

<p style="text-align: center;">SUPREME COURT, STATE OF COLORADO ORIGINAL PROCEEDING IN DISCIPLINE BEFORE THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING DISCIPLINARY JUDGE 1300 BROADWAY, SUITE 250 DENVER, CO 80203</p>	
<p>Complainant: THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF COLORADO</p> <p>Respondent: JOHN MICHAEL WALTERS, #33404</p>	<p>Case Number: 25PDJ3</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OPINION APPROVING AMENDED STIPULATION TO DISCIPLINE</p>	

SUMMARY

The Presiding Disciplinary Judge approved an amended stipulation to discipline and suspended John Michael Walters (attorney registration number 33404) for three months. The suspension takes effect immediately.

In January 2024, Walters spoke loudly and made a scene in the hallway of the Arapahoe County Courthouse. He then entered a courtroom and spoke to a magistrate's judicial assistant while sitting on the floor in an area generally reserved for court personnel. Walters complained to the judicial clerk about the magistrate, referring to her as a "fucking bitch." He made the judicial clerk feel uncomfortable by implicitly proposing a romantic or sexual relationship with her, suggesting that he would appreciate the judicial clerk more than her boyfriend would and asking her to "hang out" at his house. Walters then grabbed the clerk's arm without her consent.

Through this misconduct, Walters violated Colo. RPC 8.4(i) (it is professional misconduct for a lawyer to engage in conduct that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know constitutes sexual harassment in connection with the lawyer's professional activities).

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On July 14, 2025, Jonathan P. Blasewitz of the Office of Attorney Regulation Counsel ("the People") and John Michael Walters ("Respondent") filed an "Amended Stipulation to Discipline Pursuant to C.R.C.P. 242.19" with Presiding Disciplinary Judge Bryon M. Large ("the Court"). The parties stipulate that Respondent should serve a three-month suspension. On July 15, 2025, the

parties appeared for a hearing on the stipulation, during which they agreed that the suspension should take effect immediately.¹

II. THE PARTIES' STIPULATED FACTS AND RULE VIOLATION

Respondent was admitted in Colorado on October 22, 2001, under registration number 33404 and is thus subject to the Court's jurisdiction. Respondent was transferred to disability inactive status on April 15, 2024.

On January 9, 2024, Respondent went to the Division 35 courtroom in the Arapahoe County Justice Center. On his way, he approached a judicial clerk and tried to speak with her in the hallway. There, he spoke loudly and used profanity.

Respondent then entered Magistrate Echo Ryan's courtroom and spoke to her judicial clerk, K.R. Respondent and K.R. were familiar with each other because Respondent regularly appeared in Magistrate Ryan's division, though Respondent did not have a case on Magistrate Ryan's docket that day. Respondent approached K.R. in an area that is typically reserved for court personnel. While K.R. was sitting in her chair, Respondent sat on the floor beside her. Respondent began speaking loudly, making big hand gestures and flailing his arms. Respondent complained to K.R. about Magistrate Ryan, referring to her a "fucking bitch."

Respondent then began to suggest an interest in a romantic or sexual relationship with K.R., which made K.R. feel uncomfortable. Respondent, who was aware that K.R. recently started law school, offered to give her some law books. Respondent also invited K.R. to "come to [his] house and hang out," told K.R. that she was beautiful and gorgeous, and remarked that her boyfriend "would not appreciate [her] like [Respondent] would." He then grabbed K.R.'s arm. K.R. quickly pulled away from him. This interaction left K.R. feeling sick to her stomach.

At the time of the incident, Respondent was suffering from a manic episode. On January 13, 2024, he was hospitalized for his condition and spent three days in the hospital. Respondent received medical treatment for depression from March through May 2024. He was also formally diagnosed with severe mixed bipolar disorder without psychosis. Respondent was in the midst of a contentious divorce at the time. Respondent continues to be treated for bipolar disorder and is under the care of a medical doctor.

The parties stipulate that through the conduct described above, Respondent knowingly violated Colo. RPC 8.4(i), which prohibits a lawyer from engaging in conduct in connection with the lawyer's professional activities that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know constitutes sexual harassment. The parties agree that Respondent violated duties he owes as a professional by engaging in this misconduct, and thereby harming K.R. emotionally.

¹ At the hearing, the Court **SUPPRESSED** exhibits 2-4 attached to the amended stipulation.

III. DISCUSSION

The lawyer discipline system is designed to further the Colorado Supreme Court's regulatory objectives, including promoting the public interest; increasing the public's understanding of, and confidence in, the rule of law; ensuring compliance with the rules of professional conduct; and safeguarding the rule of law to foster a robust system of justice.² Mindful of those objectives, the Court endeavors to honor parties' stipulations and is favorably inclined to accept targeted and proportionate agreements that are consistent with the considerations governing imposition of disciplinary sanctions, including the theoretical framework set forth in the American Bar Association *Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions* ("*ABA Standards*").³ The Court also seeks to ensure that lawyers comply with the Colorado Rules of Professional Conduct in a manner that is fair, efficient, effective, targeted, and proportionate.⁴

Under ABA *Standard* 7.2, suspension is the presumed sanction when, as here, a lawyer violates a duty owed as a professional and causes injury or potential injury. The parties apply aggravating weight for Respondent's substantial experience in the practice of law.⁵ The parties apply average mitigating weight for Respondent's lack of a disciplinary record, his absence of a dishonest or selfish motive, his cooperative attitude toward this disciplinary proceeding, and his remorse.⁶ The parties give substantial mitigating weight to Respondent's personal or emotional problems, pointing to the manic episode he was experiencing at the time of his misconduct, his formal bipolar disorder diagnosis, and his contentious divorce.⁷

As a baseline, the ABA *Standards* generally call for respondent lawyers facing a presumed sanction of suspension to serve a period of suspension that lasts at least six months.⁸ But here, the Court agrees with the parties that a three-month suspension is appropriate. This is so because the applicable mitigating factors significantly outweigh the aggravating factors, justifiably downgrading the degree of discipline from the presumed six-month baseline. The Court is particularly swayed by Respondent's efforts to address his diagnosed bipolar disorder—the root cause of his misconduct—through medical intervention.

Though the Court looks to the ABA *Standards*' theoretical framework as its guide for determining the appropriate lawyer discipline, suspension is consistent with other lawyer discipline cases involving sexual harassment, as the parties observe. In *People v. Amos*, the Court approved a stipulation to a lawyer's six-month suspension.⁹ Unlike in this case, however, the parties in *Amos*

² See Preamble to Chapters 18 to 20, Colorado Court Rules ("Preamble").

³ Found in ABA *Annotated Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions* (2d ed. 2019); see also C.R.C.P. 242.19(c); *In re Att'y F.*, 2012 CO 57 ¶ 19.

⁴ Preamble at ¶2.

⁵ ABA *Standard* 9.22(i).

⁶ ABA *Standard* 9.32 (a), (b), (e), & (l).

⁷ ABA *Standard* 9.32(c).

⁸ See ABA *Standard* 2.3.

⁹ 2021 WL 5500754 (Colo. O.P.D.J 2021).

agreed to stay the suspension fully pending the lawyer's successful completion of a two-year period of probation. In *Amos*, the lawyer drank too much alcohol over the lunch hour then returned to work and sexually harassed his assistant.¹⁰ *People v. Schwartz* also offers a useful yardstick: in that case, a lawyer stipulated to a six-month fully served suspension, which included a requirement that the lawyer petition for reinstatement. There, the lawyer engaged in a pattern of sexual harassment in his workplace, including verbally harassing subordinates and slapping a paralegal on the buttocks.¹¹

In sum, considering the *ABA Standards* and similar lawyer discipline cases, the Court concludes that the parties' agreed-upon resolution is targeted and proportionate to Respondent's misconduct. A suspension here also serves the public's and the legal profession's interests, underscoring that sexual harassment has no place in the legal profession. Finally, a suspension appropriately guides lawyers' conduct, encourages their compliance with Colorado's Rules of Professional Conduct, and helps to instill public confidence in the legal profession.

IV. CONCLUSION

Because the parties' stipulation is consistent with the *ABA Standards* and considerations governing imposition of disciplinary sanctions, the Court **APPROVES** the parties' stipulation. The Court contemporaneously issues an order and notice of Respondent's suspension.



DATED THIS 15th DAY OF JULY, 2025.


BRYON M. LARGE
PRESIDING DISCIPLINARY JUDGE

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ 2022 WL 2824429 (Colo. O.P.D.J. 2022).