



COLORADO SUPREME COURT

COLORADO ATTORNEYS' FUND FOR CLIENT PROTECTION

The Colorado Attorneys' Fund for Client Protection
Colorado Supreme Court Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel
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GUIDELINES

To carry out the purposes of Rule 252.7(a)(2) of the Colorado Rules of Civil Procedure establishing the Colorado Attorneys' Fund for Client Protection (the "Fund"), the Trustees promulgate the following guidelines which are intended to serve as a guide, but not to bind, the operations of the Fund.

1. **Construction of guidelines.** These guidelines shall be liberally construed to accomplish the objectives of the Fund and the policies of the Trustees.

2. **Eligible claims.**

a. The Trustees shall consider claims for reimbursement of losses caused by the dishonest conduct of the attorney admitted to practice in Colorado which have arisen out of and by reason of an attorney-client relationship or court-appointed fiduciary relationship between the attorney and the client;

b. "Dishonest conduct" means one or more wrongful acts committed by an attorney including but not limited to theft, embezzlement of money, and the wrongful conversion of money, property, or other things of value, including, but not limited to the attorney's refusal to refund unearned fees received in advance as required by Rule 1.16 of the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct or failure to properly hold or manage property belonging to clients or third parties as required by Rule 1.15(A)-

1.15(D); or borrowing money from a client without intention to repay it, or with disregard of the attorney's inability or reasonably anticipated inability to repay it or after an attorney has died, it is discovered that at or prior to the time of his demise, the deceased attorney has not complied with Rules 1.15(A)-1.15(D).

c. The loss occurred on or after July 1, 1999.

d. The following losses shall not be eligible:

(1) Losses incurred by spouses, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, partners, associates and employees of attorney(s) causing the losses;

(2) Losses covered by any bond, surety agreement, or insurance contract to the extent covered thereby, including any loss to which any bonding agent, surety or insurer is subrogated, to the extent of that subrogated interest;

(3) Losses incurred by any financial institution which are recoverable under a "banker's blanket bond" or similar commonly available insurance or surety contract;

(4) Losses incurred by any business entity controlled by the attorney;

(5) Losses incurred by any governmental entity or agency;

(6) Losses arising from the activities of an attorney not having an office or residence in Colorado where those activities do not have substantial contacts with Colorado; and

(7) Interest on the loss or any type of consequential damages or punitive damages or cost.

e. Ordinarily, claims against Colorado licensed or certified attorneys in good standing will be denied or payment delayed until discipline is ordered by the Colorado Supreme Court; if the attorney has been disciplined, is dead, the attorney's whereabouts cannot be determined, or similar good cause exists, the Trustees shall proceed to process the claim.

f. In cases of extreme hardship or special and unusual circumstances, the Board may, in its discretion, recognize a claim which would otherwise be excluded under these rules.

g. In cases where it appears that there will be unjust enrichment or multiple recovery or the claimant unreasonably or knowingly contributed to the loss, the Trustees may, in their discretion, deny the claim.

h. The claimant shall have the responsibility to provide satisfactory evidence of an eligible loss.

3. Filing claims.

a. Claims for reimbursement from the Fund shall be written and verified. The Fund shall provide an official claim form which shall require the following information: the name and address of the claimant; the name and last known address of the attorney who is alleged to have committed a dishonest act; the terms of the attorney's professional engagement for the claimant; the amount of the loss incurred; the date of the loss or the period of time when the loss occurred; the place and manner in which the loss occurred; the date and manner in which the claimant discovered the loss; a description of what steps the claimant has taken to recover the loss from the attorney or any other source; and whether there are other sources, such as insurance, fidelity bonds, or surety agreements, to reimburse the claimant's loss. The Trustees may require a claimant to submit additional information that may be necessary to determine a claim.

b. The Fund shall promptly acknowledge receipt of the claim, which shall be assigned a claim number.

c. A claim shall be filed no later than three years after the claimant knew or should have known of the dishonest conduct of the attorney.

4. Processing claims.

a. Whenever it appears that a claim is not eligible for reimbursement pursuant to these guidelines, the claimant shall be advised of the reasons why the claim is not eligible for reimbursement, and that unless additional facts to support eligibility are submitted to the Fund within 50 days, the claim shall be dismissed.

b. The Office of the Attorney Regulation Counsel of the Colorado Supreme Court shall serve as the staff agency for the Fund and shall assist the Trustees as follows:

- (1) Investigating and reporting on all claims;

(2) Recommending denial of those claims received which are clearly not covered by the Fund;

(3) Recommending denial of those claims when the underlying grievance matter has been closed by the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel without discipline or the Claimant has withdrawn the claim;

(4) Preparing the committee agenda and recording the minutes of the committee meetings;

(5) Presenting of claims to the Trustees;

(6) Notifying claimants of ultimate disposition;

(7) Coordinating payouts;

(8) Monitoring subrogation rights on previously paid claims;

(9) Preparing of annual Fund reports;

(10) Acting as custodian of all Fund records including, but not limited to, minutes and all bank records; and

(11) Paying only those claims authorized or approved by a majority of the Trustees at a meeting duly called at which a quorum was present either in person or via teleconference.

c. A certified copy of an order disciplining an attorney for the same act of conduct alleged in a claim, or a final judgment imposing civil or criminal liability therefor, shall, for the purpose of these guidelines, be evidence that the attorney committed such act.

d. All claims that are eligible for reimbursement from the Fund shall be investigated by the Office of the Attorney Regulation Counsel which shall furnish to the Trustees a written report of each investigation.

e. Upon receipt of the investigation report, the Trustees shall determine whether to conduct additional investigation. If the attorney whose alleged conduct gave rise to the claim has not been previously notified of the claim, a copy of the claim shall be provided to the attorney. The attorney shall be invited to respond to the claim within 20 days.

f. The Trustees may request that testimony be presented to complete the record. Upon request, the claimant and the attorney, or their respective representatives, shall be given an opportunity to be heard.

g. The Trustees shall determine, in their sole discretion, whether a claim merits reimbursement from the Fund, and the amount, time, manner of its payment and the conditions upon which payment shall be made. The award of a claim shall require the affirmative vote of at least four Trustees.

h. If services were performed that were useful to the claimant, the amount of the claim for which useful services were performed will customarily be denied.

i. Unless the Trustees direct otherwise, no claim shall be awarded during the pendency of a disciplinary proceeding involving the same act of conduct that is alleged in the claim.

j. In the exercise of their discretion in determining claims, the Trustees shall consider, together with such other factors as they deem appropriate:

(1) The amount of money available and likely to become available to the Fund for the payment of claims, and the size and number of claims that have been or are likely to be presented;

(2) The amount of the claimant's loss as compared with the amount of losses sustained by other claimants who may merit reimbursement from the Fund;

(3) Any conduct of the claimant that contributed to the loss; and

(4) The existence of other sources to reimburse the claimant's loss, such as insurance, fidelity bonds or surety agreements.

k. Written notice of the Trustees' determination shall be provided to the claimant and the attorney whose alleged conduct gave rise to the claim, or the representatives.

5. **Reconsideration of claims.** A claimant who is denied reimbursement in whole or in part may request that the Trustees reconsider the claim by filing an application with the Fund no later than 30 days following receipt of the Trustees' determination. If a claimant fails to request reconsideration, or the original determination of the Trustees is confirmed, the Trustees' determination shall be final.

6. Payment of awards.

a. Claimants shall be reimbursed for losses in amounts to be determined by the Trustees. No award shall be in excess of \$50,000.00 per claim and the Fund shall not pay more than \$100,000.00 for losses caused by one attorney, unless otherwise determined by the Board of Trustees.

b. Awards shall not include interest. Attorneys' fees, consequential damages, and other incidental and out-of-pocket expenses shall not be reimbursed by the Fund. Additional taxes, interest, late charges and similar penalties finally incurred by a claimant as the direct result of an attorney's misappropriation may be eligible for reimbursement in the discretion of the Trustees. The investigation report in a claim which involves such an element of loss shall contain an estimate of the amount of such loss and a recommendation whether the loss merits reimbursement from the Fund.

c. No claim for reimbursement shall be paid until the claimant transfers to the Fund, in such form as the Trustees shall authorize, the claimant's rights against the attorney whose dishonest conduct caused the claimant's loss and any other person or entity who may be liable for the claimant's loss.

d. Payment of claims shall be made in such amounts and at such times as the Trustees deem appropriate and may be paid in lump-sum or installment amounts.

e. If a claimant is a minor or is incompetent, the award may be paid to a parent, guardian, committee or the attorney of the claimant, on behalf of and for the sole benefit of the claimant.

f. All payments of awards of reimbursement from the Fund shall be made from the Fund.

g. Payments to the Fund shall be dependent upon the allocations made to the Fund each year by the Colorado Supreme Court pursuant to C.R.C.P. 252.2(b).

7. Fiscal year. The Fund will operate on a fiscal year basis, concurrent with the fiscal year of the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel.

8. Meetings and Officers. Meetings of the Trustees shall be subject to the call of the chairperson or the call of a majority of the Trustees. The Trustees shall meet at least annually for the consideration of claims. The Trustees shall keep accurate records of their action which shall be open to inspection at any and all times by any

Trustee or by any member of the Colorado Supreme Court or by any person or persons authorized by the Colorado Supreme Court to inspect said records. Nothing set forth in this guideline shall preclude the inspection of the records by any person or persons designated as auditors of the Fund. The Trustees shall have the right to disclose information from their records to any person employed by the Trustees for the purpose of seeking restitution of any claim paid by the Fund and to disclose said information publicly in the prosecution of its subrogation rights.

9. Duties of Officers.

a. The chair shall preside at all meetings of the Trustees and generally coordinate and supervise the administration of the Fund.

b. If the chair is absent or otherwise unable to serve, the vice chair shall undertake the duties of the chair.

c. The chair shall utilize the services of the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel, which shall have (1) custody of the monies and other assets of the Fund; (2) receive all payments to the monies of the Fund in the manner authorized by the Trustees; (3) make disbursement from the Fund authorized by the Trustees; (4) invest the monies of the Fund in the manner authorized by the Trustees; (5) cause an annual accounting to be made of the Fund; (6) maintain appropriate records; and (7) file such tax or information returns as may be required of the Fund. Disbursements from the Fund shall be made upon direction of the Board of Trustees and by the signature of Attorney Regulation Counsel, or for those amounts \$5,000 or more, by the signature of Attorney Regulation Counsel and one of the liaison justices. The chair may, authorize payment of administrative expenses from the Fund. **[Too close involvement by the court?]**

d. The Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel shall prepare minutes of each meeting of the Trustees and shall maintain the original records of the Trustees, including a separate file for each claim for all claims for reimbursement filed with the Fund.

10. Fund of last resort. Claimants should reasonably exhaust other remedies before seeking reimbursement from the Fund. Other remedies include bonds, professional liability policies, third party responsibility, the defalcating attorney's partners and deceased attorney's estate. Neither the Trustees nor the Fund nor its staff shall incur any liability for non-payment of claims or for erroneous payments.

11. **Investment.** All Fund assets may be invested, as authorized by C.R.C.P. 252.7(a)(5): (1) in bonds, notes or other securities of or guaranteed by the United States or a federal agency, and (2) in interest bearing accounts or certificates of any bank, trust company, or savings and loan association which are insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation of the United States or protected pursuant to the Public Deposit Protection Act (PDPA), C.R.S. § 11-105 – 101, et. seq.

12. **Amendment.** These Guidelines and Regulations may be amended by a vote of at least four of the Trustees.

Date of Adoption: These Guidelines have been adopted on June 16, 1999, which are effective, and amended March 23, 2005 and April ___, 2015.

Charles Goldberg, Esq., Chair
Colorado Attorneys' Fund for Client Protection
Colorado Supreme Court