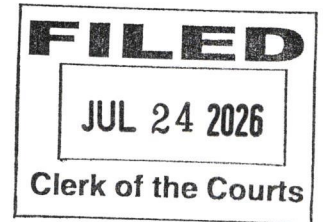


**BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
PANEL A**

IN RE: PRISCILLA G. COPELIN-NEELEY
 ARKANSAS BAR ID #2005242
 CPC Docket No. 2026-015



FINDINGS AND ORDER

The formal charges of misconduct upon which this Findings and Order is based arose from information provided to the Committee by Walter Hill ("Hill"). The information is related to Pricilla Copelin-Neeley's ("Copelin-Neeley") representation of both Hill and his wife.

1. On March 10, 2022, Hill's wife ("Mrs. Hill") was arrested at their home after officers found drugs on her during a search pursuant to a probationer address check on her. During the search, guns were also found in locked gun safes.

2. Mrs. Hill was subsequently charged with felony possession of methamphetamine; felony possession of drug paraphernalia; felony simultaneous possession of drugs and firearms; and being a felon in possession of a firearm.

3. On March 23, 2022, the State of Arkansas ("State") filed a Forfeiture Complaint on the guns seized during Mrs. Hill's arrest.

4. On June 22, 2022, Hill moved to intervene in the forfeiture case alleging the guns were his property and not his wife's property. The intervention was granted.

5. On January 13, 2023, the State motioned for default in the forfeiture matter. Hill, through his then attorney, filed an objection to the State's default motion.

6. On March 15, 2023, after a hearing on the default motion and objection, the court entered its Forfeiture Judgment denying Hill's claim to the guns, granted the forfeiture, and

determined that the Tenth Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney's Office was the new owners of the guns. No notice of appeal from that decision was filed.

7. After a June 22, 2023, jury trial, Mrs. Hill was found guilty of possession of a controlled substance (methamphetamine) and possession of drug paraphernalia. She was acquitted on the simultaneous possession of drugs and firearms and of firearms by certain persons charges. Mrs. Hill was sentenced to a total of thirty (30) years in the Arkansas Department of Corrections.

8. Hill asked his mother-in-law, Linda Faulkner ("Faulkner"), to find an attorney. Faulkner called Copelin-Neeley and arranged a telephone conference for June 27, 2023.

9. Hill paid Copelin-Neeley \$200.00 for two consultations to discuss the forfeiture action and his wife's criminal case. Hill was quoted a total fee of \$5,000.00 for Copelin-Neeley's representation in the matters. Of the \$5,000.00, \$3,500.00 was for the forfeiture matter and the remaining \$1,500.00 was for Mrs. Hill's case.

10. Hill withdrew \$5,000.00 from his retirement account. On the evening of July 21, 2023, Hill hand delivered \$5,000.00 cash to Copelin-Neeley at her office in Dumas, Arkansas. Copelin-Neeley did not provide Hill with a receipt or a fee agreement at that time, promising to mail them to him, which she did not do.

11. There were text message exchanges between Faulkner and Copelin-Neeley's then legal assistant evidencing the fee amount Copelin-Neeley charged Hill.

12. On July 25, 2023, Mrs. Hill's counsel of record (who was not Copelin-Neeley) filed a Notice of Appeal and Designation of Record in the criminal case.

13. On October 2, 2023, approximately three (3) months after being hired, and approximately seven (7) months after entry of the Forfeiture Judgement, Copelin-Neeley filed a Motion for Reconsideration and Motion for Stay With Incorporated Brief in the forfeiture case.

14. On October 5, 2023, the State filed its Motion to Strike Motion for Reconsideration and Motion for Stay, alleging that Copelin-Neeley's motion was incoherent and disorganized and that it raised no issues recognizable under Ark. R. Civ. P. 60 to set aside the March 15, 2023, forfeiture judgment.

15. Pursuant to Ark. R. Civ. P. 59(b), "A motion for a new trial shall be filed not later than 10 days after the entry of judgment. A motion made before entry of judgment shall become effective and be treated as filed on the day after the judgment is entered. If the court neither grants nor denies the motion within 30 days of the date on which it is filed or treated as filed, it shall be deemed denied as of the 30th day."

16. Pursuant to Ark. R. Civ. P. 60 (a), "To correct errors or mistakes or to prevent the miscarriage of justice, the court may modify or vacate a judgment, order or decree on motion of the court or any party, with prior notice to all parties, within ninety days of its having been filed with the clerk."

17. Ark. R. Civ. P. 60 (b) allows for clerical mistakes to be corrected beyond the ninety (90) day limit.

18. Ark. R. Civ. P. 60 (c) sets out other exceptions to the ninety (90) day limitation for judgments other than defaults. The exceptions include newly discovered evidence, if a party was constructively summoned but did not appear, misprisions of the clerk, misrepresentation or fraud, erroneous proceedings against an infant, death of one of the parties before the judgment,

and errors in a judgment shown by an infant within twelve (12) months of reaching eighteen (18) years of age.

19. Arkansas Code Annotated (“A.C.A”) § 16-89-130 sets out requests for new trials in criminal matters. In summary, it states that requests for new trial must be made at the same term at which a verdict is rendered, unless the judgment is postponed to another term, in which case it may be made at any time *before* judgment. It then lists instances in which a court may grant a new trial.

20. On October 2, 2023, Copelin-Neeley entered her appearance and filed a Motion for New Trial or Motion for Alternative Relief With Incorporated Brief in Mrs. Hill’s criminal case, despite the fact that Mrs. Hill’s sentencing order had been entered approximately four (4) months prior and that Mrs. Hill’s counsel had already filed a notice of appeal approximately three (3) months prior. Copelin-Neeley did not move to replace Mrs. Hill’s current attorney as attorney of record in the matter. Mrs. Hill’s court appointed attorney continued representing her through the appeal.

21. On October 16, 2023, the State filed its response to the motion pleading that the motion was untimely as it was filed 102 days after entry of the sentencing order and that an appeal was pending at the time of the filing of the motion. There was no ruling on the motion for new trial by the circuit court, nor did Copelin-Neeley make a written request for the court to address her pending motion.

22. On April 23, 2024, the circuit court entered an order denying the motion for new trial filed in the forfeiture case. The court found that the motion had been filed more than ninety (90) days post judgment and that the petition did not meet any of the requirements of Ark. R. Civ. P. 60 (c).

23. Mrs. Hill's conviction was affirmed on appeal. (Exhibit "22")

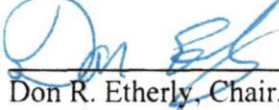
24. Upon consideration of the formal complaint and attached exhibit materials and the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct, Panel A of the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct find:

That Copelin-Neeley's conduct violated Rules 1.1, 1.3, 3.1, and 8.4(d) of the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct as alleged in the Formal Complaint.

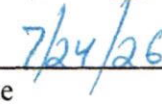
That pursuant to Procedures §17.E(1) disbarment proceedings be initiated against Respondent Priscilla Copelin-Neeley.

WHEREFORE, it is the decision of Panel A of the Committee on Professional Conduct disbarment proceedings be initiated against Respondent Priscilla Copelin-Neele, Arkansas Bar Number 2005242.

ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT



Don R. Etherly, Chair, Panel A



Date