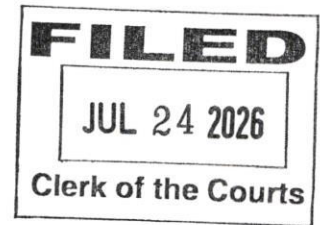


**BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT
PANEL A**

IN RE: PRISCILLA G. COPELIN-NEELEY
 ARKANSAS BAR ID #2005242
 CPC Docket No. 2026-018



FINDINGS AND ORDER

The formal charges of misconduct upon which this Findings and Order is based arose from the Office of Professional Conduct's "(OPC)" investigation of Copelin-Neeley's violation of the terms of her modified interim suspension.

1. On June 13, 2025, the Committee on Professional Conduct, through its Panel A ("Committee") entered its Order of Modified Interim Suspension, suspending Copelin-Neeley from the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas.
2. The OPC was notified that Copelin-Neeley was engaged in the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District despite her suspension from the practice of law there.
3. The OPC investigator Carl Geohegan ("Geohegan") investigated the allegations and the investigation yielded the below results:

A. On March 13, 2026, Judge Laurie Bridewell reported to the OPC that attorney Patrick Benca ("Benca") was handling an adoption matter, 21APR-25-43, *In re James Allen Milholland*, before her court. Bridewell was aware through past comments from Benca that despite her suspension, Copelin-Neeley was working as a paralegal for Benca.

In late January 2026, Judge Bridewell requested Benca submit a final adoption decree in the matter to the court. Judge Bridewell received the requested document on or about March 9, 2026, as a submission through the Arkansas Courts electronic filing program Eflex.

The document was submitted through Copelin-Neeley's Eflex account. Because of Copelin-Neeley suspension in Tenth Judicial District, Judge Bridewell had several issues with the filing: (1) the decree was filed using Copelin-Neeley's Eflex account, not Benca's; (2) as a suspended attorney, Copelin-Neeley's Eflex account should not be used to file any documents in the Tenth Judicial District; (3) even if Copelin-Neeley was authorized to practice in the Tenth Judicial District, she filed a document in a case that she had not entered an appearance in.

Judge Bridewell provided images of her Eflex portal evidencing that the decree was submitted through Copelin-Neeley's Eflex account. Because the decree was submitted through Copelin-Neeley's Eflex account and she was suspended from practicing in the Tenth Judicial District at that time, Judge Bridewell declined to take action on that decree submission.

B. On March 13, 2026, Judge Bridewell reported Copelin-Neeley was suspected of practicing law in the Tenth Judicial District in violation of the interim suspension in Judge Crews Puryear's court.

Based upon Judge Bridewell's contact, Geohegan contacted and interviewed Judge Puryear. Judge Puryear advised that on February 17, 2026, in case 22CR-25-203, *State v. Amanda Bland*, Bland, who had been assigned a public defender, informed the court that she had recently hired Copelin-Neeley as her attorney in the criminal matter.

Judge Puryear advised Geohegan that neither Copelin-Neeley nor Patrick Benca, the attorney who had assumed responsibility for the majority of Copelin-Neeley's Tenth Judicial District cases had appeared for the hearing that day.

Bland's then public defender, Tim Leonard ("Leonard"), was interviewed by Geohegan. Leonard advised that Bland informed him she met with Copelin-Neeley and hired her

as Bland's attorney in the criminal matter. Bland also advised she paid Copelin-Neeley her fee in installments.

Bland provided Leonard with a photocopy of the contract she signed and Leonard provided it to Geohegan. A review of the contract shows a heading of "Patrick J. Benca, Attorney at Law". It has in its heading, "Priscilla Copelin-Neeley, Attorney at Law, As Legal Consultant".

The contract also lists the address of Copelin-Neeley's Dumas law office of 117 Brasfield Street and the phone number, along with both Benca and Copelin-Neeley's email address. The contract was signed by Bland on December 10, 2025.

Judge Puryear's court reporter provided Geohegan with the transcript of the February 17, 2026, hearing in which Bland confirmed to the court that she paid Copelin-Neeley the fee in full. Bland paid Copelin-Neeley a total fee of \$7,500.00, with payments being made either directly to Copelin-Neeley or Copelin-Neeley's mother at Copelin-Neeley's house in Pine Bluff.

C. On April 20, 2026, Benca contacted the OPC Executive Director and advised that he made statements in Judge Puryear's court during the hearing in the Bland matter concerning his professional relationship with Copelin-Neeley. As a result, Geohegan contacted Judge Puryear the following day to confirm Benca spoke on the record about Benca's and Copelin-Neeley's business arrangement.

On April 23, 2026, Judge Puryear's court reporter emailed Geohegan a copy of the hearing from April 20, 2026. While on the record, Benca informed the court that Copelin-Neeley took money from Bland in December 2025 for legal representation and failed to inform him she had done so until months later.

Benca stated Copelin-Neeley advised him on February 6, 2026, that Bland wanted to hire Benca and that she had already taken \$3,750.00 from Bland and would like to retain \$1,000.00 of it to pay her legal assistant. Benca informed the court that public defender Leonard contacted him on February 17, 2026, and advised Bland had appeared in court and advised that she signed a contract with Copelin-Neeley for representation and that he was unaware that a contract had been signed.

Benca contacted Copelin-Neeley's legal assistant, Cheryl, after February 17 to inquire about the Bland matter. According to Benca, Cheryl then filed an entry of appearance and discovery motion. He admitted he did not file the motions; Cheryl did as she was filing motions for him in Tenth Judicial cases he was taking over for Copelin-Neeley.

Because Benca was unaware of the Bland matter, he says he did not appear for any hearings prior to the April 20 hearing. Benca informed the court that he eventually spoke with Bland who then consented to his representation of her in the matter. Bland confirmed she accepted Benca as her attorney in the matter.

4. In December 2025, when Bland paid Copelin-Neeley and signed a contract for representation in her criminal case, Copelin-Neeley was suspended from the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas pursuant to the Committee's order of interim suspension.

5. At the time of the entry of the contract that lists Copelin-Neeley as an "Attorney at Law, as Legal Consultant" at the law office located at 117 Brasfield Street, Dumas, AR which is the address of her Dumas law firm, Copelin-Neeley was suspended from the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas pursuant to the Committee's order of interim suspension.

6. As of April 30, 2026, Copelin-Neeley had signage at her office in Dumas, which stated the following, "Pricilla Copelin-Neeley, Attorney & Counselor at Law, PLC".

7. At the time of the filing of the formal complaint in this matter, Copelin-Neeley was interim suspended from the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas pursuant to the Committee's order of interim suspension.

8. Pursuant to Procedures §22.A, a "former attorney" for purposes of Procedures §22 is any attorney who is disbarred, has surrendered a law license, is on suspension pursuant to the Procedures, or is on inactive status. As Copelin-Neeley is suspended from the practice of law in the Tenth Judicial District, she is a former attorney of that judicial district.

9. Pursuant to Procedures §22.B, a former attorney shall not occupy, share, or use office space in any office where the practice of law is conducted. The contract that Bland signed has the address for Copelin-Neeley's Dumas law office, which also happens to be the address of record for her in the records of the Arkansas Supreme Court Clerk.

10. Pursuant to Procedures §22.C, a former attorney shall not engage in the practice of law, nor may a former attorney engage in any employment in, or related to, the practice of law, except as specifically permitted in this section. Copelin-Neeley took money from Bland and led her to believe that she would represent Bland in her criminal case in the Tenth Judicial District of Arkansas from which she was suspended from the practice of law. In addition, it is known from some of the judges that Copelin-Neeley works for Benca as a paralegal and also the contract that Bland signed lists Copelin-Neeley as an attorney in Dumas, AR as well as a legal consultant.

11. Pursuant to Procedures §22.E, a former attorney shall promptly take such action as is necessary to cause the removal of any indicia of lawyer, counselor at law, attorney, legal assistant, law clerk, or similar title from any association with the name of the former attorney.

Copelin-Neeley failed to remove her name from contracts for legal services in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas. In fact, the contract that Copelin-Neeley presented to Bland and Bland signed lists Copelin-Neeley as an attorney in Dumas, AR as well as a legal consultant.

12. Pursuant to §22.G, a former attorney shall have no contact with clients or prospective clients of any attorney or law firm in person, by telephone, in writing, by email, or by any other form of communication, written, electronic, or in person. Copelin-Neeley met in person with Bland regarding her criminal case and collected a fee from Bland for representation in Bland's criminal case in the Tenth Judicial District of the State of Arkansas. Copelin-Neeley also had Bland sign a contract for representation.

13. Pursuant to Procedures §22.H, a former attorney shall have no contact with client funds or property. Copelin-Neeley accepted a check from Bland for \$3,750.00, plus additional installment payments for a total of \$7,500.00 for representation of Bland in the criminal court of the Tenth Judicial District of Arkansas.

14. Pursuant to Procedures §22.N, the maximum punishment for violation of this Section 22 by an attorney, or any former attorney on suspension or on inactive status, may be disbarment.

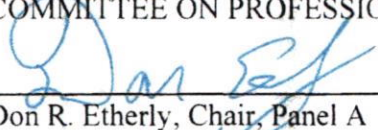
15. Upon consideration of the formal complaint and attached exhibit materials and the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct, Panel A of the Arkansas Supreme Court Committee on Professional Conduct find:

That Copelin-Neeley's conduct violated Rules 5.5(a), 5.5(b)(1), 5.5(b)(2), 8.4(a), 8.4(c), and 8.4(d) of the Arkansas Rules of Professional Conduct as alleged in the Formal Complaint.

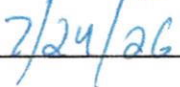
That pursuant to Procedures §17.E(1) and §22.N disbarment proceedings be initiated against Respondent Priscilla Copelin-Neeley.

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