

People v. Christopher Glen Skipp. 20PDJ036. July 27, 2020.

The Presiding Disciplinary Judge approved the parties' conditional admission of misconduct and suspended Christopher Glen Skipp (attorney registration number 26871) for one year and one day, effective July 27, 2020. To be reinstated, Skipp must prove by clear and convincing evidence that he has been rehabilitated, has complied with disciplinary orders and rules, and is fit to practice law.

In early 2018, Skipp began sharing office space with several other lawyers and a paralegal (who was later enjoined from the unauthorized practice of law). The paralegal was the office's de facto supervisor and generally in charge, assigning various cases to the lawyers; the paralegal also managed all client retainers, lawyer payroll, and office financial issues, including office rent. No formal conflict check system existed within the office, and Skipp did not maintain electronic files. Clients regularly paid retainers to the paralegal, who put the money in a locked desk drawer. Skipp was not always aware of what was going on his client matters, nor did he know exactly what the paralegal did with client money, as he was not given accountings. Skipp gave the paralegal any client money he received. He did not maintain a client ledger or a formal accounting system for work he performed. Skipp knew or should have known that the paralegal was engaged in the unauthorized practice of law. In summer 2019, Skipp left the office. Around that time, the paralegal took the office's files.

In one client matter, Skipp failed to provide a client with a statement of his fee, allowed the paralegal to advise the client without his involvement, permitted the paralegal to keep unearned cash retainers, and failed to maintain a copy of the client file. In another client matter, Skipp did not ensure the paralegal complied with Skipp's professional obligations, including by avoiding conflicts of interest. As a result, the paralegal was allowed to work on cases giving rise to a conflict of interest. In a final client matter, Skipp failed to respond to discovery requests, failed to issue any discovery before filing a motion to compel, failed to participate in drafting a trial management order, failed to maintain an electronic filing account so he could receive filings, and failing to prepare for trial.

Through this conduct, Skipp violated Colo. RPC 1.3 (a lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness when representing a client); Colo. RPC 1.5(b) (a lawyer shall inform a client in writing about the lawyer's fees and expenses if the lawyer has not regularly represented the client); Colo. RPC 1.15A(a) (a lawyer shall hold client property separate from the lawyer's own property); Colo. RPC 1.15D (a lawyer shall maintain certain records related to client funds for seven years); Colo. RPC 1.16A (a lawyer in private practice shall retain client files for ten years); Colo. RPC 5.3(b) (a lawyer with direct supervisory authority over a nonlawyer shall make reasonable efforts to ensure the nonlawyer's conduct is compatible with the lawyer's professional obligations); Colo. RPC 5.4(a) (a lawyer shall not share legal fees with a nonlawyer); Colo. RPC 5.4(c) (a lawyer shall not permit a person who employs the lawyer to render legal services for another to direct or regulate the lawyer's professional judgment in rendering such legal services); and Colo. RPC 5.5(a)(3) (a lawyer shall not assist a person in the performance of the unauthorized practice of law). The case file is public per C.R.C.P. 251.31.