Supreme Court of Wisconsin

NO. 2025AP198-D OFFICE OF LAWYER REGULATION V. LAUREN A. BLUMENTHAL

October 14, 2026

The Court has entered the following order:

We review, pursuant to Supreme Court Rule (SCR) 22.17(2), the report of the referee, Reserve Judge Sue Bischel, which determined, based on a stipulation by the parties, that Attorney Lauren A. Blumenthal committed one count of professional misconduct and which recommended the imposition of a private reprimand. Referee Bischel also recommended that Attorney Blumenthal be required to pay the full costs of this proceeding. Having fully reviewed the record in this matter, we conclude that a private reprimand is the appropriate discipline for Attorney Blumenthal's professional misconduct, that no restitution award is required, and that Attorney Blumenthal should be required to pay the full costs of the proceeding, which were $1,549.10 as of October 9, 2025.

The Office of Lawyer Regulation (OLR) initiated this disciplinary proceeding with the filing of a complaint on January 31, 2025. On March 3, 2025, Attorney Blumenthal filed an answer in which she admitted the allegations of the complaint. On May 29, 2025, Attorney Blumenthal and the OLR filed a stipulation. In the stipulation, Attorney Blumenthal agreed that the referee could use the factual allegations of the complaint as an adequate factual basis for a determination of the charged violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Attorneys. The parties further jointly requested that the referee recommend (1) the imposition of a private reprimand as the appropriate discipline to be imposed for the misconduct and (2) an award of costs in favor of the OLR. In the stipulation, Attorney Blumenthal represented that she understood the allegations of professional misconduct in the complaint, that she could contest those allegations and

put the OLR to its burden of proof, that she had consulted with counsel regarding this matter, and that her entry into the stipulation had been made knowingly and voluntarily.

The referee accepted the stipulation and concluded that, pursuant to the stipulated facts, a violation of SCR 20:1.5(g) had been proven by clear and convincing evidence. Although the parties had not provided case citations in support of the stipulation, the referee indicated that, based on her familiarity with similar cases, a private reprimand would be the appropriate level of discipline. She therefore made that recommendation for discipline to this court. In addition, in a subsequent recommendation as to costs, the referee recommended that the full costs of the proceeding be imposed on Attorney Blumenthal. The costs set forth in the OLR's July 10, 2025 Statement of Costs and the referee's supplemental invoice filed on October 9, 2025, result in a total amount of costs of $1,549.10.

The allegations in the OLR's complaint, which Attorney Blumenthal admitted in her answer and in the stipulation, describe a single representation at issue in this proceeding. In November 2022, M.F. retained Attorney Blumenthal to represent her in a divorce proceeding. In the representation agreement, Attorney Blumenthal represented that she would proceed under the alternative advanced fee procedures set forth in SCR 20:1.5(g). Under the agreement, M.F. initially paid Attorney Blumenthal $500 toward a total amount of $2,521.50 ($2,500 flat fee plus $21.50 efiling fee) and agreed to pay her the remaining $2,021.50 in eight installments that would be due bi-weekly beginning on November 19, 2022. Under the agreement, Attorney Blumenthal would not file the divorce petition until she received the agreed-upon amount in full.

On February 14, 2023, Attorney Blumenthal terminated the representation agreement due to M.F.'s failure to make the installment payments called for in the agreement. Attorney Blumenthal, however, failed to provide M.F. with a final accounting and with the written notices that are required for the alternative advanced fee procedures in SCR 20:1.5(g)(2), including the notice that, if M.F. disputed the amount of the fee and wished to submit a fee dispute to binding arbitration, M.F. would be required to provide written notice of the fee dispute to Attorney Blumenthal within 30 days of the mailing of Attorney Blumenthal's accounting. M.F. sent several emails to Attorney Blumenthal during the period of February 23, 2023, to March 14, 2023. In those emails, M.F. requested an itemization of services rendered and a refund of $2,268.83. Attorney Blumenthal failed to attempt to resolve the dispute with M.F. and then failed to submit the dispute to binding arbitration.

In her answer and in the stipulation, Attorney Blumenthal admitted that her actions following the termination of her representation of M.F., including her failure to provide M.F. with a final accounting and with the required written fee dispute notices, had violated SCR 20:1.5(g)(2). Based on this admission and the facts set forth in the complaint, the referee concluded that Attorney Blumenthal had violated SCR 20:1.5(g). The referee recommended that the court impose a private reprimand on Attorney Blumenthal.

When we review a referee's report, we will affirm a referee's findings of fact unless they are found to be clearly erroneous, but we review the referee's conclusions of law on a de novo basis. *In re Disciplinary Proceedings Against Inglimo*, 2007 WI 126, ¶5, 305 Wis. 2d 71, 740 N.W.2d 125. We determine the appropriate level of discipline to impose given the particular facts of each case, independent of the referee's recommendation, but benefiting from it. *In re Disciplinary Proceedings Against Widule*, 2003 WI 34, ¶44, 261 Wis. 2d 45, 660 N.W.2d 686.

Having reviewed the record, including Attorney Blumenthal's admissions and her stipulation, we agree that the admitted facts demonstrate that Attorney Blumenthal violated SCR 20:1.5(g). We further agree that, given this single ethical violation and the lack of any prior discipline, a private reprimand is appropriate in these circumstances.

Because the record in this matter contained no factual finding regarding restitution and no factual basis on which this court could determine whether Attorney Blumenthal should be ordered to refund the amount requested by M.F., on August 19, 2026, we issued an order directing the parties to submit responses regarding whether restitution would be appropriate in this matter. On August 24, 2026, the OLR submitted the affidavit of Attorney John Payette in response to this court's order. Attached to the affidavit is a printout of a 2025 email from M.F. stating that the fees charged by Attorney Blumenthal were fair and that she did not seek repayment of any of those fees. In addition, in the affidavit, Attorney Payette states that he spoke with M.F. on August 21, 2026, and that M.F. confirmed at that time that the fees charged by Attorney Blumenthal were fair, that they had been earned, and that M.F. did not believe restitution was appropriate. In light of this information, we will not order Attorney Blumenthal to pay restitution to M.F.

IT IS ORDERED that Attorney Lauren A. Blumenthal is privately reprimanded for her professional misconduct, as alleged in the complaint and admitted by Attorney Blumenthal.

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IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that within 60 days of the date of this order Attorney Lauren A. Blumenthal shall pay to the Office of Lawyer Regulation the full costs of this proceeding, which were $1,549.10 as of October 9, 2025.

Samuel A. Christensen
Clerk of Supreme Court

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