

FILE NO. _____

STATE OF MINNESOTA

IN SUPREME COURT

In Re Petition for Disciplinary Action
against STEVEN FORD SORONOW,
an Attorney at Law of the
State of Minnesota.

**PETITION FOR
DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Upon the approval of a Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board Panel Chair, the Director of the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility, hereinafter Director, files this petition pursuant to Rules 10(d) and 12(a), Rules on Lawyers Professional Responsibility. The Director alleges:

The above-named attorney, hereinafter respondent, was admitted to practice law in Minnesota on January 20, 2000. Respondent currently practices law in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Respondent has committed the following unprofessional conduct warranting public discipline:

FIRST COUNT

Non-Cooperation

1. On September 22, 2000, the Director received a complaint from Linda Kronenberger against respondent, alleging failure to communicate and other misconduct.
2. By notice of investigation dated September 28, 2000, the complaint was forwarded to respondent's last known address, and he was requested to respond to the district ethics committee investigator within 14 days. Exhibit 1. The notice was

returned to the Director's Office by the post office on October 2, 2000, indicating that respondent had moved and had left no forwarding address. Exhibit 2.

3. On October 3, 2000, the notice of investigation was sent to a second address of the respondent by certified mail. Exhibit 3. No return receipt was ever received by the Director's Office. Respondent did not respond to the investigator.

4. The district ethics committee investigator sent a certified letter to a third address on October 26, 2000. Exhibit 4. The return receipt was received. Exhibit 5. On October 30, 2000, respondent left a voicemail with the investigator, indicating that a response would be forthcoming. The investigator followed up with two phone messages and two more letters, but no response was received from respondent. Exhibits 6 and 7.

5. At its December 13, 2000, meeting, the Hennepin County Bar Association Ethics Committee recommended referral of this matter directly to the Lawyers Board pursuant to Rule 25, RLPR, based on respondent's non-cooperation with the disciplinary investigation. Exhibit 8.

6. On December 20, 2000, a copy of the district ethics committee's report was forwarded to respondent and he was asked to reply. Exhibit 9. No response was received.

7. On February 2, 2001, a certified letter was sent to the same address as the December 20, 2000, letter and to an additional address. Exhibit 10. The letters requested that respondent attend a meeting at the Director's Office on February 13, 2001. The return receipt for each letter was received by the Director's Office. Exhibits 11 and 12. Respondent did not appear for the meeting or otherwise contact the Director's Office.

8. On January 10, 2001, the Director received a complaint from Suzanne Marie Hicks against respondent. By notice of investigation dated January 19, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent, and he was requested to respond to the district ethics committee investigator within 14 days. Exhibit 13. The notice was

returned by the post office and another copy was sent to an additional address.

Exhibits 14 and 15. No response was received. On February 22, 2001, the matter was removed from the district ethics committee pursuant to Rule 7(d), RLPR.

9. On February 23, 2001, the Director received a complaint from Bernadette Eagle against respondent. By notice of investigation dated March 2, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent at two addresses, and he was requested to respond to the Director's Office within 14 days. Exhibit 16. No response was received.

10. On March 5, 2001, the Director received a complaint from Roxine Palmer against respondent. By notice of investigation dated March 15, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent at two addresses, and he was requested to respond to the Director's Office within 14 days. Exhibit 17. No response was received.

11. On March 13, 2001, the Director received a complaint from Pan S. Yaung against respondent. By notice of investigation dated March 19, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent at two addresses, and he was requested to respond to the Director's Office within 14 days. Exhibit 18. One copy of the notice was returned by the post office. No response was received.

12. On March 16, 2001, the Director received a complaint from David Roldan against respondent. By notice of investigation dated April 3, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent, and he was requested to respond to the Director's Office within 14 days. Exhibit 19. No response was received.

13. On April 6, 2001, a letter was sent to respondent at an address at which no previous mailings by the Director had been returned. Exhibit 20. Included with the letter were copies of all previous complaints and notices of investigation and a request for a response from respondent. No response was received.

14. On March 30, 2001, the Director received a complaint from John M. Alderson against respondent. By notice of investigation dated April 9, 2001, the complaint was forwarded to respondent at three addresses, and he was requested to respond to the Director's Office within 14 days. Exhibit 21. No response was received.

15. On April 25, 2001, the Director issued Charges of Unprofessional Conduct against respondent. A mandatory pre-hearing meeting was scheduled for May 8, 2001. The notice accompanying the charges specifically informed respondent that failure to attend the pre-hearing meeting could result in the Director moving for probable cause on the basis of flagrant non-cooperation under Rule 10(d), RLPR. Exhibits 22 and 23. Respondent did not appear for the pre-hearing meeting.

16. Respondent's conduct in failing to cooperate with the Director's disciplinary investigation violated Rule 8.1(a)(3), Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct (MRPC), and Rule 25, RLPR.

SECOND COUNT

Non-Communication, Neglect and Failure to Return Files and Retainers

17. Respondent has engaged in a pattern of non-communication, neglect and failure to return files and unearned retainers as follows:

a. Roxine Palmer hired respondent in April 2000 to handle a custody and child support matter. She paid respondent a \$1,000 advance fee. Palmer states that she called respondent numerous times, that she received no response, and that there is no evidence that respondent completed any work on her case. Respondent also did not return Palmer's file or retainer upon request.

b. Linda Kronenberger hired respondent to handle her divorce in June 2000. She paid respondent \$1,350. Respondent did not respond to several voicemail messages left by Kronenberger. He did not keep Kronenberger informed of his changes of address and phone number. Respondent told Kronenberger that he had mailed out a draft of her divorce decree on September 26, 2000. It did not arrive, however, until October 6. Kronenberger says it needed revisions, but respondent never made them. She never received the final decree or heard from respondent again.

c. John Alderson hired respondent in July 2000 to handle a school dismissal matter. He paid respondent \$2,500. Alderson states he contacted respondent over 20 times before respondent returned his call. Alderson states that he and respondent talked numerous times after that and that respondent wrote a letter to the dean of his school. Nothing more was done on his case and respondent eventually stopped communicating with Alderson. Because of the time sensitive nature of his case, Alderson hired a new attorney and requested return of his money and documents given to respondent. They were not returned.

d. Bernadette Eagle hired respondent in August 2000 to handle a custody dispute with her former husband regarding their minor child. Eagle states that after initially explaining her situation to respondent, he avoided her calls and did not respond to her messages. Eagle also twice attempted to contact respondent by mail. He did not respond. Respondent sent one letter to Eagle's former husband that contained erroneous information that Eagle alleges was directly contrary to what she had told him.

e. Suzanne Hicks hired respondent to handle her divorce in September 2000 and paid a \$250 advance fee. Hicks states that respondent did not return her calls or complete her divorce or provide any evidence of doing any work on the divorce.

f. David Roldan initially hired attorney Carrie Robson to represent him regarding a housing discrimination matter. Robson referred his case to respondent when she left private practice. Roldan paid respondent \$500. Roldan states that respondent did not return his phone calls and that nothing was done on his case.

g. Pan Yaung hired respondent in December 2000 to handle an immigration matter. Yaung paid a \$1,500 advance fee. Yaung states that between December 10, 2000, and March 6, 2001, he tried to contact respondent

numerous times. He was only able to speak with respondent one time in February. Yaung has not heard from respondent since and there is no evidence that respondent ever did any work on Yaung's case.

18. Respondent's conduct in engaging in a pattern of neglecting clients, failing to communicate with clients in a timely manner, and failing to return files or unearned retainers violated Rules 1.3, 1.4(a) and 1.16(d), MRPC.

WHEREFORE, the Director respectfully prays for an order of this Court suspending respondent or imposing otherwise appropriate discipline, awarding costs and disbursements pursuant to the Rules on Lawyers Professional Responsibility, and for such other, further or different relief as may be just and proper.

Dated: May 9, 2001.



EDWARD J. CLEARY
DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF LAWYERS
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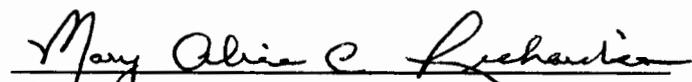
and



MARTIN A. COLE
SENIOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Attorney No. 148416.

This petition is approved for filing pursuant to Rules 10(d) and 12(a), RLPR, by the undersigned Panel Chair.

Dated: May 18, 2001.



MARYALICE C. RICHARDSON
PANEL CHAIR, LAWYERS PROFESSIONAL
RESPONSIBILITY BOARD