

Rule 8.4 [1-120] Misconduct

(Commission's Proposed Rule Adopted on January 22 – 23, 2016 – Clean Version)

It is professional misconduct for a lawyer to:

- (a) violate these Rules or the State Bar Act, knowingly* assist, solicit or induce another to do so, or do so through the acts of another;
- (b) commit a criminal act that involves moral turpitude or that reflects adversely on the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer in other respects;
- (c) engage in conduct involving moral turpitude, dishonesty, fraud,* deceit or reckless or intentional misrepresentation;
- (d) engage in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice;
- (e) state or imply an ability to influence improperly a government agency or official or to achieve results by means that violate these Rules, the State Bar Act, or other law; or
- (f) knowingly* assist a judge or judicial officer in conduct that is a violation of applicable rules of judicial conduct or other law.

Comment

[1] A violation of this Rule can occur when a lawyer is acting in propria persona or when a lawyer is not practicing law or acting in a professional capacity.

[2] Paragraph (a) does not prohibit a lawyer from advising a client concerning action the client is legally entitled to take.

[3] A lawyer may be disciplined for criminal acts as set forth in Business and Professions Code §§ 6101 et seq., or if the criminal act constitutes “other misconduct warranting discipline” as defined by California Supreme Court case law. See *In re Kelley* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 487 [276 Cal.Rptr. 375].

[4] A lawyer may be disciplined under Business and Professions Code § 6106 for acts of gross negligence involving moral turpitude.

[5] Paragraph (c) does not apply where a lawyer advises clients or others about, or supervises, lawful covert activity in the investigation of violations of civil or criminal law or constitutional rights, provided the lawyer's conduct is otherwise in compliance with these Rules and the State Bar Act.

[6] Paragraph (d) does not prohibit activities of a lawyer that are protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or by Article I, § 2 of the California Constitution.

PROPOSED RULE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT 8.4
(Current Rule 1-120)
Misconduct

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission for the Revision of the Rules of Professional Conduct (“Commission”) has evaluated current rule 1-120 (Assisting, Soliciting, or Inducing Violations) in accordance with the Commission Charter, with a focus on the function of the rule as a disciplinary standard, and with the understanding that the rule comments should be included only when necessary to explain a rule and not for providing aspirational guidance. In addition, the Commission considered the national standard of the American Bar Association (“ABA”) counterpart, Model Rule 8.4 (concerning professional misconduct of a lawyer). The Commission also reviewed relevant California statutes, rules, and case law relating to the issues addressed by the proposed rules. The result of the Commission’s evaluation is proposed rule 8.4 (Misconduct). This proposed rule has been adopted by the Commission for submission to the Board of Trustees for public comment authorization. A final recommended rule will follow the public comment process.

Proposed rule 8.4 carries forward the substance of current rule 1-120 by prohibiting a lawyer from knowingly assisting in, soliciting or inducing a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct or the State Bar Act. The proposed rule also adopts the substance of ABA Model Rule 8.4 which contains a similar prohibition as well as additional provisions addressing misconduct that warrants imposition of discipline. The proposed rule is designed to collect in a single rule various misconduct provisions that are currently found in other California rules of professional conduct or in the Business and Professions Code. The rule is intended to facilitate compliance and enforcement by clearly stating these principles in a single rule where lawyers, judges and the public can identify basic standards of conduct addressing honesty, trustworthiness and fitness to practice with which a lawyer must comply.

Paragraph (a), which carries forward the substance of current rule 1-120, prohibits a lawyer from violating the rules of professional conduct, or the State Bar Act, or knowingly assist, solicit or induce another to do so. In addition, this paragraph prohibits a lawyer from doing any of the aforementioned through the acts of another.

One issue considered was whether to follow the approach in ABA Model Rule 8.4(a) which would generally prohibit a lawyer from “attempting” to violate a rule or a provision of the State Bar Act. The Commission determined that the question of whether an attempted violation should be an independent basis for discipline is better addressed on a rule-by-rule basis. This approach means that any prohibition on an attempt would be tailored to a specific rule’s violation and potential harm rather than a generalized standard for all of the rules and the State Bar Act. This avoids possible unintended consequences of a one size fits all attempt standard that would not account for the specific purpose of individual rules. For example, in proposed rule 1.5 [4-200], the Commission has recommend a rule that provides a lawyer “shall not make an agreement for, charge, or collect an unconscionable fee or illegal fee.” The terms “make” and “charge” in effect prohibit an attempt to “collect” an unconscionable fee.¹ Although only the

¹ This is similar to the standard in Business and Professions Code section 6090.5 that, in part, prohibits a lawyer from agreeing or seeking an agreement that professional misconduct shall not be reported to the State Bar. This section was revised in 1996 in response to a State Bar Court finding that the prior version of the section did not include terms that could be construed fairly as a prohibition on attempts. (See

actual collection of an unconscionable fee will result in harm to a client, even an attempt to impose a legal obligation on a client to pay an unconscionable or illegal fee should be prohibited as disciplinable misconduct. On the other hand, the Commission also recommends adoption of proposed rule 4.2 [2-100], which prohibits a lawyer who represents a client in a matter from communicating about the subject of the representation with a person who is represented by a lawyer in the same matter. For this rule, the harm is the actual communication with the represented person that could result in the disclosure of privileged information or otherwise interfere with a lawyer-client relationship. A generalized prohibition against an attempt to engage in such a communication does not further the purpose of this rule and it would pose a risk of unduly interfering with a lawyer's ability to investigate a claim as a lawyer often cannot know that a person is represented until the lawyer has contacted the person.

Paragraph (b) adopts the language of MR 8.4(b) but adds a reference to "moral turpitude." This provision focuses on crimes committed by a lawyer that reflect adversely on the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer, all of which are central principles in lawyer conduct. The reference to moral turpitude is added to maintain conformity with the broader public protection afforded by Business and Professions Code section 6106.

Paragraph (c) adopts the language of MR 8.4(c) but adds the words "reckless or intentional" to modify "misrepresentation." The conduct prohibited in this provision – dishonesty, fraud, deceit and reckless or intentional misrepresentation – are central concepts of conduct in which lawyers must not engage if respect for the legal profession and the proper administration of justice is to be maintained. The addition of "reckless or intentional" is intended to clarify that negligent misrepresentation is not regarded as dishonesty that should result in discipline under this rule.²

Paragraph (d) adopts the language of MR 8.4(d) concerning conduct "prejudicial to the administration of justice." The Commission concluded that a lawyer's fitness to practice law is called into question by conduct prejudicial to the administration of justice regardless of whether the conduct occurs in connection with the practice of law.

Some members of the Commission raised a concern that this provision may not survive a Constitutional challenge if it is not limited to situations where the lawyer's conduct occurs "in connection with the practice of law." Compare, *United States v. Wunsch*, 84 F.3d 1110 (9th Cir. 1996) (former Bus. & Prof. Code § 6068(f), prohibiting "offensive personality," was found to be unconstitutional.) Proposed Comment [6] seeks to address this concern by specifying that paragraph (d) does not apply to constitutionally-protected conduct.

Paragraph (e) adopts the language of MR 8.4(e) prohibiting a lawyer from stating or implying the ability to improperly influence a government agency or official.

Paragraph (f) adopts the language of MR 8.4(f) prohibiting a lawyer from knowingly assisting a judge in violation of judicial conduct rules. Expressly stating that such conduct is prohibited should contribute to the confidence that the public places in the legal profession and administration of justice is justified.

[Assembly Bill No. 2787 \(Kuehl\)](#) 1995-1996 session; and *In the Matter of Fonte* (Review Dept. 1994) 2 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 752.)

² Compare proposed rule 1.1, under which discipline is imposed only if a lawyer has "intentionally, recklessly, repeatedly, or with gross negligence" failed to act competently.

Finally, non-substantive changes to the current rule include rule numbering to track the Commission's general proposal to use the Model Rule numbering system and the substitution of the term "lawyer" for "member."

Proposed Rule 8.4 contains six comments intended to clarify how the rule is to be applied. Of particular note is Comment [6] which, as noted above, has been added to clarify that the paragraph (d) does not apply to constitutionally-protected conduct.

**Rule 8.4 [1-120] ~~Assisting, Soliciting, or Inducing Violations~~ Misconduct
(Redline Comparison of the Proposed Rule to Current California Rule)**

It is professional misconduct for a lawyer to:

- (a) violate these Rules ~~or the State Bar Act~~, knowingly* assist, solicit or induce another to do so, or do so through the acts of another;
- (b) commit a criminal act that involves moral turpitude or that reflects adversely on the lawyer's honesty, trustworthiness or fitness as a lawyer in other respects;
- (c) engage in conduct involving moral turpitude, dishonesty, fraud,* deceit or reckless or intentional misrepresentation;
- (d) engage in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice;
- (e) state or imply an ability to influence improperly a government agency or official or to achieve results by means that violate these Rules, the State Bar Act, or other law; or
- (f) ~~A member shall not~~ knowingly assist ~~in, solicit, or induce any~~ a judge or judicial officer in conduct that is a violation of ~~these~~ applicable rules ~~or the State Bar Act~~ of judicial conduct or other law.

Comment

[1] A violation of this Rule can occur when a lawyer is acting in propria persona or when a lawyer is not practicing law or acting in a professional capacity.

[2] Paragraph (a) does not prohibit a lawyer from advising a client concerning action the client is legally entitled to take.

[3] A lawyer may be disciplined for criminal acts as set forth in Business and Professions Code §§ 6101 et seq., or if the criminal act constitutes "other misconduct warranting discipline" as defined by California Supreme Court case law. See *In re Kelley* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 487 [276 Cal.Rptr. 375].

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