

Public Disciplinary Records Now Available Online

by

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Reprinted from *Minnesota Lawyer* (April 3, 2006)

It is not by happenstance that the office in Minnesota charged with overseeing the professional responsibility of lawyers is called the Office of the Director of Lawyers Professional Responsibility. In many states the comparable office is known as the “office of attorney discipline” or some similar title.

However, the title of the Minnesota office better reflects the actual work of the office. While investigating and prosecuting attorney disciplinary matters remains a core function, the work of the office is much broader.

In addition to attorney discipline, the Director’s Office is heavily involved with educational efforts regarding professional responsibility. The last several directors of the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility have emphasized the importance of education in carrying out the Office’s mission.

Attorneys from the Director’s Office speak frequently at continuing legal education seminars (CLEs) and author pieces (such as this recurring column) on professional responsibility issues. The office’s attorney advisory opinion service also continues to be heavily used by Minnesota lawyers.

These educational activities involve not only lawyers, but have included efforts to reach the public as well. The Web site operated by the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility is an integral part of that effort.

Recently the office’s Web site, www.courts.state.mn.us/lprb, was modified to include “lawyer search,” a new feature that allows lawyers and members of the public to check the public disciplinary history of Minnesota lawyers.

Anyone interested in finding out if a lawyer has ever been publicly disciplined by the Minnesota Supreme Court may go to the Director’s Web site and click on “Lawyer Search – Public Discipline Record.” This will take the user to a screen asking for the name and address of the lawyer. An exact spelling of the lawyer’s name is not required because the search engine permits searches both with an exact spelling and as a “sounds like” search.

In cases where the lawyer has been publicly disciplined, the user may click on the lawyer’s name and view a copy of the Supreme Court’s order imposing the discipline. If the lawyer was disciplined more than once, each of the orders imposing discipline is available.

Moreover, the information maintained on the site is not limited to disciplinary matters. Every lawyer

licensed in Minnesota is listed on the site. The information provided includes the lawyer's full name, attorney license number, the year the lawyer was admitted to practice, the city where the lawyer practices (as provided to attorney registration) and whether the lawyer is "authorized" to practice law in Minnesota. The names of attorneys who may hold an attorney license but who are currently not authorized to practice law, including for nondisciplinary reasons such as when the lawyer has voluntarily gone on CLE restricted status, appear with the notation "not authorized."

In addition to these features, the Director's Web site includes other tools for lawyers and nonlawyers alike. Individuals accessing the site will be able to learn about the attorney disciplinary system, print attorney complaint forms, access the Minnesota Rules of Professional Conduct, obtain information about the Lawyers Professional Responsibility Board and even print directions to the Office.

Lawyers in particular will find the site helpful as it contains professional responsibility articles indexed by subject, a term search engine and copies of past articles from this publication as well as articles from Bench and Bar. There is also material on trust accounts, including frequently asked trust-account questions, information on maintaining trust accounts and a list of approved financial institutions where the lawyer may maintain a trust account.

The mission of the Office of Lawyers Professional Responsibility is much greater than attorney discipline. The Director's Office is constantly looking for other means to educate the public and the bar. We are hopeful that the latest additions to the Director's Web site will further that mission.