probation monitor will assist the Petitioner to utilize the office procedures he intends to implement in his Vermont practice.

2. Disclosure of confidential information.

In two separate instances, the Petitioner disclosed confidential information. In the first, he disclosed confidential information to a successor-lawyer about an unrelated client. In the second, he disclosed confidential juvenile court information when he filed a motion in a related civil proceeding. The disclosures were made intentionally, but without the specific intent of violating the Rules of Professional Conduct. At the least, the Petitioner should have known that he was disclosing confidential information.

Again, by means of counseling and introspection the Petitioner has come to understand that in both instances he acted precipitously without taking the time either to analyze or to research confidentiality issues. This conduct is also attributable in part to over-extension.

The Petitioner has educated himself by reviewing and outlining the Rules of Professional Conduct and by enrolling in a series of continuing legal education

courses. He appreciates the necessity of pausing before acting, of taking sufficient time and focus to analyze ethical issues and to act appropriately and responsibly. The new office procedures outlined above will help to ensure that the Petitioner has adequate time to practice thoughtfully and ethically.

3. Dishonesty in dealing with Disciplinary Counsel.

The most troubling aspect of the Petitioner's misconduct is the manner in which he attempted to mislead Disciplinary Counsel in connection with his timekeeping records. This misconduct cannot be attributed to over-extension or overwork. It was a deliberate effort to mislead Disciplinary Counsel for his own self-interest.

The Panel is also concerned about the Petitioner's interaction with the New York Grievance Committee and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. The Petitioner knew that he was required to advise the New York Judiciary of the suspension of his Vermont license. As a New York-licensed attorney, he should have known the correct method of accomplishing this. As well, he should have known that New York would reciprocally suspend his New York license when advised of the Vermont suspension. The absence of a New York suspension should have alerted him to his malfeasance in notifying the New York authorities. Yet he took no action and continued to practice in New York until suspended there in March 2025.

Nevertheless, based upon evidence of the Petitioner's counseling, introspection, and sincerely expressed remorse for his conduct, the Panel concludes that he understands the nature of his misconduct and has taken requisite measures to change his mode of thinking as well as his behavior.

4. Petitioner has the moral qualifications, competency, and learning required to practice law in Vermont, and has been rehabilitated.

Aside from the omissions made in representation of a client in a criminal case, Petitioner's competency and learning has not been questioned. As for his malfeasance in that case, the issue was not lack of knowledge or skill, but rather his failure to put his knowledge and skill into use. The Petitioner practiced law in Vermont from his admission to the bar in March 2005 until his suspension in July 2022. There appear to be no other instances in which his competency and skill came into question.

Petitioner's misleading statements to Disciplinary Counsel raise the issue of his moral qualification to practice law. The Panel concludes, however, that he sees clearly the error of his past ways, that he is sincerely remorseful, and that he is committed to dealing with adversity in a straightforward manner. Consequently, the Panel concludes that the Petitioner's reinstatement will be neither detrimental to the integrity and standing of the bar or the administration of justice nor subversive of the public interest. The Panel further concludes that the Petitioner has been rehabilitated and that his license to practice law should be reinstated albeit subject to the conditions of probation that have been stipulated to by the parties.

ORDER OF REINSTATEMENT AND CONDITIONS OF PROBATION

Petitioner Willaim W. Cobb is reinstated to the practice of law in the State of Vermont effective on the date that a Vermont-licensed attorney accepts appointment as the Petitioner's Probation Monitor as set forth below. The Petitioner shall be on probation for a period of one year from that date. Probation shall be subject to the following conditions.

1. The term of Petitioner's probation shall be one (1) year from the effective date of Petitioner's reinstatement. Reinstatement will not become effective until a Vermont-licensed attorney accepts appointment by the Hearing Panel as Probation Monitor.
2. Petitioner's probation will be supervised by a Probation Monitor selected by this Hearing Panel in its sole discretion. Within 14 days of the issuance of this order, the parties will submit the name of a proposed probation monitor who has agreed to accept the assignment. If the parties cannot agree on a single individual, each party may submit the name of its own candidate or candidates.
3. The Petitioner shall bear any costs related to compliance with the terms of his probation including, but not limited to, payment of the Probation Monitor for the monitor's time and services up to the hourly rate of \$300. If the Probation Monitor charges more than \$300 per hour, the Petitioner may move the Panel for a replacement monitor.
4. Petitioner will submit to the Probation Monitor a written inventory of all

active client files by the first day of each month disclosing each client's name, type of representation, date opened, most recent activity, last contact with the client, pending deadlines, next anticipated action, and anticipated closing date.

5. Petitioner and his Probation Monitor will meet in-person for at least two (2) hours at least once a month to conduct a comprehensive review of each of Petitioner's open and recently closed matters, as well as his office procedures, including without limitation the following issues: client needs, client expectations, client communications, status and progress of pending matters, deadlines, schedules, and statutes of limitation, billing and payment issues, and any other issues that, in the Probation Monitor's judgment, would benefit from review, including any issues of a personal nature which might impact upon Petitioner's practice.
6. The Probation Monitor will provide written reports to Respondent every three months assessing Petitioner's compliance with and progress under these probation conditions.
7. At the time of reinstatement, Petitioner will provide the Probation Monitor and Respondent with a written plan of Petitioner's law office procedures to ensure prompt responses to correspondence, telephone calls, and other important communications from clients, courts and other

interested persons, as well as effective and timely conflict screening.

Petitioner will initiate, maintain and revise these procedures as needed, as well as discuss their use at his monthly meeting with his Probation Monitor.

8. Petitioner will disclose to all prospective clients that he is on probation after reinstatement from suspension and will offer to provide further information to prospective clients concerning the same. Before accepting a new client, Petitioner must obtain a written waiver of confidentiality so that Petitioner can fulfill the requirements of these probation conditions. Petitioner will not accept a potential client who does not agree to the waiver. The client will not be required to waive attorney-client privilege. The Petitioner will timely provide appropriate waivers of confidentiality to the Probation Monitor at the monthly meeting.
9. Petitioner shall not accept any new representation if, in the judgment of the Probation Monitor, such new representation would unacceptably impair Petitioner ability to discharge his duties of competence, diligence, and communication in existing representations. At the monthly meeting, the Probation Monitor may direct the Petitioner not to accept any new clients or cases until his caseload has been reduced to a level determined by the Probation Monitor.
10. Petitioner will take the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam (“MPRE”) within six (6) months of being reinstated and achieve a Vermont

passing score of 80 on the same.

11. During the term of his probation, Petitioner will take ten (10) hours of approved in-person or virtual continuing legal education (“CLE”) seminars on professional responsibility focusing on the duties of competence, diligence, confidentiality or communication, as well as an additional five (5) hours of approved in-person or virtual CLE seminars on law office management, in addition to the normal bi-annual Vermont MCLE requirements for re-licensing.
12. During the term of his probation, Petitioner will only accept criminal defense or family law representations.
13. During the term of his probation, Petitioner will not accept representations that would require him to regularly travel from his home in St. Johnsbury to Bennington or Windham Counties.

It is **SO ORDERED** this 6th day of November 2025,

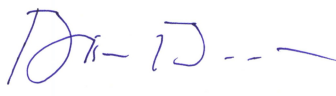
Hearing Panel No. 7

By:  _____

Elizabeth H. Miller, Esq., Chair

By:  _____

Megan Manahan Bliss, Esq.

By:  _____

Brian Bannon, Public Member