

People v. Christopher Ross Steele. 15PDJ084. September 29, 2015.

The Presiding Disciplinary Judge approved the parties' conditional admission of misconduct and publicly censured Christopher Ross Steele (Attorney Registration Number 44135). The sanction takes effect on November 3, 2015.

In one matter, Steele was retained by a couple to assist them in filing for bankruptcy. The couple paid Steele \$1,200.00 in attorney's fees and \$206.00 in filing fees, and Steele placed the money in his trust account. When Steele later received some information for the purposes of preparing the petition, he withdrew \$1,200.00 and placed that money in his operating account. Although he communicated regularly with the couple, he was not given all the required information and could not complete the petition. Steele later accepted a position as a Colorado Springs city attorney and wrote a letter to the couple withdrawing from the representation. He also returned their documents, but he only remitted to them a check of \$206.00, even though he had not completed all of the work that would have entitled him to retain the \$1,200.00. Steele thereby violated Colo. RPC 1.15(A) (a lawyer shall hold client property separate from the lawyer's own property).

When he became a city attorney, Steele prosecuted a juvenile misdemeanor shoplifting case. He met with the minor and her father and negotiated with them a deferred sentence. Soon after, the minor received a Facebook friend request from Steele. During the following week, the initial friend request was withdrawn, only to be followed by two new such requests. The minor did not accept or decline any of them, and Steele eventually canceled the requests. Steele was placed on administrative leave and was subject to an internal investigation for this behavior, which yielded no other evidence that he attempted to contact minors or other defendants. Steele was later terminated. By attempting to engage in a social relationship with a criminal defendant while employed as a prosecutor, Steele violated Colo. RPC 1.7 (restricting the circumstances in which a lawyer may represent a client if the representation involves a concurrent conflict of interest). He also violated Colo. RPC 8.4(d) (a lawyer shall not engage in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice) by improperly contacting a juvenile criminal defendant.