



# Virginia State Bar

Eighth and Main Building  
707 East Main Street, Suite 1500  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2803  
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February 10, 1993

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Anthony M. O'Connell  
6541 Franconia Road  
Springfield, Virginia 22150

Re: In the Matter of Edward James White  
VSB Docket No. 93-042-0976

Dear Mr. O'Connell:

I don't understand why the attorney was not required to take an accountable position in writing on anything. What is it that makes the accountants not have to be accountable?

This letter is in reference to your complaint against the above-referenced attorney received in our office on December 7, 1992. In addition, I acknowledge receipt of your supplemental correspondence dated January 26, 1993, received in my office on January 29. I have concluded my preliminary investigation of your original complaint and wish to advise you that your complaint presents no basis for further investigation by this office for the reasons I shall set out below.

The Respondent did not file a written answer to your complaint. However, Mr. White is represented by counsel in this matter, David R. Rosenfeld, Esquire, and I met with Mr. Rosenfeld and his associate in Alexandria to go over all of the factual matters related to this complaint.

Your complaint alleges that the Respondent served as co-executor of your father's estate along with your mother and that the Respondent allegedly withheld certain information concerning a trust which was set up under your father's will in which you were named as a trustee.

According to your complaint, you retained the Respondent in 1987 to handle a real estate closing and you allege that the Respondent appointed himself co-trustee on the note securing that transaction. Then, the day prior to closing, Respondent allegedly informed you that he was not representing your interests in this real estate transaction. You have also claimed that the Respondent has handled your mother's estate incompetently.

With respect to your first complaint, it appears that your mother, rather than you, retained the Respondent for legal assistance in her capacity as executrix

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of your father's will. Apparently, your mother removed you from her will as a co-executor and nominated the Respondent in your place. However, none of these matters fall within the scope of the Code of Professional Responsibility particularly in view of the fact that you and the Respondent did not share an attorney-client relationship.

Your father's will poured over into a trust in which you were nominated trustee. By your own complaint, you admit that you hired another attorney to look into the funding of the trust, i.e., what distributions the estate would make to the trust. It is my understanding that you came to Virginia to qualify as a trustee. Again, in respect to that matter, there is no attorney-client relationship between you and the Respondent, Mr. White.

In the absence of an attorney-client relationship between you and Mr. White, Mr. White was under no ethical obligation to follow any of your directions or instructions nor was he obligated to communicate directly with you. His ethical duties regarding competence, promptness and communication were owed to your mother.

It is my understanding, based upon a reading of your complaint, that the Respondent and your attorney reached an agreement regarding the funding of the trust and the Respondent agreed to cooperate by providing your attorney with a draft of the final accounting of your father's estate.

Your complaint initially provoked a thought on my part as to why the father's estate remained open so long. However, as indicated in your complaint, Mr. White was not retained by your mother until 1985. Thus, while your complaint states that you were not aware of the fact that your father had appointed you as a co-trustee until 1985, and that your father passed away in 1975, the Respondent appears to have notified you of that fact after he had become involved in 1985.

You have also complained that your mother executed a codicil to her will removing you as a co-trustee and naming Mr. White in your stead. I find nothing improper about that particular matter as it was certainly your mother's prerogative to amend or modify her will and it was Mr. White's responsibility to follow her instructions in that regard.

Your second complaint involves an allegation that Mr. White undertook to represent your interests in a real estate closing in 1987. By letter dated December 28, 1987, you purportedly asked the Respondent to represent your interests in a transfer of property to the Lynch Properties Limited Partnership. You complain that the Respondent failed to notify you of the closing date which you fortuitously discovered from the purchasers just before the closing. In addition, you point out that the Respondent and another party were named as trustees on the Deed of Trust securing the purchase loan without your knowledge or consent. When you confronted Respondent about this, he advised that he did not represent your interests in this real estate

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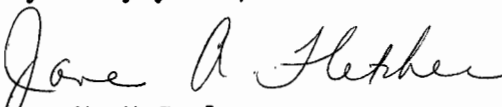
transaction.

My investigation reveals that the Respondent did not serve as settlement attorney for this transaction. In fact, the closing was handled by Coldwell Banker, and the legal instruments for the transaction were prepared under the supervision of McGuire, Woods, Battle & Boothe. I have seen the real estate closing file which was delivered to Mr. Wright by the McGuire, Woods firm, and I am firmly convinced that Mr. White took no part in that transaction other than to perhaps provide informal legal advice to your mother. Your letter of December 28, 1987 is insufficient as a matter to law to establish an attorney-client relationship unless there is some evidence that Mr. White did in fact undertake to handle the closing. Finally, there is no ethical issue raised simply because Mr. White is named as a co-trustee in the Deed of Trust securing the purchase by the Lynch Properties Limited Partnership.

The third complaint involved an allegation that Mr. White allegedly withheld a \$75,000 distribution until you agreed to obtain your own legal counsel. With respect to this allegation, Mr. White, in his capacity as an administrator or executor of an estate is under no obligation by law to make a interim distribution to you. Whether an interim distribution is made is entirely discretionary and the law requires a distribution to be made only upon the filing of a final accounting. With regard to your allegations of incompetence and delay on the part of Mr. White in handling your mother's estate, I have determined that Mr. White has filed in a timely manner the inventory and first accounting for this estate. No delinquency notices or show cause summonses have been issued. The only possible area of neglect appears to be the late filing of Mrs. O'Connell's income tax return, however, I am advised that Mr. White paid one-half of the accrued interest to the IRS, and that no penalties were assessed. In addition, Mr. White timely requested an extension for filing the decedent's last income tax return and therefore no penalties were involved. As justification for the delay, Mr. White points out that he experienced some delay in obtaining the K-1 from you and your own complaint appears to concede that there was a problem with getting the K-1 to Mr. White.

Based on the foregoing, I see no basis in fact or in law to conclude that Mr. White has engaged in any misconduct in violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility. Therefore, please be advised that no further action will be taken on your complaint. By copy of this letter to Respondent's counsel, Mr. Rosenfeld, I am advising him of my determination.

Very truly yours,

  
for James M. McCauley  
Assistant Bar Counsel

JMM/ge  
cc: David R. Rosenfeld, Esquire

Certified P 751 862 438  
Sic Semper Tyrannis

Anthony M. O'Connell  
6541 Franconia Road  
Springfield, Virginia 22150  
(703) 971-2855  
September 20, 1993

Virginia State Bar  
Eighth and Main Building  
707 East Main Street, Suite 1500  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2803  
Telephone (804) 775-0500

Re: My Complaint of December 3, 1992,  
Against Edward J. White  
VSB Docket #93-042-0976

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To Whom It May Concern:

My fourteen page complaint with forty-four enclosures was dismissed as having "no basis in fact" without allowing me the opportunity to respond. In defense of myself and future families of Virginia, I would like to offer one illustration why I feel this is unjust.

Concerning the \$1.41 million purchase agreement I made and later hired Mr. White to handle, your investigator was:

"firmly convinced that Mr. White took no part in that transaction other than to perhaps provide informal legal advice to your mother. Your letter of December 28, 1987 is insufficient as a matter to law to establish an attorney-client relationship unless there is some evidence that Mr. White did in fact undertake to handle the closing."

Mr. White's enclosed bills for services for this sale, with his initials, state:

3/18/88	Draft note & trust
4/6	PC
4/11	PC
4/14	PC atty negotiation & redraft LDPC St. Louis
4/15	Redrafting
4/16	Redrafting, Pc, Exp mail
4/18	PC
4/19	Redrafting
4/20	OV A. O'CONNELL
4/20	PC's redrafts
4/21	Settlement

Far more damaging to me than the usurped sale has been Mr. White's more than seven years of defamatory and divisive statements, preying on the uncertainties of my family. He continues this with letters referencing your "no basis in fact" approval.

This is very important to me. Please allow me a hearing within the safety of the system as I risk being sued if I ask for help elsewhere.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anthony M. O'Connell".

Anthony M. O'Connell

Enclosures:

- (1) Mr. White's bills for services rendered for my sale
- (2) List of my unreturned telephone calls to Mr. White. I suggest that Mr. White thought I though he was representing me at closing.



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November 1, 1993

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Anthony M. O'Connell  
6541 Franconia Road  
Springfield, Virginia 22150

RE: In the Matter of Edward J. White  
VSB Docket #93-042-0976

Dear Mr. O'Connell:

This letter is in response to your certified letter dated September 20, 1993, which was received in this office on September 23, 1993. As you know, the basis for my dismissal of your complaint was the absence of an attorney-client relationship between you and the Respondent. Nothing you have submitted to me under cover letter dated September 20, 1993 changes my conclusion.

The copy of Mr. White's fee statement shows an entry: "4/20 OV A. O'CONNELL." The fact that you had an office visit with Mr. White does not create an attorney-client relationship.

I note that the fee statement dated April 16, 1988 is sent to Mrs. Jean M. O'Connell and I believe that your mother is the client in this particular matter, not you.

Your original complaint alleges that the Respondent handled your mother's estate incompetently. I do not believe you have standing to complain, because you are not a client of Mr. White. The second enclosure, a list of your unreturned telephone calls to Mr. White, also does not change my conclusion. Unless you can show that you are a client of Mr. White, Mr. White was under no ethical duty or mandate to return your telephone calls. This complaint also boils down to your word against Mr. White's as to whether he was representing you at the settlement on the real estate transaction. The Bar would have to prove your position by clear and convincing evidence, and I simply do not see any clear and convincing evidence that Mr. White had agreed to represent you, or that he represented you by his conduct.

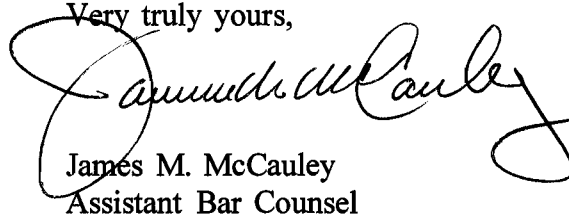
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I don't understand why a code of conduct would allow a fiduciary attorney to break up a family and destroy reputations. What is it that makes the accountants not have to be accountable? The public should know. The structure of a civil action would set family member(s) against family member(s).

Finally, you indicate that Mr. White, over a period of seven years, has made defamatory and divisive statements which you consider to be far more damaging than the issue regarding the real estate settlement. The Code of Professional Responsibility does not proscribe defamatory statements by an attorney, and our office is not the appropriate forum to investigate or prosecute your claim. If you feel that you have been defamed or libeled by the Respondent, then your remedy is to file a civil action, but a Bar complaint is not an appropriate vehicle to resolve that issue.

I am truly sorry that I cannot advance your claims or interest, however, I must stand on my original decision to dismiss your complaint. I trust that you will appreciate my explanation, although you disagree with it.

Very truly yours,



James M. McCauley  
Assistant Bar Counsel

JMM/dls