

SUPREME COURT OF WISCONSIN
OFFICE OF LAWYER REGULATION

Public Reprimand With Consent

Dennis P. Coffey
Attorney at Law

2023-OLR-8

Dennis P. Coffey (Coffey) was admitted to the practice of law in Wisconsin on June 16, 1972, State Bar No. 1014434. Coffey has been practicing law for over fifty years and is in Emeritus status.

On August 21, 2015, the family of Michael Willis (Willis) hired Coffey to do "...a complete review of the proceedings before the Circuit Court for Milwaukee county... to determine whether any basis exists for attempting to withdraw the guilty pleas already entered or a basis exists for requesting a modification of the Circuit Court's sentences." The family of Willis paid Coffey \$3500.00 for that review.

Previously, in July 2015, Willis pled guilty to armed robbery, as a party to a crime, and false imprisonment. Willis received a sentence of 33 years. Willis filed a Notice of Intent to Appeal and Appeal Number 2016XX000013 – CR was initiated. Transcripts were ordered and Atty. Michael Backes was appointed by SPD to represent Willis.

On December 1, 2015, an order was signed in the Circuit Court authorizing the substitution of Coffey for Backes "with respect to post-conviction proceedings." Coffey filed a motion to extend time to file post-conviction motions or a Notice of Appeal. The Court of Appeals issued an order extending the period to file either post-conviction motions or a Notice of Appeal until February 19, 2016. There are no other filings by Coffey.

Coffey states he researched the withdrawal of plea issue but found it was without merit. Coffey met with Willis on January 21, 2016 and informed him there was no basis to withdraw the plea but Coffey would continue to work on the case for a possible sentence modification.

Coffey provides he drafted a motion for sentence modification but was uncertain whether there was sufficient basis to proceed. Coffey did not provide a copy of the motion to Willis, claiming restrictions due to COVID prevented any visits from Coffey. Coffey did not send Willis any letters. Coffey states the motion was too complicated to discuss by telephone or in writing. Coffey states he met with Willis twice: January 21, 2016 and again on August 24, 2017 and had telephone conversations with Willis on May 11, 2018, October 30, 2018, April 1, 2019 and September 28, 2021.

Coffey had no documentation of communication with Willis between April 1, 2019 and September 28, 2021. Willis states he sent Coffey an undated letter during this time. Coffey states he did receive a letter from Willis dated November 7, 2020 on November 12, 2020.

Coffey did not respond to Willis' November 2020 letter nor did he communicate with Willis until he called Willis on September 28, 2021. Willis claims his last communication with Coffey was in February 2022. Since then, Willis has been unable to reach Coffey and wants Coffey to set up a call with Willis.

Attorney Dennis P. Coffey was privately reprimanded in 2001 and 2002. By failing to reasonably communicate with his client for a period of over two years, from April 2019 to September 2021, Coffey violated SCR 20:1.4(a), which states: "A lawyer shall: (2) reasonably consult with the client about the means by which the client's objectives are to

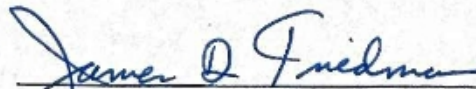
be accomplished.; (3) keep the client reasonably informed about the status of the matter;
(4) promptly comply with reasonable requests by the client for information, ...”

By failing to file a post-conviction motion or an appeal or inform his client there are no issues to appeal for nearly seven years, Coffey violated SCR 20:1.3, which states: “ a lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client.”

In accordance with SCR 22.09(3), Attorney Dennis P. Coffey is hereby publicly reprimanded.

Dated this 18th day of December, 2023.

SUPREME COURT OF WISCONSIN


James Friedman
Referee