

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY  
Disciplinary Review Board  
Docket No. DRB 07-392  
District Docket No. IIIB-06-016E

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IN THE MATTER OF  
KATRINA WRIGHT  
AN ATTORNEY AT LAW

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Decision  
Default [R. 1:20-4(f)]

Decided: April 3, 2008

To the Honorable Chief Justice and Associate Justices of  
the Supreme Court of New Jersey.

This matter came before us on a certification of default  
filed by the District IIIB Ethics Committee (DEC), pursuant to  
R. 1:20-4(f). The complaint charged respondent with gross  
neglect and failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities,  
violations of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 8.1(b), respectively. We  
determine to impose a reprimand.

Respondent was admitted to the New Jersey bar in 1988. She has no prior discipline.

Service of process was proper. On August 21, 2007, the DEC sent a copy of the complaint to 17 Tinker Place, Willingboro, New Jersey, respondent's home address, by certified and regular mail. The certified mail was returned as unclaimed. The regular mail was not returned.

When respondent did not file an answer to the complaint, the DEC sent a letter to the same address, by certified and regular mail, on September 17, 2007. The letter advised respondent that, if she did not file an answer within five days of the date of the letter, the record would be certified to us as a default. Once again, the certified mail was returned as unclaimed. The regular mail was not returned.

Respondent did not file an answer.

According to the complaint, in December 2005, Alva Hall retained respondent to represent her in a divorce suit filed by her husband. Although respondent did not file an answer on behalf of Hall, she represented to Hall that she had. Alva's belief that an answer had been filed was further confirmed by the contents of a letter from respondent to the attorney for Hall's husband, asking for further information. Furthermore,

respondent's letter led Hall to believe that a settlement was being negotiated.

In March 2006, the attorney for the husband informed Hall that respondent had not filed an answer to the divorce complaint.

The formal ethics complaint charged that respondent's failure to file an answer on Hall's behalf amounted to gross neglect. The complaint also charged that respondent's failure to reply to three letters from the DEC investigator constituted failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities.

The facts alleged in the complaint fully support the charges of unethical conduct. Because of respondent's failure to file an answer, the allegations of the complaint are deemed admitted. R. 1:20-4(f).

The facts of this matter are simple. Respondent grossly neglected the case by failing to file an answer on behalf of Hall and failed to cooperate with the DEC investigation of the Hall grievance, violations of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 8.1(b), respectively. Aggravating factors were respondent's representation to Hall that she had filed an answer and her letter to the adversary suggesting not only that an answer had been filed, but also that settlement negotiations were underway.

Generally, in default matters, a reprimand is imposed for gross neglect and failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities, even if this conduct is accompanied by other, non-serious ethics infractions. See, e.g., In re Swidler, 192 N.J. 80 (2007) (attorney grossly neglected one matter and failed to cooperate with the investigation of an ethics grievance); In re Van de Castle, 180 N.J. 117 (2004) (attorney grossly neglected an estate matter, failed to cooperate with disciplinary authorities, and failed to communicate with the client); In re Goodman, 165 N.J. 567 (2000) (attorney failed to cooperate with disciplinary authorities and grossly neglected a personal injury case for seven years by failing to file a complaint or to otherwise prosecute the client's claim; the attorney also failed to keep the client apprised of the status of the matter; prior private reprimand (now an admonition)); and In re Lampidis, 153 N.J. 367 (1998) (attorney failed to pursue discovery in a personal injury lawsuit or to otherwise protect his client's interests and failed to comply with the DEC's investigator's requests for information about the grievance; the attorney also failed to communicate with the client).

Although, here, respondent's conduct was aggravated by her misrepresentation to Hall that she had filed an answer and by her letter implying that a settlement was being negotiated, we

believe that a reprimand is sufficient discipline for her misdeeds, given that this is the first blemish in her professional record of twenty years.

Members Lolla, Neuwirth, and Baugh did not participate.

We further determine to require respondent to reimburse the Disciplinary Oversight Committee for administrative costs and actual expenses incurred in the prosecution of this matter, as provided in R. 1:20-17.

Disciplinary Review Board  
William J. O'Shaughnessy, Chair

By: Julianne K. DeCore  
Julianne K. DeCore  
Chief Counsel

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**SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY  
DISCIPLINARY REVIEW BOARD  
VOTING RECORD**

In the Matter of Katrina Wright  
Docket No. DRB 07-392

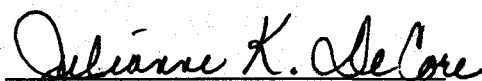
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Decided: April 3, 2008

Disposition: Reprimand

Members	Suspension	Reprimand	Admonition	Disqualified	Did not participate
O'Shaughnessy		X			
Pashman		X			
Baugh					X
Boylan		X			
Frost		X			
Lolla					X
Neuwirth					X
Stanton		X			
Wissinger		X			
<b>Total:</b>		6			3

  
Julianne K. DeCore  
Chief Counsel