

The Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana

IN RE: TIMOTHY A. MECHE

No. 2025-B-00229

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IN RE: Disciplinary Counsel - Applicant Other; Findings and Recommendations  
(Formal Charges);  
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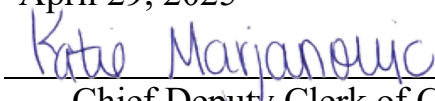
April 29, 2025

Suspension imposed. See per curiam.

JLW  
JDH  
JBM  
PDG  
JMG

Crain, J., dissents and would reject the proposed discipline as too lenient.  
Cole, J., dissents and would reject the proposed discipline as too lenient.

Supreme Court of Louisiana  
April 29, 2025

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Deputy Clerk of Court  
For the Court

SUPREME COURT OF LOUISIANA

NO. 2025-B-0229

IN RE: TIMOTHY A. MECHE

ATTORNEY DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDING

PER CURIAM

This disciplinary matter arises from formal charges filed by the Office of Disciplinary Counsel (“ODC”) against respondent, Timothy A. Meche, an attorney licensed to practice law in Louisiana, but currently suspended from practice.

**PRIOR DISCIPLINARY HISTORY**

Before we address the current charges, we find it helpful to review respondent’s prior disciplinary history. Respondent was admitted to the practice of law in Louisiana in 1989. On June 28, 2024, this court suspended respondent from the practice of law for two years. *In re: Meche*, 24-0262 (La. 6/28/24), 388 So. 3d 325 (“*Meche I*”). The misconduct at issue in *Meche I* involved respondent’s arrest for DWI on three occasions; on one of the occasions, respondent caused an accident and left the scene.

Against this backdrop, we now turn to a consideration of the misconduct at issue in the instant proceeding.

**UNDERLYING FACTS**

*Count I*

Melissa Kagel hired respondent to represent her fiancé, Jeffrey Vinson, in a criminal matter, paying him \$10,000. On February 12, 2022, respondent assured Ms. Kagel and Mr. Vinson’s mother that he would get Mr. Vinson out of jail by

March 1, 2022. Ms. Kagel alleged that respondent did not diligently represent Mr. Vinson and refused to communicate with her and/or Mr. Vinson. Ms. Kagel terminated respondent from the representation, hired another attorney, and requested a full refund. According to Ms. Kagel, respondent agreed to provide a refund, but since that time, he has ignored her phone calls, emails, and text messages.

In July 2022, Ms. Kagel filed a complaint against respondent with the ODC. The ODC mailed notice of the complaint to respondent via certified mail at his primary bar registration address. The notice was signed for on July 22, 2022, but respondent did not submit a response. The ODC issued a subpoena compelling respondent to appear for a sworn statement on November 22, 2022. The ODC's investigators attempted to serve respondent with the subpoena on October 6, 2022, October 12, 2022, November 4, 2022, and November 9, 2022, to no avail. On the attempt of November 4, when the ODC investigator knocked on the door of respondent's residence, an adult male asked: "Who is it?" When the investigator identified himself, the person inside did not respond. The investigator left his card taped to the front door of the residence, but respondent has not contacted him.

The ODC alleged that respondent's conduct violated the following provisions of the Rules of Professional Conduct: Rules 1.3 (failure to act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client), 1.4 (failure to communicate with a client), 1.5(a) (a lawyer shall not make an arrangement for, charge, or collect an unreasonable fee), 1.5(f) (failure to refund an unearned fee), 8.1(c) (failure to cooperate with the ODC in its investigation), 8.4(a) (violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct), and 8.4(d) (engaging in conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice).

## *Count II*

On October 17, 2022, the ODC received information that a warrant was issued in East Baton Rouge Parish for respondent's arrest after he leased a vehicle by false representation and failed to return the vehicle, in violation of La. R.S. 14:220.1.

The ODC mailed notice of the related disciplinary complaint to respondent via certified mail at his primary bar registration address. The notice was signed for on October 20, 2022, but respondent did not submit a response. Notice was also sent to respondent at his secondary bar registration address; this correspondence was returned unclaimed. The ODC issued a subpoena compelling respondent to appear for a sworn statement on April 11, 2023. An ODC investigator attempted to personally serve respondent with the subpoena at his primary and last known addresses on March 14, 2023, at his secondary address on March 28, 2023, and at his primary and last known addresses on April 5, 2023, all to no avail. On occasion, the investigator left his business card at the addresses with a notation on the back for respondent to contact him. To date, the investigator has not heard from respondent.

The ODC alleged that respondent's conduct violated the following provisions of the Rules of Professional Conduct: Rules 8.1(c), 8.4(a), 8.4(b) (commission of a criminal act that reflects adversely on the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness, or fitness as a lawyer), 8.4(c) (engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation), and 8.4(d).

## **DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS**

In June 2023, the ODC filed formal charges against respondent, as set forth above. He failed to answer the charges, and the factual allegations contained therein were deemed admitted and proven by clear and convincing pursuant to Supreme Court Rule XIX, § 11(E)(3). Thereafter, respondent filed a motion to recall the

deemed admitted order and an answer to the formal charges in which he denied any misconduct. The motion was granted and the deemed admitted order was vacated.

In light of respondent's answer, the matter proceeded to a formal hearing on the merits. In its pre-hearing memorandum, the ODC noted that with respect to Count II, it would pursue only respondent's violation of Rule 8.1(c). The ODC further noted that the hearing committee and respondent had been informed of this change.

### *Formal Hearing*

The matter proceeded to a formal hearing conducted by the hearing committee on September 17, 2024. Respondent attended the hearing and represented himself. Both the ODC and respondent introduced documentary evidence. The ODC called the following witnesses to testify before the committee: Deborah Helgeson, the receptionist and building manager at respondent's law office; Alan Grimmis, an ODC investigator; and Debbie Beaird, an ODC investigator. Respondent testified on his own behalf and on cross-examination by the ODC.

### *Hearing Committee Report*

After considering the evidence and testimony presented at the hearing, the hearing committee made the following factual findings: Ms. Kagel retained respondent only to try to have Mr. Vinson released from jail, and the agreed-upon price for this service was a \$10,000 fixed fee. By virtue of his efforts to have Mr. Vinson released, respondent fully earned the fee, and no evidence or testimony has been presented to show that this fee was excessive or unreasonable. Furthermore, the failure of Ms. Kagel or Mr. Vinson to testify at the hearing calls into question the accuracy and legitimacy of the allegations contained in the complaint.

The committee also found the testimony of all the witnesses to be credible. Regarding the allegations that respondent failed to communicate with the ODC, the committee highlighted his testimony, as follows: Respondent admitted that he had received various letters and notices by mail from the ODC, and instead of opening them, sent the correspondences directly to the attorney representing him at the time. Respondent acknowledged that he should have responded to the ODC. Respondent further acknowledged that he knew the ODC was trying to personally serve him with subpoenas, but he failed to cooperate, contending that he had informed the ODC that everything should go through his attorney.

Based on these facts, the committee found that respondent violated Rule 8.1(c) by failing to cooperate with the ODC in two disciplinary investigations. The committee also found that respondent violated Rules 8.4(a) and 8.4(d) “in that he knowingly violated the Rules of Professional Conduct and his doing so was prejudicial to the administration of justice with respect to these disciplinary proceedings.” The committee found that the ODC did not prove violations of Rules 1.3, 1.4, or 1.5(a)(f) alleged in Count I by clear and convincing evidence.

The committee determined that respondent violated duties owed to the legal system and the legal profession. He acted knowingly, and his conduct caused actual harm to the ODC, which had to expend resources in its attempt to serve respondent on multiple occasions. Relying on the ABA’s *Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions*, the committee determined the baseline sanction is suspension.

The committee found that the following aggravating factors are present: a prior disciplinary record, a dishonest or selfish motive “in attempting to delay or retard the proceedings by not cooperating,” multiple offenses, and substantial experience in the practice of law. The committee found that the mitigating factor of personal problems is present, noting that at the time of the misconduct, respondent’s father was declining in health and ultimately died.

After further considering the jurisprudence of the court in similar matters, the committee recommended respondent be suspended from the practice of law for sixty days, fully deferred. The committee further recommended that respondent be assessed with the costs and expenses of this proceeding.

Neither respondent nor the ODC filed an objection to the hearing committee's report and recommendation. Therefore, pursuant to Supreme Court Rule XIX, § 11(G), the disciplinary board submitted the committee's report to the court for review.

## **DISCUSSION**

Bar disciplinary matters fall within the original jurisdiction of this court. La. Const. art. V, § 5(B). Consequently, we act as triers of fact and conduct an independent review of the record to determine whether the alleged misconduct has been proven by clear and convincing evidence. *In re: Banks*, 09-1212 (La. 10/2/09), 18 So. 3d 57. While we are not bound in any way by the findings and recommendations of the hearing committee and disciplinary board, we have held the manifest error standard is applicable to the committee's factual findings. *See In re: Caulfield*, 96-1401 (La. 11/25/96), 683 So.2d 714; *In re: Pardue*, 93-2865 (La. 3/11/94), 633 So.2d 150.

The record of this matter supports a finding that respondent failed to cooperate with the ODC in two disciplinary investigations. This misconduct violates the Rules of Professional Conduct as found by the hearing committee.

Having found evidence of professional misconduct, we now turn to a determination of the appropriate sanction for respondent's actions. In determining a sanction, we are mindful that disciplinary proceedings are designed to maintain high standards of conduct, protect the public, preserve the integrity of the profession, and deter future misconduct. *Louisiana State Bar Ass'n v. Reis*, 513 So. 2d 1173

(La. 1987). The discipline to be imposed depends upon the facts of each case and the seriousness of the offenses involved considered in light of any aggravating and mitigating circumstances. *Louisiana State Bar Ass’n v. Whittington*, 459 So. 2d 520 (La. 1984).

The record supports a finding that respondent knowingly violated duties owed to the legal system and the legal profession, causing actual harm. Under the ABA’s *Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions*, the baseline sanction is suspension. The record supports the aggravating and mitigating factors found by the committee.

In the past, we have held that an attorney’s failure to cooperate with the ODC, standing alone, is sufficient to warrant discipline. *In re: Fahrenholtz*, 09-0748 (La. 10/2/09), 18 So. 3d 751. The sanctions imposed typically have been in the range of a public reprimand to a six-month suspension from the practice of law. *See, e.g., In re: Tucker*, 23-1013 (La. 9/26/23), 370 So. 3d 714 (public reprimand for failing to respond to two disciplinary complaints and failing to appear for a sworn statement in response to a subpoena); *In re: Belfield*, 12-1690 (La. 9/28/12), 98 So. 3d 796 (public reprimand for failing to respond to three disciplinary complaints); *In re: Boudreau*, 03-1890 (La. 12/3/03), 860 So. 2d 1119 (six-month suspension for failing to cooperate with the ODC in its investigation; the attorney had recently been disciplined for similar misconduct, and his continued failure to cooperate was therefore found to be “particularly egregious”); *In re: Gold*, 98-2819 (La. 4/30/99), 734 So. 2d 1210 (public reprimand and probation for failing to cooperate with the ODC in five investigations); and *In re: Augustine*, 97-1570 (La. 9/26/97), 707 So. 2d 1 (thirty-day suspension for knowing failure to cooperate with the ODC in two investigations).

Based on this jurisprudence, we cannot say that a fully deferred suspension is inappropriate in this matter. After further considering the absence of any objection by the ODC to the hearing committee’s report, we will accept the committee’s



recommendation and suspend respondent from the practice of law for sixty days, fully deferred.

### **DECREE**

Upon review of the findings and recommendations of the hearing committee, and considering the record, it is ordered that Timothy A. Meche, Louisiana Bar Roll number 19706, be and he hereby is suspended from the practice of law for a period of sixty days. This suspension shall be deferred in its entirety, with the condition that any misconduct during the deferral period may be grounds for making the deferred suspension executory or imposing additional discipline, as appropriate. All costs and expenses in the matter are assessed against respondent in accordance with Supreme Court Rule XIX, § 10.1, with legal interest to commence thirty days from the date of finality of this court's judgment until paid.