SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY
DISCIPLINARY REVIEW BOARD
Docket No. DRB 25-171
District Docket No. XIV-2021-0316E

In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan
An Attorney at Law

Argued
October 23, 2025

Decided
January 14, 2026

Rachael Weeks appeared on behalf of the
Office of Attorney Ethics.

John McGill, III appeared on behalf of respondent.

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Introduction

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

This matter was before us on a motion for final discipline filed by the Office of Attorney Ethics (the OAE), pursuant to R. 1:20-13(c)(2), following respondent's guilty plea and adjudication, in the Shelby Town Court, Orleans County, New York, to misdemeanor obstructing governmental administration, in violation of New York Penal Law § 195.05. The OAE asserted that respondent's misconduct constituted a violation of RPC 8.4(b) (committing a criminal act that reflects adversely on a lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness, or fitness as a lawyer).

For the reasons set forth below, we determine to grant the motion for final discipline and conclude that a three-month suspension is the appropriate quantum of discipline for respondent's misconduct.

Ethics History

Respondent earned admission to the New Jersey and Pennsylvania bars in 2006 and to the District of Columbia bar in 2011. During the relevant timeframe, she maintained a practice of law in Moorestown, New Jersey. She has prior discipline in New Jersey.

LaVan I

In 2019, the Court reprimanded respondent for her violation of RPC 8.4(a) (knowingly assisting or inducing another to violate the Rules of Professional Conduct) and RPC 8.4(c) (engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation). In re LaVan, 238 N.J. 474 (2019) (LaVan I). In that matter, respondent misrepresented to both the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey and her adversary that a fee agreement between her and her client, which she produced in response to her adversary's motion to compel production of that agreement, was the original agreement. In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan, DRB 18-232 (December 27, 2018) at 7. In truth, respondent had re-created and backdated the document, and had arranged for her client re-execute it, after the filing of the motion, because she could not locate the original. Ibid.

LaVan II

In 2021, the Court censured respondent for engaging in a conflict of interest, in violation of RPC 1.7(a). In re LaVan, 249 N.J. 5 (2021) (LaVan II). In that matter, respondent failed to notify her client that she was a principal of, and general counsel to, the environmental remediation contractor she recommended that the client retain to perform remediation work. In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan, DRB 20-187 (April 27, 2021) at 4-5. Further, as a condition to her discipline, the Court required respondent to complete two continuing legal education courses in ethics approved by the OAE.

LaVan III

On April 2, 2024, the Court censured respondent, on a motion for final discipline, following her June 16, 2022 guilty plea and conviction in the Superior Court of New Jersey for petty disorderly persons harassment, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:33-4(a), and disorderly persons obstructing the administration of law, in violation of N.J.S.A. 2C:29-1(a), which offenses constituted violations of RPC 8.4(b). In re LaVan, 256 N.J. 615 (2024) (LaVan III).

In that matter, respondent's criminal convictions stemmed from two offenses. In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan, DRB 23-156 (January 2, 2024) at 1, 4. First, underlying her plea of guilty to petty disorderly persons harassment, on February 22, 2019, she sent text messages that she knew to be cast in offensively coarse and alarming language to a friend and confidante after learning that her husband was having a romantic relationship with that individual. Id. at 5. Second, underlying her plea of guilty to disorderly persons obstructing the administration of law, on May 7, 2019, she provided a bank with documents that were non-compliant with banking regulations, and the provision of these documents obstructed the normal administration of law. Id. at 7. More specifically, she endorsed three checks, made payable to her husband's company, without his consent, and attempted to deposit them in her personal checking account. Ibid.

In mitigation, we weighed that respondent sent the harassing text messages immediately after learning that the recipient was romantically involved with her husband; her outburst also reflected other psychological stressors, documented in her mental health evaluations; she promptly apologized to the recipient; and, soon thereafter, she engaged in intensive therapy to aid her in addressing the stressors that contributed to that behavior. Id. at 29.

In aggravation, we weighed that she had failed to timely inform the OAE, in 2019, that she had been charged with indictable offenses, as R. 1:20-13(a)(1) requires. In addition, by early 2019, she should have had a heightened awareness of the importance of complying with the Rules of Professional Conduct, given that we had issued our decision underlying LaVan I in December 2018. Id. at 30.

As a condition of discipline, the Court required that respondent provide proof of fitness to practice law, as attested to by a medical doctor approved by the OAE, within sixty days of the Court's Order. LaVan, 256 N.J. at 616.

Procedural History

This matter previously was before us on the same motion for final discipline. Following our review of the record, we determined to grant the motion for final discipline and recommended that respondent be suspended from the practice of law for a period of three months. In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan, DRB 22-140 (January 30, 2023). In determining the appropriate quantum of discipline, we weighed (among other aggravating factors) that respondent's "misconduct directly touched upon her law license."

On January 30, 2023, our decision in that matter was transmitted to the Court.

On February 17, 2023, respondent, through counsel, filed a notice of petition for review and a supporting brief with the Court, pursuant to R. 1:20-16(b). In part, she disputed that her misconduct directly touched upon her law license.

On July 12, 2023, the Court remanded the matter to us to convene an evidentiary hearing before a Special Ethics Adjudicator (SEA), in order to develop a detailed record and make findings in respect of whether respondent's misconduct directly touched upon her law license. The Order further provided that, upon receipt of the SEA's report, we should review the findings of the SEA and, if we determined it appropriate and necessary based on the developed record, file with the Court a revised decision as to final discipline.

On July 14, 2025, following a hearing, the SEA, Robert A. Gaccione, Esq., issued his report, concluding that respondent's conduct directly touched upon her law license. This revised decision follows.

Facts

On July 4, 2021, N.W.[1] reported to the New York Orleans County Sheriff's Office (the NY Sheriff) that respondent, who was a family friend, and respondent's boyfriend (now husband), Mark Anson, had come to his residence, in Lyndonville, New York, and threatened him. N.W. had not seen respondent for some time but knew that she practiced law in New Jersey. He was in the midst of a contentious divorce from his estranged wife, Pa.W., and continued to live and work on the farm that he owned with Pa.W. Respondent and Pa.W. were close.

After respondent and Anson arrived at the farm, they spoke briefly with N.W. about his sons, and respondent asked him where they lived. Respondent also inquired about the farm, including how many acres it encompassed and the types of apples being grown. She then brought up N.W.'s and Pa.W.'s divorce and, more specifically, the topic of settlement.

During the subsequent evidentiary hearing following the remand, respondent and N.W. provided differing accounts of the remainder of their discussion. However, they concurred that, as the exchange continued, the three

[1] Initials are used to protect the identities of the victim (N.W.), his estranged wife (Pa.W.), and their son (P.W.).

proceeded into N.W.'s home. After further conversation relating to the divorce, Anson made a comment that offended N.W., who, in turn, told Anson he did not know him and to "keep his mouth shut." Anson responded by pulling out an 8-to10-inch knife, which he held to N.W.'s throat. Respondent initially remained silent as Anson held the knife to N.W.'s throat. She then asked Anson to go wait in the car, which he did. Respondent and Anson left the farm soon thereafter.

Subsequently, N.W. reported respondent's and Anson's conduct to NY Sheriff's Deputy John Doyle. Doyle left after taking N.W.'s report but returned to the farm an hour or so later. At that time, N.W.'s and Pa.W.'s adult son, P.W., approached him and showed him text messages that P.W. had received from his mother's cellular telephone number. While Doyle was with P.W., the latter received a telephone call from respondent. As we detail later in our decision in this matter, Doyle testified during the remand proceeding regarding a portion of that call, which he stated he had overheard; however, respondent disputed his account of what he heard.

Doyle then took the telephone from P.W. and spoke to respondent himself. After an exchange with her (also detailed below), he told her that there was a criminal investigation underway and to expect a visit shortly.

Later that same day, Doyle and two other officers arrived at respondent's location. When questioned by the officers, Anson gave evasive answers and a fake name. He also resisted the officers' attempts to place him under arrest. According to Doyle's police report, as Anson was resisting arrest, respondent interfered by placing her hand on Doyle's arm. Doyle further reported that, subsequently, when the officers attempted to place Anson in a patrol vehicle, respondent approached them from behind and Officer Martin Stirk, Jr. "pulled her away again." In the charging document filed against respondent after the incident, Stirk alleged that respondent then struck him in the face.[2]

Consequently, on July 4, 2021, the NY Sheriff arrested respondent and charged her with (1) second-degree obstructing governmental function, in violation of New York Penal Law § 195.05, for intentionally interfering with Officer Stirk's arrest of Anson, and (2) second-degree assault, in violation of New York Penal Law § 120.05, for intentionally striking Officer Stirk. The following day, on July 5, 2021, the Shelby Town Court also entered a temporary order of protection against respondent, on behalf of Officer Stirk.

[2] The arrest reports are silent regarding respondent's alleged assault of Officer Stirk.

Respondent failed to report her arrest and criminal charges to the OAE, as R. 1:20-13(a)(1) requires. On October 14, 2021, three months after the incident, the OAE sent a letter to respondent, informing her that it had become aware of her pending charges. In that letter, the OAE also reminded respondent of her obligation to inform the Director of the OAE, in writing, of any pending matters and the disposition of those matters.

On May 3, 2022, before the Honorable Dawn M. Keppler, Judge of the Shelby Town Court, respondent pleaded guilty to second-degree obstructing governmental administration, a misdemeanor offense. Although respondent did not plead guilty to the assault charge, the parties referred to it as being "covered" by the obstruction charge. Specifically, the colloquy before the Shelby Town Court went as follows:

> RESPONDENT'S COUNSEL: Just to clarify, Judge, the Assault Third is being dismissed pursuant to the ADA [Assistant District Attorney] and the colloquy is going to be relating to the allocution on the Obstruction.
>
> ADA: Correct.
>
> RESPONDENT'S COUNSEL: I just wanted to clarify that.
>
> THE COURT: Okay, so my sheet says reduced for jurisdiction, then - -

ADA: Should be COVO, covered by, but we can dismiss it, that's fine.

THE COURT: Is covered, the Assault Third is covered?

ADA: Yeah - -

THE COURT: By the Obstructing?

ADA: Yes.

THE COURT: Okay.

ADA: Should say COVO.

THE COURT: It doesn't, but I'll put it in there.

[OAE-Ex. C at 2:20-3:15.][3]

During her limited plea allocution, respondent admitted that, on July 4, 2021, she "intentionally obstructed and impaired or perverted the administration of law" and interfered with the performance of police duties. In accepting respondent's guilty plea to the obstruction charge, the court again stated that the "Assault in the Third is covered under" the obstruction charge.[4] At sentencing,

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[3] "OAE-Ex" refers to the exhibits attached to the OAE's brief in support of its motion for final discipline.
"Rb" refers to respondent's August 31, 2022 brief to us.
"2T" refers to the transcript of the January 21, 2025 hearing before the SEA.

[4] The certificate of discharge also demonstrated that respondent did not plead guilty to the assault charge, but that it had been "covered" by the obstruction charge.

respondent received a conditional discharge, along with a $195 fine, $205 surcharge, and $50 DNA fee.

Almost a year later, on June 27, 2022, respondent, through counsel, notified the OAE of her guilty plea.

The Parties' Positions Regarding the Motion for Final Discipline

Previously, during the 2022 proceedings on the instant motion, the parties presented to us their positions regarding the record as it then stood, the alleged violation of RPC 8.4(b), and the appropriate quantum of discipline. More recently, with the matter before us following the evidentiary hearing, the parties presented their positions on the limited issue of whether respondent's misconduct directly touched upon her law license. Here, we review the parties' 2022 positions before us.

The OAE asserted that respondent should receive a censure for her misconduct. Citing disciplinary precedent, discussed below, the OAE acknowledged that, typically, attorneys convicted of obstructing justice receive a reprimand. Here, however, the OAE insisted that a censure was required because respondent also had been charged with assaulting a law enforcement officer. If respondent had engaged in more substantial violence, the OAE maintained that a term of suspension would be required.

Respondent, through counsel, urged that a reprimand was the appropriate discipline for her conviction for obstructing the administration of justice. She claimed that the OAE's reliance on the dismissed assault charge and hearsay statements set forth in the underlying police report was improper, exceeded the record, and failed to establish, by clear and convincing evidence, her assault upon a police officer. Specifically, respondent argued:

> [t]he OAE, incorrectly and without legal support, suggests that, because [r]espondent's guilty plea to Obstruction "covered" the downgraded Assault charge, [r]espondent's guilty plea and allocution to Obstruction <u>includes</u> an admission to the Third Degree Assault and, therefore, the evidence of the Obstruction includes relevant evidence of the Assault upon which the Board may reasonably rely in determining the appropriate sanction in this matter.
>
> [Rb5-6 (emphasis in original).]

Rather, respondent asserted that the record lacked any evidence to demonstrate what "covered" even meant when used in connection with respondent's plea allocution, and that the OAE's assertion that her guilty plea to obstruction somehow included an admission to the assault was mere speculation unsupported by the record. She further asserted that she pleaded not guilty to the assault charge, which was dismissed as part of her guilty plea, and that she continues to maintain her innocence. In short, she contended there was no clear and convincing evidence to find that she committed an assault. Finally, she argued that the police report, upon which the OAE relied, contained no admission to the assault by her and, further, constituted inadmissible hearsay.

Although respondent acknowledged that we could remand the matter for an evidentiary hearing to address the assault allegations, she vehemently urged us to not do so. Respondent claimed that she would be unfairly prejudiced, given the lack of reasonably expected discovery, including the absence of any body-worn camera footage or vehicle video recordings.

Citing disciplinary precedent, discussed below, respondent urged that a reprimand was consistent with the discipline imposed on attorneys convicted of obstruction of justice. In mitigation, respondent apologized for her misconduct, stating, through her counsel:

> She realizes that such conduct is inappropriate and submits that, at the time, she, incorrectly, believed that, as an attorney, she was entitled to ask questions and receive answers from the police during the melee and heightened confusion incident to the forcible arrest of [Anson]. Respondent accepts responsibility for her conduct. Respondent further submits that the Board should deem it never too late to say "I am sorry" for one's past transgression.

[Rb11.]

The Limited Remand

The Evidentiary Hearing

As stated above, in our 2023 decision, having determined to grant the motion for final discipline, we recommended the imposition of a three-month suspension, based, in part, on our conclusion that respondent's misconduct directly touched upon her law license. Following respondent's filing of her petition for review, the Court remanded the matter to us to convene an evidentiary hearing on the limited issue of whether her misconduct did, in fact, directly touch upon her law license.

During that evidentiary hearing, which took place on January 21, 2025, the SEA heard testimony from N.W., Doyle, and respondent.

N.W. testified that, when respondent arrived at his farm, he thought she was just stopping in to see him as a friend of the family. After she asked about where his sons lived, she "started asking some questions about the divorce" and stated she "was going to file some papers in the divorce the next day . . . to finalize the divorce, and it was going to take two days and she was going to have it done." N.W. asked her if Pa.W. "had now hired her to represent her, and she says no, the wife didn't hire her. She goes she's working for both of us. I said you're not working for me. I didn't hire you." According to N.W., respondent went on to talk about "making an offer to my wife that was reasonable instead of the unreasonable one, which she termed." He added that, after they proceeded inside, respondent "told me again that I'm going to give my wife a reasonable offer" and that, throughout, she was "very adamant" that he do so.

N.W. further testified that respondent remained silent for most of the time as Anson held the knife to N.W.'s throat. After he felt Anson relax a bit, he turned and walked away, telling respondent and Anson to leave. At that juncture, respondent directed Anson to return to the vehicle, which he did. Shortly after, respondent left with him.

N.W. related that, after respondent and Anson departed, he worried that she also would threaten his sons. These worries stemmed from her questions about where his sons lived, which he had found puzzling.

N.W. testified that, later on the same date, after making his report to the NY Sheriff, he contacted his divorce attorney and described the incident to her, as he was "trying to figure out how any of this would be detrimental to my side of . . . whatever was going to happen in the divorce." They did not address its potential effects on his divorce that day but, later, his attorney indicated that she did not think it would have any effect on his divorce settlement.

Asked whether he was concerned about the farm in connection with the divorce, N.W. answered in the affirmative and explained, in essence, that a cash settlement would adversely affect his ability to sustain his farming operations (which depended on his continued eligibility for bank loans). He clarified, however, that he did not recall respondent speaking to him about selling the farm.

In reply to questioning by respondent's counsel, N.W. denied that, when respondent said she was working for both him and Pa.W., he took that to mean that, as a friend of the family, she was trying to talk to them both about working together to resolve their matter. When further asked if he thought she was there both on his behalf and on Pa.W.'s behalf, he stated, "She sure wasn't there on my behalf." He also confirmed that she made her statement about filing papers at least twice.

Respondent's counsel asked N.W. about statements he had made when interviewed by the OAE following the Court's remand in this matter. Specifically, N.W. had recounted the following:

> Inside the house, respondent told [N.W.] that he was going to give his wife a fair settlement agreement tomorrow or she would file papers tomorrow as a friend of the court. [N.W.] said he found this odd as he had never heard of such a thing as "a friend of the court," filing in a divorce proceeding. And odd as July 4, 2021

> was a Sunday and the holiday was observed on the Monday, and courts were closed on Monday in observance of the holiday. He explained his divorce had been going on for . . .years, and he knew it was not going to be settled in two days. [N.W.] recalled that respondent told him his wife did not hire her to file the papers.
>
> [2T107:7-108:2.]

During the hearing, respondent's counsel questioned N.W. about his statement that "[r]espondent told [him] that he was going to give his wife a fair settlement agreement tomorrow or she would file papers tomorrow as a friend of the court." N.W. did not recall that respondent used the phrase "friend of the court" or that he had related this to the OAE. Nevertheless, noting the passage of time, he said he had no reason to doubt that he made the statement documented in the report. He confirmed that he knew his divorce, which had been ongoing for years, would not be settled in two days, and that, because the Fourth of July 2021 fell on a Sunday, he understood that respondent could not file documents the next day.

Doyle testified regarding his encounter with P.W. and subsequent telephone conversation with respondent. While he was speaking with P.W. about the text messages that he had received from his mother's (Pa.W.'s) cellular telephone number, P.W. received a telephone call from respondent, who Doyle heard saying, "you and your father better figure it out by Friday or I'm filing papers and we're gonna sell the [f*ing] farm. Got it." Doyle then took the telephone from P.W. and said, "is this normal procedure or normal conduct for an attorney to call somebody and threaten them over the phone?" He also identified himself and asked what had happened at N.W.'s residence earlier that day. In reply, respondent laughed and stated "oh, this is the leverage that they're gonna use now." When he informed her of the criminal investigation underway and advised her to expect a visit shortly, she again laughed and stated "we will be waiting for you."

Doyle clarified that, when he asked respondent regarding her tactics, he assumed, based on his earlier interview with N.W., that she was acting as an attorney involved in the divorce. He also testified that N.W. did not inform him that respondent had told N.W. that his estranged wife had not hired her.

Respondent testified that she went to visit N.W. because, based on a conversation with Pa.W., she had concerns about his health. She claimed she brought Anson with her because she wanted N.W. to meet him. When they arrived, he and respondent had a friendly conversation about the farm and about where his sons lived. She denied stating that she would file paperwork relating to the divorce. Rather, having learned from Pa.W. that the matter was listed for trial, she premised her conversation with N.W. on alerting him that “if . . . your matter goes to trial, the court could . . . issue an order to sell the farm.” As a family friend concerned about both his and his wife’s health, she wanted to help them resolve the matter before that occurred and, essentially, sought to act as an informal mediator.

As for her response to Anson’s conduct with the knife, respondent testified that, initially, she was shocked into silence. However, she then asked Anson to go wait in the car.

In connection with Doyle’s account of the telephone conversation that day, respondent acknowledged that she spoke with P.W. and that Doyle then got on the telephone. However, she denied making the remark, attributed to her by Doyle, about filing papers and selling the farm. Instead, she testified that she had tried to convey to P.W. that, if the matter was not resolved, the court could make the decision to sell the farm.

Finally, as subsequently noted by the OAE, when questioned by the presenter during the evidentiary hearing, respondent at times countered with accusations directed at the presenter.

The Special Ethics Adjudicator's Report

After hearing testimony, reviewing the exhibits, and considering the factual and legal arguments submitted by the parties, the SEA concluded that clear and convincing evidence established that respondent's conduct directly touched upon her law license.

In reaching this conclusion, the SEA found that Doyle and N.W. credibly testified that they heard respondent threaten to file paperwork related to the pending divorce, in a manner consistent with their statements and reports made in 2021. More specifically, the SEA highlighted N.W.'s testimony that respondent had told him she would be filing paperwork on behalf of both him and his estranged wife, and that he found her threats so concerning that he called his divorce attorney to make sure there would be no impact on the proceedings. He found that N.W.'s testimony was corroborated by Doyle, who testified that he heard respondent telling P.W. that she would be filing papers and selling the farm – that is, making the same threats reflecting her involvement in the divorce. In addition, Doyle's question to respondent, regarding whether it was appropriate for an attorney to threaten people over the telephone, demonstrated that a police officer overhearing a short telephone call believed her to be an attorney threatening people over the telephone.

The SEA also found it notable that respondent replied, "oh, this is the leverage they're gonna use now." Despite having the opportunity to correct Doyle and explain that she was not a threatening attorney but, rather, a concerned family friend, she instead mentioned the "leverage" N.W. would have in his divorce proceedings following her threats and Anson's violent behavior.

In her written summation to the SEA, respondent, through counsel, made arguments based on whether N.W. used the phrase "friend of the court" when reporting the incident to the police in 2021, when interviewed in 2023, and in his testimony during the hearing. The SEA rejected these arguments, reasoning that whether respondent had used this phrase was not relevant to whether she held herself out as an attorney involved in the divorce in 2021.

In the OAE's summation to the SEA, citing In the Matter of David S. Rochman, DRB 09-307 (April 20, 2010), and In the Matter of S. Dorell King, DRB 08-130 (December 17, 2008), the OAE urged that respondent's outbursts during the evidentiary hearing would normally warrant increased discipline and should cause the SEA to give her testimony no weight. Based on this argument, the SEA determined that respondent's behavior during the hearing reduced the value of her testimony.

The SEA concluded that respondent had "weaponized" her law license in an attempt to frighten N.W. (who knew she was an attorney and was close to his estranged wife) into promptly settling his divorce. She was not licensed to practice law in New York, and both N.W. and Pa.W. already had counsel. However, she used her status as an attorney in an effort to make N.W. believe that she would file paperwork related to the divorce that would ensure his estranged wife received a "reasonable" settlement, and to make "them" (presumably N.W. and P.W.) believe she could file paperwork that could result in the farm being sold.

Based on the above findings, the SEA concluded that respondent's conduct directly touched upon her law license.

<u>The Parties' Positions to the Board Following Remand</u>

In the OAE's August 21, 2025 brief and during oral argument before us, the OAE again argued that respondent's misconduct directly touched upon her law license. Further, the OAE asserted that respondent's behavior during the evidentiary hearing constituted an additional aggravating factor and, based on this factor, urged us to consider further enhancing the quantum of discipline to a six-month term of suspension.

For her part, respondent, through counsel, continued to assert that her conduct at N.W.'s residence on July 4, 2021 did not directly touch upon her law license. Rather, she maintained that she went to the home hoping to mediate a "reasonable settlement" between N.W., whom she referred to as "Uncle [N.]," and Pa.W., whom she referred to as "Aunt [Pa.]." However, Anson's unauthorized and threatening actions derailed her amicable discussion with N.W. and placed him in fear.

Emphasizing that she told N.W. that his estranged wife had not hired her to file any papers, respondent argued that he knew she was not representing or acting as an attorney on his wife's behalf. When she arrived at the farm, N.W. considered her a family friend and thought she was just stopping in to see him. He also testified that she urged making a reasonable settlement offer in his and Pa.W.'s divorce matter. She never told him that she was working as an attorney on behalf of him and his wife, both parties already had counsel, and she is not licensed to practice law in New York.

Respondent also argued that the evidence did not clearly establish what (if anything) she said to N.W. with respect to filing any papers, because he gave inconsistent accounts. More specifically, during his 2023 interview with the OAE, he stated that she said she would file papers as a "friend of the court;"

however, in 2021, when reporting the incident to Doyle, he did not use that phrase; and, during the 2025 hearing, he did not recall using that phrase. In addition, his use of the phrase "friend of the court" left unclear what he "believed and/or understood by her alleged use of that phrase," and whether it involved or required the practice of law in New York.

Continuing, respondent argued that N.W. was not intimidated or threatened by her "attempt to mediate as a family friend," insofar as he (1) purportedly knew she was not acting as an attorney on his wife's behalf, and (2) knew his divorce would not be settled in two days and did not believe she would be filing papers the next day, when the courts would be observing the Fourth of July holiday.

In sum, as to N.W., respondent argued that clear and convincing evidence did not establish that she held herself out to him as an attorney involved in the divorce. Rather, she "held herself out to be a concerned family friend acting as an informal mediator on behalf of both [N.W. and his wife], in an attempt to facilitate a reasonable and amicable resolution to their marital strife." Moreover, N.W. knew that respondent – a person close with his wife – "was acting to mediate a 'reasonable settlement'" of the marital strife as a family friend, as evidenced by the fact that they were discussing the "reasonable settlement" proposal when Anson interjected himself. Accordingly, the only threat that concerned N.W. came from Anson. Indeed, the latter's conduct was so concerning that it caused N.W. unreasonably to think that respondent's innocent questions about where P.W. lived somehow constituted a continuation of Anson's threats.

Addressing Doyle's testimony, respondent asserted that the evidence did not establish that she held herself out to him as an attorney involved in N.W.'s and Pa.W.'s divorce. Doyle's question to her during the telephone call, asking if it was appropriate for an attorney to threaten people over the telephone, did not indicate otherwise. Instead, he admittedly assumed that she was acting as an attorney during the call because N.W. had told him this was her profession and also, she urged, because N.W. had failed to tell him that she said Pa.W. did not hire her.

Respondent further argued that the statement purportedly heard by Doyle – that she would file papers and sell the farm – did not corroborate N.W.'s testimony regarding her alleged threats. N.W. did not recall her speaking to him about selling the farm and, further, stated that she threatened to file papers as a friend of the court.

Moreover, respondent contested the SEA's conclusion that her reference to "leverage" when speaking to Doyle related to the divorce. In context, the statement could also refer to the leverage Doyle would have in arresting Anson.

In addition, respondent asserted that the SEA's statement that she "did not say or do anything to prevent [Anson] from holding the knife to [N.W.'s] throat" was unduly prejudicial, as it implied that she was responsible for Anson's conduct. Her testimony that she had been shocked into silence was unrefuted. Moreover, N.W.'s testimony demonstrated that, after Anson had pulled the knife on N.W., respondent had acted to prevent Anson from threatening N.W. further.

Regarding the OAE's assertions regarding her conduct during the hearing, respondent conceded making a limited number of excited utterances but argued that we should not weigh these in aggravation. More specifically, before us, she apologized for her conduct during the hearing. She also urged us to consider her outbursts in context and to consider that the presenter was badgering her and that she was exasperated because the OAE had made inaccurate statements and relied on incredible proofs, continued to try to drape her with responsibility for Anson's criminal conduct, and previously had alleged – based on hearsay – that she also committed assault on a police officer.

Finally, when asked during oral argument to address the appropriate quantum of discipline, respondent's counsel urged a reprimand or censure.

Analysis and Discipline

Violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct

Following a review of the record, we determine to grant the OAE's motion for final discipline. Final discipline proceedings in New Jersey are governed by R. 1:20-13(c). Under that Rule, "a plea of guilty to a crime or disorderly persons offense, whether the plea results either in a judgment of conviction or admission to a diversionary program," is conclusive evidence of guilt in a disciplinary proceeding. R. 1:20-13(c)(1). See also In re Magid, 139 N.J. 449, 451 (1995), and In re Principato, 139 N.J. 456, 460 (1995).

Pursuant to RPC 8.4(b), it is misconduct for an attorney to "commit a criminal act that reflects adversely on the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness[,] or fitness as a lawyer." Thus, respondent's guilty plea to obstructing governmental administration, in violation of New York Penal Law § 195.05, is clear and convincing evidence that she violated this Rule. Hence, the sole issue left for our determination is the proper quantum of discipline to be imposed. R. 1:20-13(c)(2); Magid, 139 N.J. at 451-52; Principato, 139 N.J. at 460.

Quantum of Discipline

In determining the appropriate measure of discipline, we must consider the interests of the public, the bar, and respondent. “The primary purpose of discipline is not to punish the attorney but to preserve the confidence of the public in the bar.” Principato, 139 N.J. at 460. Fashioning the appropriate penalty involves the consideration of many factors, including “the nature and severity of the crime, whether the crime is related to the practice of law, and any mitigating factors such as respondent’s reputation, [their] prior trustworthy conduct, and general good conduct.” In re Lunetta, 118 N.J. 443, 445-46 (1989).

The Court has noted that, although it does not conduct “an independent examination of the underlying facts to ascertain guilt,” it will “consider them relevant to the nature and extent of discipline to be imposed.” Magid, 139 N.J. at 452. In motions for final discipline, it is acceptable to “examine the totality of circumstances, including the details of the offense, the background of respondent, and the pre-sentence report” before “reaching an appropriate decision” as to the sanction to be imposed. In re Spina, 121 N.J. 378, 389 (1990). The “appropriate decision” should provide “due consideration to the interests of the attorney involved and to the protection of the public.” Ibid.

As both the OAE and respondent observed, attorneys who have been convicted of the disorderly persons offense of obstruction typically receive an admonition or a reprimand, depending on the presence of aggravating or mitigating factors. See, e.g., In re Healy, 202 N.J. 131 (2010) (admonition for an attorney who was convicted of obstruction of justice and resisting arrest; no disciplinary history; we considered, as compelling mitigation, that the attorney had not been involved in the underlying offense that precipitated the police encounter but, instead, involved himself in an effort to calm down the situation); In re Lanuto, 227 N.J. 568 (2017) (reprimand for an attorney who was convicted of obstruction of the administration of law and resisting arrest; the attorney was hostile and antagonistic toward the police; no disciplinary history; no other mitigating factors); In re Angelucci, 183 N.J. 472 (2005) (reprimand for an attorney who was convicted of obstruction of law or other governmental function; the attorney was hostile and antagonistic toward police officers, necessitating the use of force; no disciplinary history; no other mitigating factors).

Like the attorneys in Lanuto and Angelucci, who received reprimands, respondent was convicted of obstructing governmental administration, the equivalent of a disorderly persons offense in New Jersey. Thus, pursuant to New

Jersey disciplinary precedent, we determine that the minimum quantum of discipline for respondent's misconduct is a reprimand. To craft the appropriate discipline in this case, however, we also consider mitigating and aggravating factors.

There is no mitigation to consider.

In aggravation, we accord significant weight to respondent's disciplinary history and prior encounters with the disciplinary system. In 2022, when this motion for final discipline first came before us, it represented respondent's third disciplinary proceeding in just as many years. Specifically, the Court's prior disciplinary Orders were dated July 12, 2019 (reprimand) and November 18, 2021 (censure). In LaVan I, respondent violated RPC 8.4(a) and (c) and, in LaVan II, she violated RPC 1.7(a). Following the issuance of the Court's Order in LaVan I, respondent violated RPC 8.4(b) in connection with the instant matter, with the underlying criminal conduct occurring in July 2021. The Court's November 2021 Order in LaVan II, however, post-dated her instant misconduct; however, by then, she should have been acutely aware of her professional responsibilities, given that we had issued our decision in April 2021, three months before she committed the instant misconduct. Thus, unlike the attorneys in Lanuto and Angelucci, who had no prior discipline and were reprimanded for obstructing justice, respondent's 2021 misconduct serves to justify discipline greater than a reprimand.

Additionally, this matter involved the attempted arrest of a person who respondent had witnessed threatening the life of a third person – whom she considered an uncle – with a knife to the throat, making the interference with the police officers far more serious than the circumstances in Lanuto and Angelucci.

In further aggravation, respondent failed to report her arrest to the OAE and, despite subsequently being reminded of her obligation to keep the OAE informed as to the outcome, she waited almost one year to report her guilty plea.

Moreover, following our review of the SEA's findings and the developed record, we again conclude that respondent's misconduct directly touched upon her law license. According to the arrest report, respondent visited N.W. to discuss the equitable distribution of a marital asset in his divorce proceedings, in which she intended to file pleadings on behalf of his soon-to-be ex-wife.

Most notably, during the evidentiary hearing, N.W. testified that respondent, whom he knew to be an attorney and close with his estranged wife, told him that she would file paperwork with the court in connection with his pending divorce, unless he promptly made what she termed a "reasonable" offer to his wife. Soon after, he called his attorney to ask whether his position in the divorce would be negatively affected. Moreover, Doyle testified that he heard respondent tell P.W. that, unless he and his father "figure[d] this out by Friday," she would file papers and "we're gonna sell the . . . farm."

Whereas the most relevant statements made by N.W. and Doyle are consistent with each other, respondent's contention that she sought to facilitate a reasonable, amicable resolution on behalf of both N.W. and Pa.W. finds no support in the record. Indeed, N.W. expressly rejected her contention that she was at his home on his behalf.

As respondent argues, she told N.W. that Pa.W. had not hired her and, thus, did not hold herself out as formally representing Pa.W. in the divorce proceedings. However, she did not need to hold herself out in this specific manner for her conduct to directly touch upon her law license.

In addition, N.W.'s 2023 statement that respondent said she would file papers "as a friend of the court" does not reduce the clarity of his statements – made to Doyle in 2021, to the OAE in 2023, and during the hearing in 2025 – that she said she would file paperwork in the divorce matter. It also has no bearing on her statement to P.W.

Thus, we determine that respondent clearly leveraged her law license in an effort to convince N.W. that, if he did not resolve the divorce quickly, on terms more favorable to his estranged wife, she would file paperwork in his divorce proceedings. Accordingly, her misconduct "directly touched upon her law license."

On this record, however, we do not find that respondent assaulted a police officer. Despite that conclusion, we conclude that respondent's misconduct, exacerbated by the compelling aggravating factors, requires a term of suspension. "Lawyering is a profession of 'great traditions and high standards.'" In re Jackman, 165 N.J. 580, 584 (2000) (quoting Speech by Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz, Commencement Address-Rutgers University School of Law, Newark, New Jersey (June 2, 1991), 49 Rutgers L. Rev. 1061, 1062 (1997)). Attorneys are expected to hold themselves in the highest regard and must "possess a certain set of traits -- honesty and truthfulness, trustworthiness and reliability, and a professional commitment to the judicial process and the administration of justice." In re Application of Matthews, 94 N.J. 59, 77 (1983).

The Court has explained, when considering the character of a Bar applicant, that:

> [t]hese personal characteristics are required to ensure that lawyers will serve both their clients and the

> administration of justice honorably and responsibly. We also believe that applicants must demonstrate through the possession of such qualities of character the ability to adhere to the Disciplinary Rules governing the conduct of attorneys. These Rules embody basic ethical and professional precepts; they are fundamental norms that control the professional and personal behavior of those who as attorneys undertake to be officers of the court. These Rules reflect decades of tradition, experience and continuous careful consideration of the essential and indispensable ingredients that constitute the professional responsibility of attorneys. Adherence to these Rules is absolutely demanded of all members of the Bar.
>
> [Matthews, 94 N.J. at 77-78.]

Adherence to these basic ethical, moral, and professional precepts are demanded of all attorneys, from the newly admitted to the most seasoned practitioners. In our view, given the established facts of this case, for personal and improper reasons, respondent chose to abandon her professional and ethical responsibilities to which she took an oath to adhere and, through her misconduct, demonstrated a lack in these character traits, including her professional commitment to the administration of justice.

Conclusion

On balance, we determine that a three-month suspension is the quantum of discipline necessary to protect the public and preserve confidence in the bar.

Vice-Chair Boyer and Member Campelo were absent.

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
Hon. Mary Catherine Cuff, P.J.A.D. (Ret.),
Chair

By: */s/ Timothy M. Ellis*
Timothy M. Ellis
Chief Counsel

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY
DISCIPLINARY REVIEW BOARD
VOTING RECORD

In the Matter of Julie Anna LaVan
Docket No. DRB 25-171

Argued: October 23, 2025

Decided: January 14, 2026

Disposition: Three-Month Suspension

Members	Three-Month Suspension	Absent
Cuff	X	
Boyer		X
Campelo		X
Hoberman	X	
Menaker	X	
Modu	X	
Petrou	X	
Rodriguez	X	
Spencer	X	
Total:	7	2

/s/ Timothy M. Ellis
Timothy M. Ellis
Chief Counsel