

3-5.3 | DIVERSION OF DISCIPLINARY CASES TO PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONALISM ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS

(a) Authority of Board. The board of governors is hereby authorized to establish practice and professionalism enhancement programs to which eligible disciplinary cases may be diverted as an alternative to disciplinary sanction.

(b) Types of Disciplinary Cases Eligible for Diversion. Disciplinary cases that otherwise would be disposed of by a finding of minor misconduct or by a finding of no probable cause with a letter of advice are eligible for diversion to practice and professionalism enhancement programs.

(c) Limitation on Diversion. A respondent who has been the subject of a prior diversion is not eligible for diversion for the same type of rule violation for a period of 5 years after the earlier diversion. However, a respondent who has been the subject of a prior diversion and then is alleged to have violated a completely different type of rule at least 1 year after the initial diversion, will be eligible for a practice and professionalism enhancement program.

(d) Approval of Diversion of Cases at Staff or Grievance Committee Level Investigations. The bar shall not offer a respondent the opportunity to divert a disciplinary case that is pending at staff or grievance committee level investigations to a practice and professionalism enhancement program unless staff counsel, the grievance committee chair, and the designated reviewer concur.

(e) Contents of Diversion Recommendation. If a diversion recommendation is approved as provided in subdivision (d), the recommendation shall state the practice and professionalism enhancement program(s) to which the respondent shall be diverted, shall state the general purpose for the diversion, and the costs thereof to be paid by the respondent.

(f) Service of Recommendation on and Review by Respondent. If a diversion recommendation is approved as provided in subdivision (d), the recommendation shall be served on the respondent who may accept or reject a diversion recommendation in the same manner as provided for review of recommendations of minor misconduct. The respondent shall not

have the right to reject any specific requirement of a practice and professionalism enhancement program.

(g) Effect of Rejection of Recommendation by Respondent. In the event that a respondent rejects a diversion recommendation the matter shall be returned for further proceedings under these rules.

(h) Diversion at Trial Level.

(1) Agreement of the Parties. A referee may recommend diversion of a disciplinary case to a practice and professionalism enhancement program if the bar approves diversion and the respondent agrees. The procedures for approval of conditional pleas provided elsewhere in these rules shall apply to diversion at the trial level.

(2) After Submission of Evidence. A referee may recommend diversion of a disciplinary case to a practice and professionalism enhancement program if, after submission of evidence, but before a finding of guilt, the referee determines that, if proven, the conduct alleged to have been committed by the respondent is not more serious than minor misconduct.

(3) Costs of Practice and Professionalism Enhancement Program. A referee's recommendation of diversion to a practice and professionalism enhancement program shall state the costs thereof to be paid by the respondent.

(4) Appeal of Diversion Recommendation. The respondent and the bar shall have the right to appeal a referee's recommendation of diversion, except in the case of diversion agreed to under subdivision (h) (1).

(5) Authority of Referee to Refer a Matter to a Practice and Professionalism Enhancement Program. Nothing in this rule shall preclude a referee from referring a disciplinary matter to a practice and professionalism enhancement program as a part of a disciplinary sanction.



(i) Effect of Diversion. When the recommendation of diversion becomes final, the respondent shall enter the practice and professionalism enhancement program(s) and complete the requirements thereof. Upon respondent's entry into a practice and professionalism enhancement program, the bar shall terminate its investigation into the matter and its disciplinary files shall be closed indicating the diversion. Diversion into the practice and professionalism enhancement program shall not constitute a disciplinary sanction.

(j) Effect of Completion of the Practice and Professionalism Enhancement Program. If a respondent successfully completes all requirements of the practice and professionalism enhancement program(s) to which the respondent was diverted, the bar's file shall remain closed.

(k) Effect of Failure to Complete the Practice and Professionalism Enhancement Program. If a respondent fails to fully complete all requirements of the practice and professionalism enhancement program(s) to which the respondent was diverted, including the payment of costs thereof, the bar may reopen its disciplinary file and conduct further proceedings under these rules. Failure to complete the practice and professionalism enhancement program shall be considered as a matter of aggravation when imposing a disciplinary sanction.

(l) Costs of Practice and Professionalism Enhancement Programs. The Florida Bar shall annually determine the costs of practice and professionalism enhancement programs and publish the amount of the costs thereof that shall be assessed against and paid by a respondent.

(Added Oct. 20, 1994 (644 So.2d 282). Amended April 25, 2002 (820 So.2d 210); May 20, 2004, (SC03-705) (875 So.2d 448). Amended June 11, 2015, effective October 1, 2015 (167 So.3d 412).)

Comments

As to subdivision (c) of 3-5.3, a lawyer who agreed to attend the Advertising Workshop in 1 year would not be eligible for another such diversion for an advertising violation for a period of 5 years following the first diversion. However, that same lawyer would be eligible to attend the Advertising Workshop 1 year and a Trust Account Workshop for a completely different violation 1 year after the first diversion is completed.

