

Supreme Court of New Jersey
Disciplinary Review Board
Docket No. DRB 20-207
District Docket Nos. XIV-2019-0326E;
XIV-2019-0327E; and XIV-2019-0421E

In the Matter of
George R. Saponaro
An Attorney at Law

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Decision

Decided: April 1, 2021

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

This matter was before us on a certification of the record filed by the Office of Attorney Ethics (OAE), pursuant to R. 1:20-4(f). The formal ethics complaint charged respondent with violations of RPC 1.1(a) (gross neglect – two instances); RPC 1.3 (lack of diligence – two instances); RPC 1.4(b) (failure

to keep a client reasonably informed about the status of a matter and to promptly comply with reasonable requests for information – two instances); RPC 1.4(c) (failure to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit the client to make informed decisions regarding the representation); RPC 1.5(b) (failure to set forth in writing the basis or rate of the fee); RPC 1.8(f) (acceptance of compensation for representing a client from someone other than the client); RPC 1.16(a)(2) (failure to withdraw from a representation if the lawyer’s physical or mental condition materially impairs the lawyer’s ability to represent the client); RPC 1.16(d) (upon termination of representation, failure to protect a client’s interests – three instances); and RPC 8.1(b) (failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities – four instances).¹

For the reasons set forth below, we determine to impose a one-year suspension, with conditions.

Respondent was admitted to the New Jersey and Maryland bars in 1995. At the relevant times, he maintained an office for the practice of law in Mount Holly, New Jersey.

¹ Due to respondent’s failure to file an answer to the formal ethics complaint, the OAE amended the complaint to include the fourth RPC 8.1(b) charge.

On January 6, 2020, the Court temporarily suspended respondent for his failure to comply with a determination of the District IIIB Fee Arbitration Committee, detailed further below. In re Saponaro, 240 N.J. 214 (2020). He remains suspended to date.

Service of process was proper. On May 30, 2020, the OAE sent a copy of the formal ethics complaint, by certified and regular mail, to respondent's home address of record. The certified mail was delivered on June 10, 2020, but the signature accepting delivery is illegible. The regular mail was not returned.

On July 17, 2020, the OAE sent a letter to respondent, via UPS, at the same address, informing him that, unless he filed a verified answer to the complaint within five days of the date of the letter, the allegations of the complaint would be deemed admitted, the record would be certified to us for the imposition of discipline, and the complaint would be deemed amended to charge a willful violation of RPC 8.1(b). On July 20, 2020, UPS informed the OAE that the letter had been left at the front door.

As of August 3, 2020, respondent had not filed an answer to the complaint, and the time within which he was required to do so had expired. Accordingly, the OAE certified this matter to us as a default.

We now turn to the allegations of the complaint.

The Clevenger and Attorney-Trustee Referral Matters (XIV-2019-0326E)

On June 11, 2019, the Honorable Ronald E. Bookbinder, A.J.S.C., appointed Jeffrey S. Apell, Esquire, as the temporary attorney-trustee for respondent. Judge Bookbinder's order was prompted by Apell's June 7, 2019 Verified Petition for Appointment of Attorney-Trustee (R. 1:20-19).

Apell stated in the verified petition that respondent had abandoned his law practice and could not be located. Apell also represented that, on June 6, 2019, he called respondent's telephone, "and the line went dead with no ringing or answer." In addition, Apell attached letters from Timothy Farrow, Esquire, regarding his client's inability to contact respondent. Specifically, Farrow stated that respondent had represented Michael Clevenger in a criminal matter but had failed to appear at his scheduled Superior Court appearance and appeared to have abandoned his practice. Consequently, Clevenger retained Farrow to represent him in defense of his matter.

Apell also represented that another attorney, Michele Finizio, Esquire, had informed him that her client could not contact respondent, and sought new counsel.

By letter dated June 28, 2019, the OAE informed respondent that it had learned that respondent had abandoned his clients and that Apell had been

appointed as attorney-trustee to protect their interests. The OAE directed respondent to provide a written response to Judge Bookbinder's referral, by July 12, 2019. Because respondent failed to reply to that letter, the OAE sent another letter, on July 25, 2019, requiring his response by August 8, 2019. Respondent also failed to reply to this second letter.

The OAE sent both letters, by certified and regular mail, to respondent's law office and home addresses of record. The United States Postal Service (USPS) returned the letters sent to respondent's law office address, marked not deliverable, with no forwarding address. The letters sent to respondent's home address were not returned to the OAE. The USPS confirmed that respondent had received the letters sent to his home address, and that he no longer received mail at his law office address.

On August 27, 2019, the OAE sent another letter to respondent's home address, enclosing copies of the prior letters, and extended the deadline for his written reply to September 13, 2019. During an October 9, 2019 telephone call, respondent told the OAE that he was not sure whether he had received the prior mailings, and represented that he would look for them. He also represented that, if he could not find the letters, he would contact the OAE and "even drive to the OAE to retrieve the same." Thereafter, the OAE did not hear from respondent.

On November 26, 2019, the OAE sent another letter to respondent's home address, reminding him of its previous letters and the October 9 telephone call, and set a final deadline of December 13, 2019 for submission of his written reply to the grievance. Respondent failed to submit a written reply.

On January 21, 2020, Apell informed the OAE that, although he had not communicated with respondent in a couple of months, respondent was "okay," as Apell had not heard otherwise. On March 3, 2020, the OAE telephoned respondent, who stated that he knew why the OAE had contacted him; that he had tried to contact an attorney to represent him; and that he would try to contact a different attorney, whom he had called previously.

Respondent asked the OAE to re-send the prior letters, because he had not been able to find them. When reminded that, in October, he had represented that he would retrieve the letters from the OAE's office if he could not find them, respondent replied he had been busy traveling. Although respondent confirmed that the OAE's letters had been sent to the correct home address, he claimed that he had not received the November 26, 2019 letter.

On March 3, 2020, the OAE sent another copy of its prior mailing to respondent's home address, by UPS, and set a final deadline of March 18, 2020

for him to submit his written reply. On March 4, 2020, UPS confirmed that the mailing had been left on the porch.

On March 18, 2020, the OAE granted respondent's request for a further extension to March 23, 2020, so that another attorney could first review the written reply. Yet again, he failed to submit anything on that date.

On March 31, 2020, the OAE left a voicemail message for respondent, informing him that the OAE had not received a reply, and requesting that respondent confirm that he had not submitted any documents. Respondent did not return the call and, as of May 29, 2020, the date of the ethics complaint, he had not submitted a written reply to the referral.

The complaint alleged that respondent violated RPC 1.4(c); RPC 1.16(a)(2); RPC 1.16(d); RPC 8.1(b); and R. 1:20-3(g)(3), which requires an attorney to cooperate in a disciplinary investigation and reply in writing within ten days of receipt of a request for information.

The Fee Arbitration Committee Referral (XIV-2019-0327E)

On May 1, 2019, the District IIIB Fee Arbitration Committee ordered respondent to refund his entire fee of \$2,000 to his client, P.D., and referred respondent to the OAE. Respondent's temporary suspension on January 6, 2020

resulted from an enforcement action for his failure to comply with this fee arbitration determination. The facts underlying the fee arbitration matter are as follows.

In April 2018, P.D. contacted respondent's law office regarding representation in a municipal court expungement matter. A secretary instructed P.D. to provide a \$2,000 retainer, which P.D. paid, in cash, on April 27, 2018. There was no written engagement letter or retainer agreement between P.D. and respondent.

The secretary informed P.D. that respondent could not meet with him right away, but that a meeting would be scheduled at a later date. Yet, a couple of weeks after payment of the retainer, respondent had neither called P.D. nor scheduled a meeting with him. P.D. placed several telephone calls to respondent's office, but repeatedly was told that respondent was not available.

After a month had passed with no meeting, P.D. requested a refund of his retainer. In early July 2018, having received neither any communication nor a refund from respondent, P.D. went to respondent's office and spoke to him for the first and only time. When P.D. requested the return of his retainer fee, respondent refused, claiming that he issued checks only at the end of each

month. Despite that statement, respondent failed to refund the \$2,000 retainer to P.D., resulting in his temporary suspension.

On June 28, 2019, the OAE provided a copy of the fee arbitration referral to respondent and directed him to provide a written reply by July 12, 2019. This letter and those that followed also included the Attorney-Trustee Referral matter and, thus, the facts that pertain to the OAE's efforts to obtain respondent's participation in that disciplinary proceeding and this proceeding are the same. In short, as detailed above, between June 28, 2019 and March 31, 2020, the OAE contacted respondent five times, seeking his reply to the District IIIB Fee Arbitration Committee's referral. On a few occasions, respondent communicated with the OAE, but he failed to submit a reply.

The complaint alleged that, by accepting a legal fee from P.D. with no retainer agreement, performing no work, refusing to return the unearned retainer, and failing to submit a written reply to the referral, respondent violated RPC 1.1(a); RPC 1.3; RPC 1.4(b); RPC 1.5(b); RPC 1.16(d); RPC 8.1(b); and R. 1:20-3(g)(3).

The Ana Block Matter (XIV-2019-0421E)

In April 2019, Ana Block paid respondent a fee of \$2,000 to represent her grandson in a pending criminal matter. Thereafter, respondent took no action in the case. Block tried to contact respondent by telephone, mail, and e-mail, to no avail. She visited his office, only to discover that it was vacant. When she tried to telephone respondent's office, the telephone had been disconnected.

On August 27, 2019, the OAE sent respondent a copy of the grievance and requested that he submit a written reply, as well as certain records, by September 13, 2019. Thereafter, in seeking respondent's compliance with his obligation as an attorney subject to a disciplinary investigation, the OAE's letters included this matter along with the Attorney-Trustee and Fee Arbitration referral matters. Specifically, after respondent had informed the OAE, on October 9, 2019, that he was not sure whether he had received the prior mailings, but that he would look for them, the OAE sent him letters, on November 26, 2019 and March 3, 2020; spoke to him by telephone on March 3 and 18, 2020; and left him a voicemail message on March 31, 2020. Despite the OAE's efforts, respondent failed to submit a written reply to Block's grievance.

Respondent performed no work in respect of Block's grandson's matter; had no communication with Block; failed to return Block's unearned retainer;

and failed to submit the required written reply to the grievance. Based on those facts, the OAE charged respondent with having violated RPC 1.1(a), RPC 1.3, RPC 1.4(b), RPC 1.8(f) (a lawyer shall not accept compensation for representing a client from one other than the client unless (1) the client gives informed consent; (2) there is no interference with the lawyer's independence of professional judgment or with the lawyer-client relationship; and (3) information relating to representation of a client is protected as required by RPC 1.6); RPC 1.16(d); RPC 8.1(b); and R. 1:20-3(g)(3).

We find that the facts recited in the complaint support most of the charges of unethical conduct. Respondent's failure to file an answer to the complaint is deemed an admission that the allegations are true and that they provide a sufficient basis for the imposition of discipline. R. 1:20-4(f)(1). Notwithstanding that Rule, each charge in the complaint must be supported by sufficient facts for us to determine that unethical conduct has occurred.

Specifically, in the Clevenger matter, respondent violated RPC 1.4(c) by failing to appear at the court hearing with Clevenger, who was required to seek substitute counsel to proceed.

In the P.D. matter, respondent violated RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.3 by agreeing to represent P.D. in respect of his petition for expungement but

performing no work on the case. He also violated RPC 1.4(b) by failing to communicate with P.D. Next, despite P.D.'s prompt payment of a \$2,000 retainer, respondent, who previously had not represented P.D., failed to provide him with a writing setting forth the basis or rate of his fee, in violation of RPC 1.5(b).

Finally, in Block's grandson's matter, respondent violated RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.3 by agreeing to represent the client but performing no work on the case. He also violated RPC 1.4(b) by failing to communicate with the client.

Moreover, in respect of all three client matters, respondent unilaterally abandoned each representation, without notice to any client, and made no effort to protect any of the three clients' interests, in violation of RPC 1.16(d). He likewise violated RPC 8.1(b) in all three matters by failing to cooperate with disciplinary authorities, as R. 1:20-3(g)(3) requires. He ignored the OAE's repeated attempts to obtain his written reply to the referrals and the grievance. He further violated RPC 8.1(b) by failing to file an answer to the ethics complaint.

The complaint, however, does not contain sufficient facts to sustain the RPC 1.16(a)(2) charge in the Attorney-Trustee matter. There is no evidence in the record that establishes either a physical or mental condition that impaired

respondent's ability to represent Clevenger (or, for that matter, any of his clients). Indeed, the record provides no explanation for respondent's decision to abandon his clients.

Similarly, in respect of Block's grandson's matter, although RPC 1.8(f) prohibits an attorney from accepting compensation from a third party for the representation of a client, the Rule provides a path to representation under such circumstances, if three elements are met. The complaint fails to address those elements and, thus, we cannot determine whether respondent was able to accept payment of the retainer from Block. Accordingly, we dismiss that charge.

Respondent's most egregious ethics infraction was his abandonment of his law practice and his clients, in violation of RPC 1.16(d). In his verified petition to be appointed as attorney-trustee for respondent's law practice, Apell represented that respondent had abandoned his law practice and could not be located. In addition, all OAE mailings sent to respondent's law office address, via certified mail, were returned, marked undeliverable, with no forwarding address. Further, in early September 2019, the USPS confirmed that respondent had moved and left no forwarding address.

Finally, when Block went to respondent's office, it was vacant. In May 2019, both Clevenger and Block called respondent's office and learned that the phone had been disconnected.

In sum, we determine that respondent violated RPC 1.1(a) (two instances); RPC 1.3 (two instances); RPC 1.4(b) (two instances); RPC 1.4(c); RPC 1.5(b); RPC 1.16(d) (three instances); and RPC 8.1(b) (four instances). We dismiss, for lack of sufficient evidence, the charges that respondent violated RPC 1.8(f) and RPC 1.16(a)(2). The sole issue left for our determination is the appropriate quantum of discipline for respondent's misconduct.

Conduct involving gross neglect, lack of diligence, and failure to communicate with clients ordinarily results in either an admonition or a reprimand, depending on the number of client matters involved, the gravity of the offenses, the harm to the clients, the presence of additional violations, and the seriousness of the attorney's disciplinary history. See, e.g., In the Matter of Esther Maria Alvarez, DRB 19-190 (September 20, 2019) (admonition for attorney who was retained to obtain a divorce for her client, but for the next nine months, failed to take any steps to pursue the matter, and failed to reply to all but one of the client's requests for information about the status of her case, violations of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.4(b)); in another matter, the attorney agreed

to seek a default judgment, but waited more than a year-and-a-half to file the necessary papers with the court; although the attorney obtained a default judgment, the court later vacated it due to the passage of time, which precluded a determination of the timing of the damage to the property, violations of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.3); In the Matter of Michael J. Pocchio, DRB 18-192 (October 1, 2018) (admonition for attorney who filed a divorce complaint and permitted it to be dismissed for failure to prosecute the action; he also failed to seek reinstatement of the complaint, and failed to communicate with the client; violations of RPC 1.1(a), RPC 1.3, RPC 1.4(b), and RPC 3.2); In re Burro, 235 N.J. 413 (2018) (reprimand for attorney who grossly neglected and lacked diligence in an estate matter for ten years and failed to file New Jersey Inheritance Tax returns, resulting in the accrual of \$40,000 in interest and the imposition of a lien on property belonging to the executrix, in violation of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.3; the attorney also failed to keep the client reasonably informed about events in the case (RPC 1.4(b)); return the client file upon termination of the representation (RPC 1.16(d)); and cooperate with the ethics investigation (RPC 8.1(b)); in aggravation, we considered the significant harm to the client and the attorney's prior private reprimand; in mitigation, the attorney suffered a stroke that forced him to cease practicing law and expressed

his remorse); and In re Abasolo, 235 N.J. 326 (2018) (reprimand for attorney who grossly neglected and lacked diligence in a slip-and-fall case for two years after filing the complaint; after successfully restoring the matter to the active trial list, the attorney failed to pay a \$300 filing fee, permitting the defendants' order of dismissal with prejudice to stand, in violation of RPC 1.1(a) and RPC 1.3; in addition, for four years, the attorney failed to keep the client reasonably informed about the status of the case, in violation of RPC 1.4(b)).

Conduct involving the failure to memorialize the basis or rate of a fee, as RPC 1.5(b) requires, typically results in an admonition, even if accompanied by other, non-serious ethics offenses. See, e.g., In the Matter of Peter M. Halden, DRB 19-382 (February 24, 2020) (attorney failed to set forth in writing the basis or rate of the legal fee, and failed to abide by the client's decisions concerning the scope of the representation; no prior discipline); In the Matter of Kenyatta K. Stewart, DRB 19-228 (October 22, 2019) (attorney failed to set forth in writing the basis or rate of the legal fee, and engaged in a concurrent conflict of interest; no prior discipline); and In the Matter of Alan Monte Kamel, DRB 19-086 (May 30, 2019) (attorney failed to provide the client with a writing setting forth the basis or rate of his fee in a collection action, failed to communicate with the client, and failed to communicate the method by which a contingent fee

would be determined; no prior discipline).

Similarly, admonitions typically are imposed for failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities, if the attorney does not have an ethics history. See, e.g., In the Matter of Michael C. Dawson, DRB 15-242 (October 20, 2015) (attorney failed to reply to repeated requests for information from the district ethics committee investigator regarding his representation of a client in three criminal defense matters, a violation of RPC 8.1(b)); In re Gleason, 220 N.J. 350 (2015) (attorney did not file an answer to the formal ethics complaint and ignored the district ethics committee investigator's multiple attempts to obtain a copy of his client's file, a violation of RPC 8.1(b); the attorney also failed to inform his client that a planning board had dismissed his land use application, a violation of RPC 1.4(b)); and In the Matter of Raymond A. Oliver, DRB 12-232 (November 27, 2012) (attorney failed to submit a written, formal reply to the grievance and a copy of the filed pleadings in the underlying case, despite repeated assurances that he would do so, a violation of RPC 8.1(b)).

Abandonment of clients almost invariably results in a suspension, the duration of which depends on the circumstances of the abandonment, the presence of other misconduct, and the attorney's disciplinary history. See, e.g., In re Nwaka, 178 N.J. 483 (2004) (three-month suspension for attorney who was

disbarred in New York for abandoning one client and failing to cooperate with New York ethics authorities, by neither filing an answer to the complaint nor complying with their requests for information about the disciplinary matter; prior three-month suspension); In re Hoffmann, 163 N.J. 4 (2000) (three-month suspension in a default matter; the attorney closed his office without notifying four clients; he also was guilty of gross neglect, lack of diligence, failure to communicate with clients, failure to protect clients' interests upon termination of representation, and failure to cooperate with disciplinary authorities; prior reprimand and a three-month suspension); In re Perdue, 240 N.J. 43 (2019) (in three consolidated default matters, six-month suspension imposed on attorney who, in two of the matters, abandoned his clients; the attorney also exhibited gross neglect and lack of diligence, failed to communicate with the clients, failed to return the file to one of the clients, and made misrepresentations to the clients; in all three matters, the attorney failed to submit a written reply to the grievance); In re Bowman, 175 N.J. 108 (2003) (six-month suspension for abandonment of two clients, misrepresentations to disciplinary authorities, pattern of neglect, and misconduct in three client matters, including gross neglect, lack of diligence, failure to communicate with the clients, failure to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit the client to make

an informed decision about the representation, failure to provide a written fee agreement, failure to protect a client's interests upon termination of representation, and misrepresenting the status of a matter to a client; prior private reprimand); In re Milara, 237 N.J. 431 (2019) (in two default matters, one-year suspension imposed on attorney for the totality of his misconduct, which included the abandonment of two clients, one of whom suffered serious harm as a result; misrepresentations to the clients, failure to file an affidavit of compliance with R. 1:20-20 following a temporary suspension for failure to cooperate with the OAE and a second temporary suspension for failure to comply with a fee arbitration determination, and other conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice; at the time, a censure was pending before the Court, which entered an Order confirming our decision); In re Rosenthal, 208 N.J. 485 (2012) (in seven default matters, one-year suspension imposed on attorney who exhibited gross neglect and a pattern of neglect in two matters; lacked diligence in four matters; failed to keep the client reasonably informed about the status of a matter and promptly comply with reasonable requests for information in seven matters; failed to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit the client to make informed decisions regarding the representation in one matter; charged an unreasonable fee in three matters; failed to communicate in writing

the basis or rate of his fee in one matter; failed to expedite litigation in one matter; failed to cooperate with disciplinary authorities in seven matters; engaged in dishonesty in two matters; and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in two matters; he also abandoned six of the seven clients; attorney had unblemished disciplinary history in his more than twenty years at the bar); In re Basner, 232 N.J. 164 (2018) (motion for reciprocal discipline; two-year suspension imposed on attorney who exhibited gross neglect in eight matters, engaged in a pattern of neglect, exhibited lack of diligence in ten matters, failed to keep the client reasonably informed about the status of a matter and promptly comply with reasonable requests for information in seven matters; failed to explain a matter to the extent reasonably necessary to permit the client to make informed decisions regarding the representation in eight matters; failed to comply with the recordkeeping requirements of R. 1:21-6; failed to withdraw from the representation of a client when the representation violated the RPCs or other law; upon termination of representation, failed to protect the interests of the client in three matters; asserted a frivolous claim in two matters; failed to expedite litigation in two matters; made a false statement of material fact or law to a tribunal in two matters; knowingly made a false statement of material fact to disciplinary authorities in four matters; engaged in

conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation in five matters; and engaged in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice in four matters; in aggravation, we considered the widespread and persistent nature of the attorney's misconduct, which, among other things, resulted in two of his clients serving prison terms); In re Cataline, 223 N.J. 269 (2015) (default; two-year suspension imposed on attorney who exhibited gross neglect in three matters, failed to cooperate with the district ethics committee in four matters, and ignored the client's request for the return of his original documents in one matter; in aggravation, the attorney engaged in a pattern of neglect and abandoned the four clients by closing her office without notice to the clients or attorney regulatory authorities, and by failing to maintain an office telephone; prior reprimand); and In re Franklin, 236 N.J. 453 (2019) (retroactive three-year suspension imposed on attorney who abandoned an unknown number of clients and engaged in an improper fee-sharing arrangement with a company marketed as a service provider to handle and defend foreclosure and real estate mitigation against Florida mortgage lenders).

In egregious cases involving client abandonment, the Court will not hesitate to impose disbarment, particularly in matters in which the attorney fails to appear on the Court's Order to Show Cause. See, e.g., In re Byrne, 237 N.J.

441 (2019) (default in three matters; attorney, who failed to appear on the Court's Order to Show Cause, disbarred for abandoning three clients; he also failed to file an affidavit of compliance with R. 1:20-20 following his temporary suspension for failure to comply with a fee arbitration determination; prior reprimand and three-month suspension).

Here, for the totality of respondent's misconduct, particularly his abandonment of three clients, at least a three-month suspension is warranted. To craft the appropriate discipline, however, we also must consider aggravating and mitigating factors.

In aggravation, we note that, throughout the OAE's investigation, respondent inconsistently communicated with the OAE, leading its representatives to believe that he would comply with his obligations. Yet, despite his representations, he would fail to follow through on his promises. On one occasion, he informed the OAE that he had been unable to comply because he was "busy traveling." We consider this conduct sufficiently egregious to warrant enhancement of what would have been a three-month suspension to a suspension of six months.

In further aggravation, despite the OAE's prolonged efforts to garner his cooperation in the investigation, to no avail, respondent defaulted in this matter.

“A respondent’s default or failure to cooperate with the investigative authorities acts as an aggravating factor, which is sufficient to permit a penalty that would otherwise be appropriate to be further enhanced.” In re Kivler, 193 N.J. 332, 342 (2008) (citations omitted).

Finally, we have considered, in aggravation, the temporary suspension imposed on respondent for his failure to comply with the fee arbitration award in the P.D. matter, which he continues to flout. It, thus, appears that respondent has no interest in participating in any aspect of the disciplinary process. Thus, we determine that a one-year suspension is necessary to protect the public and preserve confidence in the bar.


Moreover, Block paid respondent a \$2,000 retainer, which has not been returned, despite his failure to perform any work on her grandson’s case. We, thus, order the disgorgement of the entire fee to Block within sixty days of the date of the Court’s Order in this matter.

Finally, as an additional protective measure, due to the nature of respondent’s sudden abandonment of his clients, we require respondent, as a condition of reinstatement, to provide to the OAE proof of fitness to practice law, as attested by a qualified mental health professional approved by the OAE.

Chair Clark and Members Hoberman, Joseph, and Singer voted to impose a three-month suspension, with the same conditions imposed by the majority.

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
Bruce W. Clark, Chair

By: 

Johanna Barba Jones
Chief Counsel

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY
DISCIPLINARY REVIEW BOARD
VOTING RECORD

In the Matter of George R. Saponaro
Docket No. DRB 20-207

Decided: April 1, 2021

Disposition: One-Year Suspension

<i>Members</i>	One-Year Suspension	Three-Month Suspension	Recused	Did Not Participate
Clark		X		
Gallipoli	X			
Boyer	X			
Hoberman		X		
Joseph		X		
Petrou	X			
Rivera	X			
Singer		X		
Zmirich	X			
Total:	5	4	0	0



Johanna Barba Jones
Chief Counsel