

**BEFORE THE ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
PANEL A**

IN RE: Priscilla G. Copelin-Neeley, Respondent Attorney
Arkansas Bar No. 2005242
Case No. CPC-2025-020

FINDINGS AND ORDER

The formal charges of misconduct upon which this Findings and Order is based arose from information provided to the Committee by Barbara Ray Watkins (Watkins) on March 21, 2022. The information related to the representation of Watkins by Respondent in 2019 and 2020.

1. Priscilla G. Copelin-Neeley (Neeley) is licensed by the Supreme Court of Arkansas and has been assigned Arkansas Bar No. 2005242.
2. On or about February 22, 2019, Watkins retained Neeley to represent her in a divorce matter in Chicot County Circuit Court Case No. 09DR-19-12.
3. On or about September 19, 2019, Neeley appeared in Court with Watkins for a final hearing.
4. At the hearing, the Court ordered the marital home be sold at auction and the proceeds equally distributed to both parties.
5. On or about February 5, 2020, the property was sold for \$5,000.00.
6. On or about March 30, 2020, the Court entered an Order of Distribution, which ordered a distribution of \$2,500.00 to each party through his and her attorneys of record.
7. Neeley received the funds pursuant to the Order and never sent them to Watkins.
8. At the hearing, the Court also ordered Neeley to prepare and file the Qualified Domestic Relations Order (QDRO), so Watkins would receive her portion of her ex-husband's retirement and/or 401k.

9. Neeley never prepared or filed the QDRO and failed or refused to return Watkins' phone calls or messages.

10. On or about March 9, 2020, Watkins' ex-husband deceased, and she was no longer eligible to receive the benefits that were due to her through the QDRO.

11. Watkins was eligible to receive one-half (1/2) of her ex-husband's retirement until his death, which would have been a gross benefit of approximately \$575.83 per month, based upon records received from the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System (ATRS).

12. On or about March 21, 2022, Watkins submitted a grievance to the Office of Professional Conduct (OPC) against Neeley.

13. On or about March 24, 2025, Neeley submitted a response to OPC wherein she alleged that Watkins still owed Neeley money and Watkins did not pay enough for Neeley to do the QDRO.

14. Neeley's response was incomplete. Neeley's exhibits included a file-marked copy of the Order of Distribution from the Court, remnants of an invoice that contains suspicious billing or payment details, and a litany of excuses that were underwhelming and lacked credibility.

15. Neeley also failed to provide a fee agreement to substantiate her counter-allegation that Watkins still owed her money.

16. OPC's investigation concluded that Neeley made an arrangement at the onset of representation wherein Watkins paid \$2,000.00 and agreed to go out into the community and obtain signatures on petitions that would assist Neeley in running for a judge position without having to pay the filing fee.

17. Watkins never received an invoice and never agreed to allow Neeley to keep the proceeds from the sale of the marital home.

18. Neeley's own response admits that she did not prepare a QDRO, despite being ordered by the Court to do so.

Upon consideration of the formal complaint and attached exhibit materials, the response to it, and other matters before it, and the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct, Panel A of the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct finds:

A. Neeley's conduct, as set forth in the formal complaint and attached exhibits, violated **Rule 1.3**, when Neeley failed or refused to prepare or file the QDRO as ordered by the Court and thereby failed to carry through to conclusion all matters undertaken for the client. Rule 1.3 requires that a lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.

B. Neeley's conduct, as set forth in the formal complaint and attached exhibits, violated **Rule 1.15(a)(5)**, when she received the \$2,500.00 distribution from the Court for the sale of Watkins' marital property and failed or refused to notify Watkins of the receipt of the funds, and then failed or refused to deliver said funds to Watkins. Rule 1.15(a)(5) requires that upon receiving funds or other property in which a client or third person has an interest, a lawyer shall promptly notify the client or third person in writing. Except as stated in this Rule or otherwise permitted by law or by agreement with the client, a lawyer shall promptly deliver to the client or third person any funds or other property that the client or third person is entitled to receive and, upon request by the client or third person, shall promptly render a full written accounting regarding such property to the client or third persons.

C. Neeley's conduct, as set forth in the formal complaint and attached exhibits, violated **Rule 8.4(c)**, when she retained and converted the funds that belonged to her client. Rule 8.4(c) provides that it is professional misconduct for a lawyer to engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation.

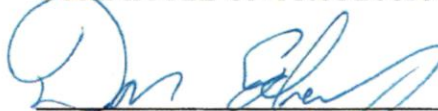
D. Neeley's conduct, as set forth in the formal complaint and attached exhibits, violated **Rule 8.4(d)**, when she failed or refused to prepare and file the QDRO, as ordered by the Court, to the financial detriment of her client. Rule 8.4(d) provides that it is professional misconduct for a lawyer to engage in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice.

WHEREFORE, it is the decision and order of the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct, acting through its authorized Panel A, that **PRISCILLA COPELIN-NEELEY**, Arkansas Bar Number 2005242, be, and hereby is, **REPRIMANDED** for her conduct in this matter.

The Panel further assesses a fine of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS AND NO CENTS (**\$1,000.00**), costs of ONE HUNDRED FIFTY DOLLARS AND NO CENTS (**\$150.00**), and orders the Respondent to pay restitution to BARBARA RAY WATKINS in the amount of TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS AND NO CENTS (**\$2,500.00**).

The fine, restitution, and costs assessed herein totaling **THREE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED FIFTY DOLLARS AND NO CENTS (\$3,650.00)** shall be payable by cashier's check or money order payable to the "Clerk, Arkansas Supreme Court" delivered to the Office of Professional Conduct within thirty (30) days of the date this Findings and Order is filed of record with the Clerk of the Arkansas Supreme Court.

ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT



Don R. Etherly, Panel Chair

2/3/26
Date