

# THE SUPREME COURT OF WASHINGTON

IN THE MATTER OF THE SUGGESTED  
AMENDMENT TO RPC 1.4—COMMUNICATION

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## **ORDER**

NO. 25700-A-1351

The Washington State Bar Association Board of Governors, having recommended the adoption of the suggested amendment to RPC 1.4—Communication, and the Court having considered the suggested amendment, and having determined that the suggested amendment will aid in the prompt and orderly administration of justice;

Now, therefore, it is hereby

**ORDERED:**

- (a) That the suggested amendment as attached hereto is adopted.
- (b) That pursuant to the emergency provisions of GR 9(j)(1), the suggested amendment will be published in the Washington Reports and will become effective September 1, 2021.

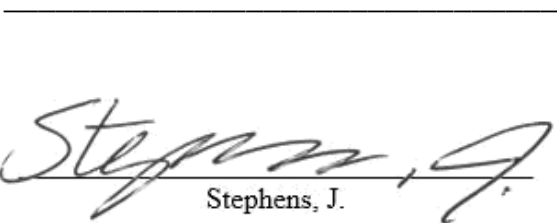
DATED at Olympia, Washington this 4th day of June, 2021.

  
González, C.J.

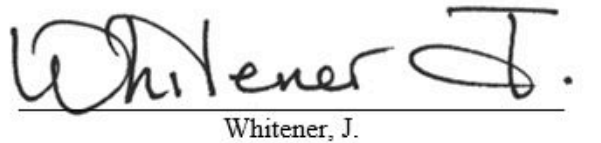
  
Gordon McCloud, J.

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Madsen, J.

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Yu, J.

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Stephens, J.

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Montoya-Lewis, J.

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Whitener, J.

**RPC 1.4**  
**COMMUNICATION**

(a)–(b) [Unchanged.]

(c) A lawyer shall communicate to a client or prospective client a lack of minimum levels of lawyer professional liability insurance as required by the provisions of this Rule.

(1) A lawyer not covered by lawyer professional liability insurance in the amounts specified in paragraph (c)(4) shall, before or at the time of commencing representation of a client, notify the client in writing of the absence of such insurance coverage and promptly obtain the client’s informed consent in writing. A lawyer who knows or reasonably should know that the lawyer’s professional liability insurance policy has either lapsed or been terminated during the representation shall within 30 days either (i) obtain a new policy in the required amounts or (ii) provide notice in writing to the client and promptly obtain the client’s informed consent in writing. If a lawyer does not obtain a new policy in the required amounts or provide notice to the client and obtain the client’s informed consent in writing within 30 days of a lapse or termination, the lawyer shall withdraw from representation of the client

(2)(i) A notice to the client in substantially the following form satisfies the notice requirements of paragraph (c)(1):

Under Rule 1.4(c) of the Washington Rules of Professional Conduct, I must obtain your informed consent to provide legal representation, and ensure that you understand and acknowledge that [I][this Firm] [do not][does not][no longer] maintain[s] [any lawyer professional liability insurance (sometimes called malpractice insurance)] [lawyer professional liability insurance (sometimes called malpractice insurance)] of at least one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per occurrence, and three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) for all claims submitted during the policy period (typically 12 months). Because [I][we] do not carry this

insurance coverage, it could be more difficult for you to recover an amount sufficient to compensate you for your loss or damages if [I am][we are] negligent.

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Lawyer's Signature

(ii) A client consent and acknowledgment in substantially the following form satisfies the informed consent requirements of paragraph (c)(1):

I acknowledge and supply this written consent, required by Rule 1.4(c) of the Washington Rules of Professional Conduct, that [insert attorney or firm's name] [does not][no longer] maintain[s] [any lawyer professional liability insurance (sometimes called malpractice insurance)][lawyer professional liability insurance (sometimes called malpractice insurance)] with at least maximum coverage of \$100,000 for each claim, and at least \$300,000 for all claims submitted during the policy period (typically 12 months), and I consent to representation by [the lawyer][the firm].

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Client's Signature

(3) A lawyer shall maintain a record of notices of disclosure to clients, and the signed consents and acknowledgments received from clients, for at least six (6) years after the representation is terminated.

(4) As used in this paragraph (c), "lawyer" means an active member of the Washington State Bar Association, and any other person authorized by the Washington State Supreme Court to engage in the practice of law, including emeritus pro bono status lawyers and lawyers permitted to engage in the limited practice of law in this state as provided in Admission and Practice Rule (APR) 3(g); however, as used in this paragraph (c), "lawyer" does not include, (i) a judge, arbitrator, or mediator not otherwise engaged in the practice of law; (ii) in-house counsel for a single entity; (iii) an employee of a governmental agency

practicing law in that capacity; (iv) an employee of a nonprofit legal service organization, or a lawyer volunteering with such an organization, where the nonprofit legal service organization provides lawyer professional liability insurance coverage at the minimum levels required by this paragraph to that employee or volunteer pro bono lawyer. “Lawyer professional liability insurance” means a professional liability insurance policy that provides coverage for claims made against the lawyer that arise from an act, error, or omission in the lawyer’s performance of legal services to a client, with limits of liability of at least one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per occurrence, and three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) for all claims submitted during the policy period.

Comment

[1]–[7] [Unchanged.]

**Additional Washington Comments (8-13)**

*Insurance Disclosure*

[8] A lawyer without a basic level of professional liability insurance might not pay for damages or losses a client incurs that result from the lawyer’s mistakes or negligence. Consequently, prospective clients and clients should have sufficient information about whether the lawyer maintains a minimum level of lawyer professional liability insurance so they can intelligently determine whether they wish to engage, or continue to engage, that lawyer. Paragraph (c) requires a lawyer to provide disclosure if the lawyer is without a level of lawyer professional liability insurance specified in paragraph (c), and to obtain each client’s acknowledgement and informed consent. Client consent should be obtained promptly—ordinarily within 10 days of the lawyer’s providing disclosure. Certain lawyers are excluded from the disclosure requirements of Rule 1.4(c), including full-time judges, arbitrators and mediators, in-house lawyers for a single entity, and employees of governmental agencies. If a lawyer serving as a judge represents clients outside judicial duties, or an in-house lawyer or government employee represents other clients, such a

judge or lawyer is subject to the requirements of Rule 1.4(c) regarding those representations.

[9] As used in paragraph (c), a lawyer who “maintains” or “is covered by” lawyer professional liability insurance is an insured lawyer under a lawyer professional liability insurance policy providing coverage regarding claims relating to legal services provided by that lawyer. The minimum limits of lawyer professional liability insurance specified by paragraph (c)(4) include any deductible or self-insured retention that must be paid by the lawyer or the lawyer’s law firm for claim expenses and damages. Lawyer professional liability insurance, as defined in paragraph (c)(4), does not include an insurance policy with a deductible or self-insured retention that the lawyer knows or has reason to know cannot be paid by the lawyer or the firm if a loss occurs.

[10] Whether the disclosure and notice obligations of paragraph (c) apply to a Washington-licensed lawyer practicing in another jurisdiction is determined by the choice of law provisions of Rule 8.5(b).

[11] In addition to complying with paragraph (c), every active member of the bar must comply with the reporting requirements of Admission and Practice Rule (APR) 26, under which lawyers in the private practice of law are required to annually report their insurance coverage to the Washington State Bar Association.

[12] Withdrawal from a representation under paragraph (c)(1) is a circumstance where withdrawal is obligatory under Rule 1.16(a)(1) because the representation would violate the Rules of Professional Conduct. The withdrawal shall be accomplished in conformity with the requirements of Rule 1.16(c) and (d).

[13] In an emergency where the health, safety, or a financial interest of a person is threatened with imminent and irreparable harm, a lawyer not covered by lawyer professional liability insurance in the amounts specified in paragraph (c)(4) may take legal action on behalf of such a person even though the person cannot receive or evaluate the

notice required by paragraph (c)(1) or there is insufficient time to provide it. A lawyer who represents a person in such an exigent situation shall provide the notice required by paragraph (c)(1) as soon as reasonably practicable.