

In the Matter of a Suspended) Arizona Supreme Court
Member of the State Bar of) No. SB-26-0021-R
Arizona)
) Office of the Presiding
WILLIAM J. RITCHEY) Disciplinary Judge
Attorney No. 33588) No. PDJ20259067
)
Applicant.)
_____) **FILED:05/05/2026**

O R D E R

The Court en banc has considered the Application for Reinstatement filed by Willam Ritchey and the hearing panel's March 6, 2026 Report and Recommendation. Upon consideration,

IT IS ORDERED WILLIAM J. RITCHEY is reinstated as an active member of the State Bar of Arizona as of the date of this order, subject to the two-year term of probation on the terms recommended by the Hearing Panel in its Report and Recommendation.

DATED this 5th day of May, 2026.

_____/s/_____
ANN A. SCOTT TIMMER
Chief Justice

TO:
Geoffrey M T Sturr
Celina Lopez
Sandra Montoya
Maret Vessella
Don Lewis
Beth Stephenson
West Publishing Company
Mary Rose Dominguiano
Princess Mutya Zorilla
Lexis Nexis

BEFORE THE PRESIDING DISCIPLINARY JUDGE

**IN THE MATTER OF A
SUSPENDED MEMBER OF THE
STATE BAR OF ARIZONA**

**WILLIAM J. RITCHEY
Bar No. 033588,**

Applicant.

PDJ 2025-9067-R

**REPORT AND
RECOMMENDATION**

[State Bar No. 25-2304-R]

FILED MARCH 6, 2026

On October 3, 2025, Applicant William J. Ritchey filed an Application for Reinstatement (“Application”) Pursuant to Rule 65, Arizona Rules of the Supreme Court, (“Ariz. R. Sup. Ct.”).

An evidentiary hearing was held on February 11, 2026, before the Hearing Panel (“Panel”) comprised of Presiding Disciplinary Judge (“PDJ”) Lisa A. VandenBerg, attorney member Rebecca N. Kennelly, and public member Shannon C. Karazuba. Chief Bar Counsel Maret Vessella appeared on behalf of the State Bar of Arizona. William J. Ritchey, Applicant, was present and was represented by Attorney Geoffrey M.T. Sturr.

The parties stipulated to a number of facts and exhibits¹, and the following individuals testified at the hearing:

- William Ritchey
- Debra S. Onsager, MA, LPC
- Derick C. Runion

At the conclusion of the evidentiary portion of the hearing, bar counsel advised the Panel that,

“based on the evidence that was presented today, the State Bar would support the application for reinstatement, with the following conditions.: ... 2 years of probation [with the following terms:] continued counseling with Ms. Onsager at least 2 times per month (if at some point Ms. Onsager cannot continue, as Mr. Ritchie's provider, he must advise the State Bar within 5 days- ... subsequent provider [to] be approved by the State Bar); In addition, Ms. Onsager will provide the State Bar Compliance Monitor with a quarterly report...; As well as, [Attorney] Derick Runion will provide the State Bar Compliance Monitor with a quarterly report on how Mr. Ritchie is doing, performing, and citing any concerns he might have.”²

¹ Exhibits 1-22 were admitted as Joint Exhibits. Exhibits 6, 11, 13, 14, 18, and 19 are sealed.

² See, e.g., *In re Robbins*, 172 Ariz. 255, 256 (1992) (“It is significant, but not dispositive, that the State Bar does not oppose reinstatement . . .”).

Counsel Sturr indicated that the Applicant agreed to these recommendations.

For the following reasons, the Panel recommends that Reinstatement with two years of probation, including terms provided at the conclusion of this order.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Mr. Ritchey was first admitted to the practice of law in Arizona on March 6, 2017.
2. By Order of the PDJ of the Supreme Court of Arizona dated September 3, 2020, Mr. Ritchey was suspended from the practice of law in Arizona for a period of four years.
3. The effective date of Mr. Ritchey's suspension was October 5, 2020. Mr. Ritchey has remained suspended since this date.
4. Mr. Ritchey's suspension was a result of deliberately altering a medical record to increase his client's damages claim which he attached to a settlement offer sent to the opposing party's insurer. However, the Panel finds that the evidence demonstrates that Mr. Ritchey did not stand to be monetarily benefited by this misconduct.

5. The Agreement for Discipline by Consent, filed August 31, 2020, identifies the following Aggravation and Mitigation Factors: dishonest or selfish motive; and absence of prior discipline, personal or emotional problems, full and free disclosure, inexperience in the practice of law, imposition of other penalties or sanctions (i.e. termination) and remorse.

6. Mr. Ritchey has no prior disciplinary history.

7. Mr. Ritchey applied for reinstatement prior to this matter. An Application for Reinstatement was previously filed on September 23, 2024. Thereafter, a Notice of Withdrawal of Application was filed on January 9, 2025.

8. Mr. Ritchey held jobs at four different law firms during the period of Suspension as a paralegal. His most recent and current place of employment is Runion Personal Injury Lawyers, at which Attorney Derick C. Runion (founder) is Mr. Ritchey's supervising attorney.

9. Mr. Ritchey's job responsibilities primarily involved assisting attorneys with document drafting, collecting information for discovery, working on disclosure statements, and assembling exhibits as a paralegal.

10. Mr. Ritchey maintained two residences during the period of

suspension. He and his wife rented from October 2020 to September 2022 and have owned a residence from September 2022 to present.

11. Mr. Ritchey has not been a party to any criminal or civil action during the period of suspension but acknowledges one speeding ticket resulting in his attendance at traffic school. There have been no charges of fraud made or claimed against Mr. Ritchey during the period of rehabilitation, formal or informal.

12. Mr. Ritchey has taken 50 hours of continuing legal education since being suspended.

13. Mr. Ritchey timely paid the discipline costs associated with the underlying suspension, owes no monies to the client protection fund or as a result of any fee arbitration, timely filed a Rule 72 notice upon his suspension, and has no judgments entered against him. As well, there has been no procedure or inquiry concerning Mr. Ritchey's standing as a member of any profession or organization or holder of any license or office which involved the reprimand, removal, suspension, revocation of license or discipline of Mr. Ritchey during the period of rehabilitation.

Specific Findings Regarding Testimony

William Ritchey³

Mr. Ritchey was pleasant, well groomed, and possessed a calm demeanor throughout the proceedings. He was direct and open with the Panel in his testimony⁴.

Mr. Ritchey testified that he started his legal career with a great mentor, personal injury and litigation solo practitioner, Atty. Garvey Biggers, who had 200 cases and a total of five employees. Mr. Ritchey left that firm in January of 2019 to begin working for the firm of his employ at the time of the offense that led to his suspension. Mr. Ritchey called it a “very fast-paced” pre-litigation personal injury law firm in his testimony. He described how his work at this firm, within his first four to six months, grew to a case load of 600 cases with supervision of three paralegals and 2 legal assistants. He found the work to be unfulfilling and extremely stressful, causing him to have physical effects, such as hives, trouble sleeping, exhaustion and such. Mr. Ritchey described the client that was the

³ Please note: In this Recommendation, the Panel has referred to the Respondent as “Mr. Ritchey”. However, two of the witnesses referred to Mr. Ritchey as “Will”. When quoting a witness herein, the Panel left the reference as Will.

⁴ Including colorful language at times.

subject of his misconduct offense as Mr. [R.F.], a friend and member of his Latter-Day Saints' ward that he had referred as a client to his firm. In his testimony, Mr. Ritchey described his role in the case, as "essentially to, you know, answer any questions he had, supervise my paralegal with respect to his medical treatment, and negotiate his claim with the at-fault insurer."

Mr. Ritchey testified, during negotiations in September of 2019, he had become frustrated with his inability "to provide an appropriate result" in the case, believing that Mr. R.F. "was entitled to the full at-fault driver's policy limits"- despite Mr. R.F. having not undergone an MRI. He described that, in a moment of haste, frustration and anger, he intentionally altered, using a photoshop program, another person's MRI record to reflect that an MRI had been done on Mr. R.F. and attached that document to a new demand letter. He testified that in a matter of moments he had made the altered document and provided it and the new demand letter to his paralegal to fax to the insurance adjuster. He testified that he immediately regretted his action and notified his paralegal of his misconduct approximately five to ten minutes later. The following morning, Mr. Ritchey was terminated by the firm and directed to self-report his misconduct to the State Bar.

Mr. Ritchey testified that he later called his employer that evening to apologize. Stating to the Panel, he knew “it was going to adversely affect his [employer’s] business and his [employer’s] personal life.” During the call, Mr. Ritchey disclosed that he had done something similar one other time, approximately one month earlier (August of 2019), by altering another client’s OBGYN record (“female client”) to reflect fewer sexual partners for a packet required by the insurance provider during negotiations. He testified that he made the changes because he thought it would be less embarrassing for the client. However, unlike the MRI, Mr. Ritchey left the altered document on his desk and never disclosed it to the opposing party because he had second thoughts.

While he did not self-report the misconduct to the State Bar, Mr. Ritchey testified that he contacted Therapist Hal Nevitt and began therapy at the direction of his counsel in October of 2019, continuing with such until August of 2020. He also participated in a psychiatric consultation with Dr. Lisa Jones, a licensed psychiatrist, on January 29, 2020. Mr. Ritchey admitted that he went to these providers because his disciplinary counsel recommended he do such because of the formal discipline charge. Mr. Ritchey testified that these providers helped him

understand that his childhood trauma and upbringing had some impact on his conduct. However, once the formal discipline process was over, he did not understand that he needed to do more with that insight.

Eventually, Mr. Ritchey testified, he found his way to the therapy services of Debra Onsager in April of 2024, admittedly at the advice of his reinstatement counsel. He testified that it was through his work with Ms. Onsager's therapy, using trauma-focused Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing ("EMDR") alongside Internal Family Systems ("IFS"), he was able to determine the weaknesses that caused his misconduct. He described that it was after an interview with Bar Counsel in late December of 2024 and discussion with Ms. Onsager in January of 2025 that he gained the insight that he had more work to do in order to be prepared to be reinstated to the practice of law and withdrew his first application. He testified that, it was initially a significant struggle after that withdrawal to do the "deep dive" in his therapy.

However, he testified that he now has an appreciation for the reasons why he over identified with Mr. R.F. and the female client. "I was able to... you know, sort of isolate and identify the... the specific things that were driving me: the

constant shame I felt from my upbringing and my childhood- they were a bigger problem than I ever realized.” He described during the course of his testimony, he realized that in addition to relating to these two clients; he lacked healthy boundaries with colleagues, staff, and clients; had impulsivity issues that had been previously mis-diagnosed and control issues; all of which assisted him in justifying his impulsive dishonest alterations to medical records in August and September of 2019 that he immediately regretted and or second guessed.

Mr. Ritchey testified to the tools that Ms. Onsager had assisted him in obtaining to reduce anxiety, slow down his reactions and resist the temptation to take matters into his own hands. He indicated that since working with Attorney Derick Runion, he can see that the very fast-paced, pre-litigation focused practice was not a good fit for him to practice in and be able to manage the tools he has learned in therapy. He concluded his testimony by affirming that he is free of the past family shame that framed his past decisions, is committed to continued therapy as part of his life, and confident that he will not be back through the disciplinary process.

The Panel found Mr. Ritchey’s testimony to credibly demonstrate ownership with regard to his misconduct and genuine remorse. For example, a Panel member asked Mr. Ritchey whether he had the option to redact certain information from the OBGYN record rather than make the alteration. Mr. Ritchey took a moment before answering and then stated,

“Man, I’ve thought about that. Uh, yeah, no, it was... it was definitely an option. I... I regret, I regret taking, you know, her case into my hands and altering that record, because like I said, it... it didn’t solve anything. And so, it definitely would have been an option to simply redact the unfavorable information.”

While Mr. Ritchey has demonstrated that he has completed 50 hours of Continuing Legal Education, the Panel found Mr. Ritchey’s testimony that he did not complete the new Lawyer Boot Camp, included in that total, as a concern. Dr. Jones’s consultation report dated February 17, 2020 indicated that he “may also benefit from taking a professional boundaries course.”⁵

The Panel found Mr. Ritchey’s testimony identifying the distinction between the environment he is currently working in at Runion Personal Injury Lawyers

⁵ Mr. Ritchey testified that he was not made aware of Dr. Jones Report until he was already under the treatment of Ms. Onsager in December of 2024.

and that of the last firm that he practiced law to demonstrate insight into a significant contributing factor to his misconduct. Mr. Ritchey testified that, while both firms handle personal injury matters, his current firm's work in litigation cases is more significant and satisfying- yet less stressful. He testified that he plans, upon reinstatement, to have "a relatively modest or manageable caseload" as an associate attorney working with Mr. Runion and receiving the benefit of his continued mentorship. Mr. Ritchey stated his work as a litigation paralegal at this firm has helped him in his rehabilitation, "I mean, [i]t's been a way that I could... You know, contribute meaningfully to the profession."

Derick C. Runion

Mr. Runion testified that he is the founding partner of Runion Personal Injury Lawyers, established in January of 2025, practicing in the area of personal injury and wrongful death almost exclusively since 2011. He testified that Mr. Ritchey is currently a litigation paralegal for the firm, having hired him initially at his previous firm, Curiel and Runion in the fall of 2023.

He described the interview process with Mr. Ritchey in 2023, stating that,

[He met] Will at Tempe Marketplace to do an in-person interview of him, and he was upfront about his misconduct

and the circumstances leading to his suspension. He was also very upfront about the confines of his capacity related to his suspension, and what he would be able to do, and what he clearly would not be able to do as a suspended lawyer.

He went on to describe Mr. Ritchey as a hard worker that he works closely with, testifying,

Will is my right-hand man in litigation. He helps me do nearly everything I do in litigation. When I say that he helps me- [he] draft documents, helps me review discovery requests, interacts with clients, and put[s] together responses to discovery requests, assist me in sending out discovery requests, helps put together exhibits for depositions. When I'm going to question witnesses, he puts together exhibits for the court related to motions that I file. He works with investigators and process servers to achieve service of process. Basically, A to Z in the litigation environment.

Mr. Runion was comfortable, a bit casual, yet confident as a witness before the Panel. When he testified that he intends to hire Mr. Ritchey as an attorney once he is reinstated, Mr. Runion was quick to highlight his awareness of the importance of his testimony, stating:

[M]y license is on the line and choosing to work with any of the folks that I work with, I have to depend on the people that I work with to have clear judgment, to have

honest and ethical judgment, and I didn't take that decision to hire [Mr. Ritchey] lightly.

The Panel appreciated Mr. Runion's description of the current case load and focus of Runion Personal Injury Law, testifying that there are two partners of the firm and approximately 150 open cases, while not all being in litigation, the firm's focus is litigation with cases that "tend to be, you know, catastrophic in nature, serious injuries that require a lot of effort from the firm." As well, the Panel notes Mr. Runion's testimony regarding the observed change in Mr. Ritchey since 2023. "I have... you know, gotten to see how Will has evolved since 2023. [I] have seen that he's continued to develop over time, and he has become a... I would say more thoughtful, slow, calm, and calculated individual over time."

However, the Panel found Mr. Runion's testimony most compelling when he described an opportunity in which Mr. Ritchey navigated an ethical issue, that came up in litigation that they were working on, with grace and professionalism. Mr. Runion stated,

Will's an honest guy, and he has an opportunity to exhibit that frequently in our practice in litigation... there's actually a situation that jumps out to me that happened in

the fall of 2024. We were disclosed some information as part of an expert response to a subpoena.

[The] document production was 600 to 800 pages (as I remember)... Will went through that documentation, and within that documentation, there was, a 6- to 8-page document that was drafted by an opposing attorney to the defendant clients and also to the claims handler. It related to their stance on the case and strategy related to the case and valuation of the case. It was inadvertently produced. It was, or at least Will had an idea that it was inadvertently produced, so he immediately flagged that.

[Will] brought it to the handling attorney's attention, and even though the contents of that particular document were favorable to our case and could certainly help us, you know, get a great result in the case -[Will] didn't take a strategic opportunity to either bury it in the file and bring it up later, where a lawyer would have to make a knee-jerk reaction about whether to use it against opposing counsel or not. He actually researched ER 4.4, and made a recommendation that the inadvertent or potentially inadvertent disclosure be disclosed to opposing counsel - that a letter be drafted, and it was disclosed. We weren't able to use the contents of that particular letter, but we were still able to get a great result for the clients. What I think that demonstrates is: [n]umber one, being able to flag an ethical issue, then being able to make recommendations to folks on the team that depend on his judgment to get to the right answer; and be able to do that and get a great result for the client, notwithstanding that you know, the material that otherwise could be used to a strategic advantage.

Debra S. Onsager, MA, LPC

Ms. Onsager's treatment records from April 19, 2024, through December 16, 2025, and Treatment Summary Report ("Report"), dated January 18, 2026, were admitted into evidence in addition to her testimony before the Panel. On the first page of her Report, Ms. Onsager provides her initial clinical diagnosis for Mr. Ritchey to be Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (C-PTSD) pursuant to the DSM-5-TR⁶ criteria due to his symptoms which included Chronic hyperarousal, avoidance, negative self-concept, emotional dysregulation and relational difficulties. She goes on to state,

Will now demonstrates improved emotional regulation, insight and resilience.⁷ [He]now demonstrates the ability to pause, reflect, seek consultation, and use supervision appropriately – skills essential to ethical legal practice... and he has developed sustainable coping strategies that support sound judgement under pressure.⁸

On page 2 of the Report, Ms. Onsager writes,

At approximately six months into treatment, the Arizona State Bar requested my records. I also spoke with State Bar Counsel, Ms. Maret Vessella. Ms. Vessella expressed concern that Will's therapeutic work, up to that

⁶ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision

⁷ See Bates page 000360.

⁸ See Bates page 000361.

point, had not had [been] given sufficient time to address the depth of his childhood trauma and its' connection with his misconduct. In response, Will and I collaboratively revised his treatment plan to focus more directly on trauma integration and to draw explicit connections between his early experiences and his professional behavior.

Because of the depth and complexity of his early trauma, it became clear that meaningful progress required internal motivation beyond the expectations of the Arizona State Bar. Will embraced the deeper work willingly and began regular journaling and mediation practices to support emotional regulation and reflection in addition to meeting every two weeks.⁹

Debra Onsager is a licensed professional counselor in the State of Arizona and practiced for over 26 years (23 of which has been in private practice). She began her testimony before the Panel describing her extensive training and experience in trauma therapy- initially with children and families in trauma situations, then to elementary children and to teenagers. She describes this groundwork as very good preparation to the work that she does today exclusive to adults, stating,

Virtually everyone who comes in for counseling has something in their childhood that was a survival strategy

⁹ See Bates 000361.

that is no longer working for them or fitting for them in their lives. [S]o the work that I do with them is addressing the roots and development of those strategies. Some of them we don't want to entirely go away, some of them need to go away or be managed or be taken care of in other ways internally. So, taking care of trauma, dealing with it, healing from it in very specific, therapeutic ways is healing, and people recover from their childhood traumas.

...

What we call complex childhood post-traumatic stress disorder (or complex trauma) it's woven into the fabric of a person's childhood, so the work that we do means we really have to do some deep dives if we're going to see deep and lasting healing.

Ms. Onsager went on to describe the specific treatment that she and Mr. Ritchey have worked on over the past 20 months, approximately twice a month, expanding on the information that Mr. Ritchey provided in his testimony. The Panel notes that Ms. Onsager testified as an experienced professional, her credentials and testimony were uncontroverted and unchallenged.

The Panel found Ms. Onsager's testimony regarding her opinion that Mr. Ritchey had been misdiagnosed as suffering from ADHD to be demonstrative of her credibility as a witness before the Panel.

Ms. Onsager testified as to the benefit that Derick Runion has provided Mr. Ritchey as a mentor, stating:

Derek has been a really good mentor to Will. We've talked about the ways that he's been a good mentor. I think, in addition, Will can speak frankly with him when he's in need of, um, dialing things back. Mr. Runion has been supportive of Will taking time to go to the gym during the workday, so Will fits that in. He is one that encouraged [Will] with the meditation app. Those things have been very, very helpful to Will and his healing process.

Ms. Onsager reported that Mr. Ritchey “is transparent and has been transparent with me and that he's a reliable reporter. [In my opinion], he meets the psychological and behavioral expectations appropriate for reinstatement. [I] feel confident that he will not engage in that kind of misconduct or behavior.”

Ms. Onsager went on to recommend the following for Mr. Ritchey going forward: continued individual therapy for the next 24 months, continued employment under the oversight/mentorship of Derick Runion, and continued self-care practices including exercise, healthy nutrition, meditation and balanced work-family routines, in order to maintain emotional well-being and prevent overextension.

The Panel found Ms. Onsager's opinion and recommendations regarding Mr. Ritchey's on-going therapy, his processing/identifying of his weaknesses and management of said weaknesses to be compelling.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. In seeking reinstatement Mr. Ritchey has "the burden of demonstrating by clear and convincing evidence the lawyer's rehabilitation, compliance with all applicable discipline orders and rules, fitness to practice, and competence." Rule 65(b)(2), Ariz. R. Sup. Ct. Clear and convincing evidence is evidence, the truth of which is highly probable. *Matter of Petrie*, 154 Ariz. 295, 297 (1987).

2. "To show rehabilitation, an applicant must first establish by clear and convincing evidence that he has identified just what weaknesses caused the misconduct and then demonstrate that he has overcome those weaknesses." *In re Arrotta*, 208 Ariz. 509, 513 (2004). *See also In re Johnson*, 231 Ariz. 556, 557.

3. Weighing the misconduct, generally. When considering the misconduct, the Court has instructed, "The more egregious the misconduct the heavier an applicant's burden to prove his or her present fitness to practice law." *In re Robbins*, 172 Ari. 255, 256 (1992). "On the other hand, the severity of the lawyer's

misconduct in itself does not preclude reinstatement if the lawyer can establish that he has rehabilitated himself.” (emphasis added) *In re Arrotta*, 208 Ariz. at 512 (2004).

4. Regarding the demonstration of rehabilitation. The Court went on to clarify in a lengthy discussion in the *In re Johnson* case, 231 Ariz. 556, 559-560, ¶16 (2013), the various factors the Panel could consider,

The applicant must show by clear and convincing evidence “the positive actions he has taken to overcome the weaknesses that led to his [sanction] ... The required demonstration may come from any number of showings.” *In re Arrotta*, 208 Ariz. at 515 ¶¶29-30 For example, the applicant may present evidence of “participation in community or charitable organizations, specialized instruction or education, counseling, or other similar [activities].” (*Id.* at 516¶31.) The applicant may also present testimony from character witnesses, whose well founded opinions “we will carefully consider.” *Id.* at 515¶¶ 28-29. In addition, an applicant's “[a]ccepting responsibility for past misdeeds constitutes an important element of rehabilitation.” *Id.*¶29. These categories of evidence are neither exhaustive nor conclusive, and no single piece of evidence is necessary or sufficient to prove rehabilitation. *Id.* at 512¶¶13-14 (stating that in evaluating an application for reinstatement, we do not mechanically apply the pertinent factors that bear on rehabilitation).

5. In considering a reinstatement application, the foremost concern is

protecting the public. See *In re Robbins*, 172 Ariz. at 255 (1992); *Arrotta*, 208 Ariz. at 512 (2004) (in balancing relevant reinstatement factors, “our primary responsibility remains at all times the protection of the public”).

DISCUSSION

The Panel begins by weighing the misconduct. Mr. Ritchey testified that his misconduct was an intentional act of dishonesty¹⁰, in which he altered a medical document. The Panel understands that the commission of intentional dishonesty conduct by a lawyer requires close review of the basic character of lawyer as an individual. Here, Mr. Ritchey provided the Panel with an intimate view into the numerous traumas that he suffered in his formative years that he seemingly was able to successfully navigate in obtaining his license to practice law in Arizona on March 6, 2017.¹¹ Mr. Ritchey’s and Ms. Onsager’s testimony described how those

¹⁰ Case law is clear, dishonest conduct in practice of law causes the legal profession to suffer. “The whole structure of ethical standards is derived from the paramount need for lawyers to be trustworthy. The court system and the public we serve are damaged when our officers play fast and loose with the truth.” Cf. *Iowa Supreme Ct. Atty Disciplinary Bd. v. Bieber*, 824 N.W. 2d 514, 523 (Iowa 2012); “[U]nlike matters relating to competency, diligence and the like, intentional dishonest conduct is closely entwined with the most important matters of basic character to such a degree as to make intentional dishonest conduct by a lawyer almost beyond excuse.” *Atty. Grievance Comm’n of M. v. Wingerter*, 929 A.2d 47, 60 (Md2007)

¹¹ In his background information leading up to his admission to the bar, Mr. Ritchey testified that he went before the Character and Fitness Committee and presented information to the Committee’s satisfaction that a prior credit

traumas caused a survival strategy to develop in young Will that was triggered by the anxiety and stress of his legal practice environment, which increased his impulsivity and framed his invalid motivation in the commission of the misconduct- rather than the misconduct being a demonstration of a basic character flaw of dishonesty. Further in weighing the misconduct, the Panel finds his actions occurred in an isolated period, of approximately one month; not motivated by personal benefit; no actual harm to a client was identified; and his lack of prior discipline as mitigation to be considered by the Panel.

The Panel has considered whether Mr. Ritchey has demonstrated by clear and convincing evidence that he has been rehabilitated. Mr. Ritchey and Ms. Onsager testified to the positive actions that Mr. Ritchey began almost immediately after the misconduct occurred via therapy. Ms. Onsager's Report and testimony effectively demonstrated Mr. Ritchey's willingness to pursue therapy to obtain healing and to overcome his weaknesses for something greater than simply the State Bar or this Panel's satisfaction. Mr. Runion's testimony regarding his

card related arrest and past drug use had been resolved and did not pose a challenge to his qualifications to admission. Further, the Panel found his testimony and that of Ms. Onsager to be persuasive that those past events did not have a causal connection to the misconduct at issue before the Panel.

observations of Mr. Ritchey's growth since therapy in the areas identified as the causes/facilitating factors that led to Mr. Ritchey's misconduct was instructive to the Panel. Further, Mr. Runion and Mr. Ritchey's testimony regarding the successful navigation of an event with similar ethical challenges as those present in the misconduct provided the Panel assurance that Mr. Ritchey has obtained the specialized skills and resources needed to assist him such that he "poses no further threat to members of the public."¹²

Having considered all the evidence presented in its totality, the Panel further finds that Mr. Ritchey has demonstrated that he has "complied with all applicable discipline orders and rules; is fit to practice; and is competent to practice law¹³." Rule 65(b)(2), Ariz. R. Sup. Ct. In making these findings, the Panel notes that Mr. Ritchey's stated intention to follow all of Ms. Onsager's recommendations going forward, and his agreement with the recommendations of the State Bar, as essential/ integral to these findings.

¹²"Applicant's burden is to show, by clear and convincing evidence, that he has been rehabilitated, that he is competent, and that he poses no further threat to members of the public." *Matter of Robbins*, 172 Ariz. 255, 256 (1992).

¹³ The Panel has added two additional recommendations for the terms of probation to ensure that these factors are met going forward based on the testimony.

CONCLUSION

The Panel is satisfied that Mr. Ritchey has met his burden by clear and convincing evidence as to Mr. Ritchey's rehabilitation, compliance with all applicable discipline orders and rules, fitness to practice, and competence. Therefore,

IT IS RECOMMENDED that **WILLIAM J. RITCHEY, Bar No. 033588**, be reinstated to the practice of law.

IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED that **WILLIAM J. RITCHEY** be placed on probation, immediately after reinstatement, for a period of 2 years with the terms and conditions to include:

- Continued counseling with Debra Onsager, MA LPC, at least 2 times per month (if at some point Ms. Onsager cannot continue as Mr. Ritchie's provider, he must advise the State Bar within 5 days and identify a subsequent provider with equivalent qualifications for approval by the State Bar),

- 1) Ms. Onsager (or the approved subsequent provider) will provide the State Bar Compliance Monitor with a quarterly report;

- Attorney Derick C. Runion will continue to serve as a practice mentor for Mr. Ritchey (if Mr. Runion cannot continue to serve as a mentor, Mr. Ritchey is to report such and the circumstances surrounding such within 5 days and identify a subsequent mentor for approval by the State Bar),

- 1) Mr. Runion will provide the State Bar Compliance Monitor with a quarterly report on how Mr. Ritchie is doing, performing, general nature of his practice and approximate caseload, and citing any concerns he might have;

- Mr. Ritchey will continue to integrate self-care practices into his daily life: including exercise, healthy nutrition, meditation and balanced work-family routines,

- 1) Mr. Ritchey will provide the State Bar Compliance Monitor with a quarterly report on how Mr. Ritchie is doing with regard to these self-care practices;

- Mr. Ritchey shall notify the State Bar if his employment with Runion Personal Injury Lawyers is terminated;

- Mr. Ritchey shall complete the new Lawyer Boot Camp or a similar CLE training that addresses appropriate professional boundaries for lawyers as part of Mr. Ritchey's CLE requirement for 2026; and

- Mr. Ritchey shall not commit any further violations of the Rules of Professional Responsibility or the Rules of the Arizona Supreme Court.

DATED 6th day of March, 2026.

/s/ signature on file

Hon. Lisa A. VandenBerg, Presiding Disciplinary Judge

/s/ signature on file

Rebecca N. Kennelly, Attorney Member

/s/ signature on file

Shannon C. Karazuba, Public Member

COPY of the foregoing e-mailed
this 6th day of March, 2026 to:

Maret Vessella
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Geoffrey M.T. Sturr
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Applicant's Counsel

By: CLopez