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<b>State Bar Court of California</b> Hearing Department <b>PUBLIC MATTER</b>		
Counsel For The State Bar  <b>PAUL T. O'BRIEN</b>  Bar # 171252	Case Number (s) <b>06-O-13698</b>	(for Court's use)  <div style="text-align: center;"> <b>FILED</b>   <b>MAR 18 2010</b>             STATE BAR COURT            CLERK'S OFFICE            LOS ANGELES         </div>
Counsel For Respondent  <b>DAVID A. CLARE</b>  Bar # 44971	Submitted to: <b>Settlement Judge</b>	
In the Matter Of: <b>STEVEN JOSEPH COOPER</b>  Bar # 81689  A Member of the State Bar of California (Respondent)	STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND DISPOSITION AND ORDER APPROVING  <b>ACTUAL SUSPENSION</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> PREVIOUS STIPULATION REJECTED	

**Note: All information required by this form and any additional information which cannot be provided in the space provided, must be set forth in an attachment to this stipulation under specific headings, e.g., "Facts," "Dismissals," "Conclusions of Law," "Supporting Authority," etc.**

#### A. Parties' Acknowledgments:

- (1) Respondent is a member of the State Bar of California, admitted November 29, 1978.
- (2) The parties agree to be bound by the factual stipulations contained herein even if conclusions of law or disposition are rejected or changed by the Supreme Court.
- (3) All investigations or proceedings listed by case number in the caption of this stipulation are entirely resolved by this stipulation and are deemed consolidated. Dismissed charge(s)/count(s) are listed under "Dismissals." The stipulation consists of 10 pages, not including the order.
- (4) A statement of acts or omissions acknowledged by Respondent as cause or causes for discipline is included under "Facts."
- (5) Conclusions of law, drawn from and specifically referring to the facts are also included under "Conclusions of Law".
- (6) The parties must include supporting authority for the recommended level of discipline under the heading "Supporting Authority."
- (7) No more than 30 days prior to the filing of this stipulation, Respondent has been advised in writing of any pending investigation/proceeding not resolved by this stipulation, except for criminal investigations.

(Stipulation form approved by SBC Executive Committee 10/16/00. Revised 12/16/2004; 12/13/2006.)

Actual Suspension



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(8) Payment of Disciplinary Costs—Respondent acknowledges the provisions of Bus. & Prof. Code §§6086.10 & 6140.7. (Check one option only):

- until costs are paid in full, Respondent will remain actually suspended from the practice of law unless relief is obtained per rule 284, Rules of Procedure.
- costs to be paid in equal amounts prior to February 1 for the following membership years: two billing cycles following the effective date of the Supreme Court order in this matter.  
(hardship, special circumstances or other good cause per rule 284, Rules of Procedure)
- costs waived in part as set forth in a separate attachment entitled "Partial Waiver of Costs"
- costs entirely waived

**B. Aggravating Circumstances [for definition, see Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct, standard 1.2(b)]. Facts supporting aggravating circumstances are required.**

- (1)  **Prior record of discipline** [see standard 1.2(f)]
  - (a)  State Bar Court case # of prior case
  - (b)  Date prior discipline effective
  - (c)  Rules of Professional Conduct/ State Bar Act violations:
  - (d)  Degree of prior discipline
  - (e)  If Respondent has two or more incidents of prior discipline, use space provided below.
- (2)  **Dishonesty:** Respondent's misconduct was surrounded by or followed by bad faith, dishonesty, concealment, overreaching or other violations of the State Bar Act or Rules of Professional Conduct.
- (3)  **Trust Violation:** Trust funds or property were involved and Respondent refused or was unable to account to the client or person who was the object of the misconduct for improper conduct toward said funds or property.
- (4)  **Harm:** Respondent's misconduct harmed significantly a client, the public or the administration of justice.
- (5)  **Indifference:** Respondent demonstrated indifference toward rectification of or atonement for the consequences of his or her misconduct.
- (6)  **Lack of Cooperation:** Respondent displayed a lack of candor and cooperation to victims of his/her misconduct or to the State Bar during disciplinary investigation or proceedings.
- (7)  **Multiple/Pattern of Misconduct:** Respondent's current misconduct evidences multiple acts of wrongdoing or demonstrates a pattern of misconduct.
- (8)  **No aggravating circumstances** are involved.

**Additional aggravating circumstances:**

(Stipulation form approved by SBC Executive Committee 10/16/00. Revised 12/16/2004; 12/13/2006.)

Actual Suspension

**C. Mitigating Circumstances [see standard 1.2(e)]. Facts supporting mitigating circumstances are required.**

- (1)  **No Prior Discipline:** Respondent has no prior record of discipline over many years of practice coupled with present misconduct which is not deemed serious.
- (2)  **No Harm:** Respondent did not harm the client or person who was the object of the misconduct.
- (3)  **Candor/Cooperation:** Respondent displayed spontaneous candor and cooperation with the victims of his/her misconduct and to the State Bar during disciplinary investigation and proceedings.
- (4)  **Remorse:** Respondent promptly took objective steps spontaneously demonstrating remorse and recognition of the wrongdoing, which steps were designed to timely atone for any consequences of his/her misconduct.
- (5)  **Restitution:** Respondent paid \$ \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ in restitution to \_\_\_\_\_ without the threat or force of disciplinary, civil or criminal proceedings.
- (6)  **Delay:** These disciplinary proceedings were excessively delayed. The delay is not attributable to Respondent and the delay prejudiced him/her.
- (7)  **Good Faith:** Respondent acted in good faith.
- (8)  **Emotional/Physical Difficulties:** At the time of the stipulated act or acts of professional misconduct Respondent suffered extreme emotional difficulties or physical disabilities which expert testimony would establish was directly responsible for the misconduct. The difficulties or disabilities were not the product of any illegal conduct by the member, such as illegal drug or substance abuse, and Respondent no longer suffers from such difficulties or disabilities.
- (9)  **Severe Financial Stress:** At the time of the misconduct, Respondent suffered from severe financial stress which resulted from circumstances not reasonably foreseeable or which were beyond his/her control and which were directly responsible for the misconduct.
- (10)  **Family Problems:** At the time of the misconduct, Respondent suffered extreme difficulties in his/her personal life which were other than emotional or physical in nature.
- (11)  **Good Character:** Respondent's good character is attested to by a wide range of references in the legal and general communities who are aware of the full extent of his/her misconduct.
- (12)  **Rehabilitation:** Considerable time has passed since the acts of professional misconduct occurred followed by convincing proof of subsequent rehabilitation.
- (13)  **No mitigating circumstances** are involved.

**Additional mitigating circumstances**

**D. Discipline:**

- (1)  **Stayed Suspension:**

- (a)  Respondent must be suspended from the practice of law for a period of one year.
- I.  and until Respondent shows proof satisfactory to the State Bar Court of rehabilitation and present fitness to practice and present learning and ability in the law pursuant to standard 1.4(c)(ii) Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct.
- ii.  and until Respondent pays restitution as set forth in the Financial Conditions form attached to this stipulation.
- iii.  and until Respondent does the following:
- (b)  The above-referenced suspension is stayed.

(2)  **Probation:**

Respondent must be placed on probation for a period of one year, which will commence upon the effective date of the Supreme Court order in this matter. (See rule 9.18, California Rules of Court)

(3)  **Actual Suspension:**

- (a)  Respondent must be actually suspended from the practice of law in the State of California for a period of 30 days.
- i.  and until Respondent shows proof satisfactory to the State Bar Court of rehabilitation and present fitness to practice and present learning and ability in the law pursuant to standard 1.4(c)(ii), Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct
- ii.  and until Respondent pays restitution as set forth in the Financial Conditions form attached to this stipulation.
- iii.  and until Respondent does the following:

**E. Additional Conditions of Probation:**

- (1)  If Respondent is actually suspended for two years or more, he/she must remain actually suspended until he/she proves to the State Bar Court his/her rehabilitation, fitness to practice, and learning and ability in general law, pursuant to standard 1.4(c)(ii), Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct.
- (2)  During the probation period, Respondent must comply with the provisions of the State Bar Act and Rules of Professional Conduct.
- (3)  Within ten (10) days of any change, Respondent must report to the Membership Records Office of the State Bar and to the Office of Probation of the State Bar of California ("Office of Probation"), all changes of information, including current office address and telephone number, or other address for State Bar purposes, as prescribed by section 6002.1 of the Business and Professions Code.
- (4)  Within thirty (30) days from the effective date of discipline, Respondent must contact the Office of Probation and schedule a meeting with Respondent's assigned probation deputy to discuss these terms and conditions of probation. Upon the direction of the Office of Probation, Respondent must meet with the probation deputy either in-person or by telephone. During the period of probation, Respondent must promptly meet with the probation deputy as directed and upon request.

- (5)  Respondent must submit written quarterly reports to the Office of Probation on each January 10, April 10, July 10, and October 10 of the period of probation. Under penalty of perjury, Respondent must state whether Respondent has complied with the State Bar Act, the Rules of Professional Conduct, and all conditions of probation during the preceding calendar quarter. Respondent must also state whether there are any proceedings pending against him or her in the State Bar Court and if so, the case number and current status of that proceeding. If the first report would cover less than 30 days, that report must be submitted on the next quarter date, and cover the extended period.

In addition to all quarterly reports, a final report, containing the same information, is due no earlier than twenty (20) days before the last day of the period of probation and no later than the last day of probation.

- (6)  Respondent must be assigned a probation monitor. Respondent must promptly review the terms and conditions of probation with the probation monitor to establish a manner and schedule of compliance. During the period of probation, Respondent must furnish to the monitor such reports as may be requested, in addition to the quarterly reports required to be submitted to the Office of Probation. Respondent must cooperate fully with the probation monitor.
- (7)  Subject to assertion of applicable privileges, Respondent must answer fully, promptly and truthfully any inquiries of the Office of Probation and any probation monitor assigned under these conditions which are directed to Respondent personally or in writing relating to whether Respondent is complying or has complied with the probation conditions.
- (8)  Within one (1) year of the effective date of the discipline herein, Respondent must provide to the Office of Probation satisfactory proof of attendance at a session of the Ethics School, and passage of the test given at the end of that session.
- No Ethics School recommended. Reason:
- (9)  Respondent must comply with all conditions of probation imposed in the underlying criminal matter and must so declare under penalty of perjury in conjunction with any quarterly report to be filed with the Office of Probation.
- (10)  The following conditions are attached hereto and incorporated:
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse Conditions | <input type="checkbox"/> Law Office Management Conditions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Conditions         | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Conditions             |

#### F. Other Conditions Negotiated by the Parties:

- (1)  **Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination:** Respondent must provide proof of passage of the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination ("MPRE"), administered by the National Conference of Bar Examiners, to the Office of Probation during the period of actual suspension or within one year, whichever period is longer. **Failure to pass the MPRE results in actual suspension without further hearing until passage. But see rule 9.10(b), California Rules of Court, and rule 321(a)(1) & (c), Rules of Procedure.**
- No MPRE recommended. Reason:
- (2)  **Rule 9.20, California Rules of Court:** Respondent must comply with the requirements of rule 9.20, California Rules of Court, and perform the acts specified in subdivisions (a) and (c) of that rule within 30 and 40 calendar days, respectively, after the effective date of the Supreme Court's Order in this matter.
- (3)  **Conditional Rule 9.20, California Rules of Court:** If Respondent remains actually suspended for 90 days or more, he/she must comply with the requirements of rule 9.20, California Rules of Court, and

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perform the acts specified in subdivisions (a) and (c) of that rule within 120 and 130 calendar days, respectively, after the effective date of the Supreme Court's Order in this matter.

- (4)  **Credit for Interim Suspension [conviction referral cases only]:** Respondent will be credited for the period of his/her interim suspension toward the stipulated period of actual suspension. Date of commencement of interim suspension:
- (5)  **Other Conditions:**



4. The draft fee agreement included the following language, which Respondent intended to as a conflict waiver by Audrey in the transfer of her property interest as Respondent's fee.

"As a condition of attorney's representation of Client in this matter, Client agrees to waive all claims of liability and hold attorney harmless for any purported conflict of interest herein."

5. Respondent did not at any time inform Audrey in writing that she could or should seek the advice of independent counsel regarding this transaction, although he did orally advise her to do so. Respondent gave Audrey the time to seek such advice. However, Audrey did not consent in writing to the transaction nor to the terms of the acquisition outlined in the draft fee agreement.

6. On or about August 22, 2003, Respondent filed a grant deed with the Amador County Recorder's office, bearing Audrey's notarized signature, which transferred one-half of Audrey's interest in the Pine Grove property to Respondent. Subsequently, Respondent made no attempts to make use of the property, e.g., occupy, lease, leverage, or exercise any control over it.

7. Thereafter, Respondent performed some services on behalf of Audrey in the P.I. case; however, he was prevented from completing the services due, in large part, to Audrey's failure to cooperate, including her failure to appear at hearings or trial, ultimately resulting in the dismissal of her case.

8. Due largely to Audrey's conduct, Respondent was unable to perform services to earn the full value of the fee in the P.I. case, and he did not refund the unearned portion of the fee to Audrey upon termination of the representation. Respondent did not provide services equal to the value of the Pine Grove property to Audrey throughout the representation. At no time did Respondent re-convey the one-fourth interest in the Pine Grove Property, or any portion thereof, to Audrey.

#### **CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

9. By accepting 50% interest in his client's share of the Pine Grove property as his fee for legal services, Respondent knowingly acquired an ownership, possessory, security or other pecuniary interest adverse to a client, the terms of which were not fully disclosed to the client in a manner which should reasonably have been understood by the client. By not reducing to writing any advice regarding the conflict or potential conflict with Audrey, Respondent failed to advise his client in writing that she may seek independent counsel of her choosing and failed to provide the client a

reasonable opportunity to seek such advice. By not securing Audrey's signature, approving of the terms of the proposed division of the Pine Grove property, Respondent failed to obtain the written consent of his client to the terms of the transaction or acquisition. By each of the acts or omissions herein described, Respondent wilfully violated rule 3-300.

10. By conditioning his representation of Audrey on her waiver of any claim of a conflict of interest, Respondent contracted with a client prospectively limiting Respondent's liability to the client for the member's professional malpractice, in willful violation of rule 3-400.

11. By not refunding the unearned portion of the fee paid upon termination of employment, Respondent failed, upon termination of his employment, to promptly refund any part of a fee paid in advance that had not been earned, in violation of rule 3-700(D)(2).

#### **PENDING PROCEEDINGS.**

The disclosure date referred to, on page 2, paragraph A(6), was February 19, 2010.

#### **COSTS OF DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.**

Respondent acknowledges that the Office of the Chief Trial Counsel has informed respondent that as of February 12, 2010, the prosecution costs in this matter are \$ 2,059.26. Respondent further acknowledges that should this stipulation be rejected or should relief from the stipulation be granted, the costs in this matter may increase due to the cost of further proceedings.

#### **AUTHORITIES SUPPORTING DISCIPLINE.**

Standard 2.8 provides that culpability of a member of a willful violation of rule 3-300, Rules of Professional Conduct, shall result in suspension unless the extent of the member's misconduct and the harm to the client are minimal, in which case, the degree of discipline shall be reproof. Here, the harm to Respondent's client cannot be said to be minimal, as she has not for several years enjoyed the ownership interest in the Pine Grove property to which she should have been entitled.

#### **OTHER CONDITIONS NEGOTIATED BY THE PARTIES.**

Within the first 60 days after the effective date of the Supreme Court order in this matter, Respondent will convey his interest in the Pine Grove property to Audrey. In so doing, Respondent does not waive his right to any fees earned during the representation.

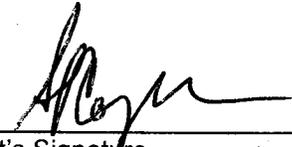
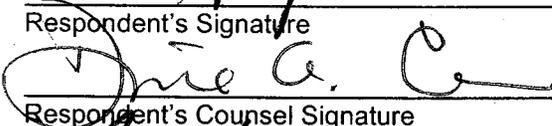
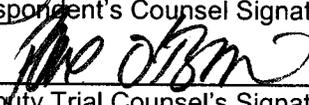
If the Pine Grove property has been sold by the time of the effective date of the Supreme Court order, Respondent will release his claim to the proceeds from the sale, and will so instruct the party or entity acting as an escrow for the sale of the Pine Grove property.

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In the Matter of <b>STEVEN JOSEPH COOPER</b>	Case number(s): <b>06-O-13698</b>
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### SIGNATURE OF THE PARTIES

By their signatures below, the parties and their counsel, as applicable, signify their agreement with each of the recitations and each of the terms and conditions of this Stipulation Re Fact, Conclusions of Law and Disposition.

<u>3/3/10</u> Date	 Respondent's Signature	<u>STEVEN J. COOPER</u> Print Name
<u>3/2/10</u> Date	 Respondent's Counsel Signature	<u>DAVID A. CLARE</u> Print Name
<u>3/9/10</u> Date	 Deputy Trial Counsel's Signature	<u>PAUL T. O'BRIEN</u> Print Name

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In the Matter Of <b>Steven Joseph Cooper</b>	Case Number(s): <b>06-O-13698</b>
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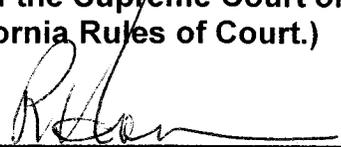
**ORDER**

Finding the stipulation to be fair to the parties and that it adequately protects the public, IT IS ORDERED that the requested dismissal of counts/charges, if any, is GRANTED without prejudice, and:

- The stipulated facts and disposition are APPROVED and the DISCIPLINE RECOMMENDED to the Supreme Court.
- The stipulated facts and disposition are APPROVED AS MODIFIED as set forth below, and the DISCIPLINE IS RECOMMENDED to the Supreme Court.
- All Hearing dates are vacated.

The parties are bound by the stipulation as approved unless: 1) a motion to withdraw or modify the stipulation, filed within 15 days after service of this order, is granted; or 2) this court modifies or further modifies the approved stipulation. (See rule 135(b), Rules of Procedure.) **The effective date of this disposition is the effective date of the Supreme Court order herein, normally 30 days after file date. (See rule 9.18(a), California Rules of Court.)**

3-17-10  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Judge of the State Bar Court  
**RICHARD A. HONN**

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

[Rule 62(b), Rules Proc.; Code Civ. Proc., § 1013a(4)]

I am a Case Administrator of the State Bar Court of California. I am over the age of eighteen and not a party to the within proceeding. Pursuant to standard court practice, in the City and County of Los Angeles, on March 18, 2010, I deposited a true copy of the following document(s):

STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND DISPOSITION AND ORDER APPROVING

in a sealed envelope for collection and mailing on that date as follows:

- by first-class mail, with postage thereon fully prepaid, through the United States Postal Service at Los Angeles, California, addressed as follows:

DAVID ALAN CLARE ESQ  
444 W OCEAN BLVD STE 800  
LONG BEACH, CA 90802

- by interoffice mail through a facility regularly maintained by the State Bar of California addressed as follows:

Paul T. O'Brien, Enforcement, Los Angeles

I hereby certify that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed in Los Angeles, California, on March 18, 2010.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Julieta E. Gonzales  
Case Administrator  
State Bar Court