

ORIGINAL

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State Bar Court of California Hearing Department Los Angeles STAYED SUSPENSION			PUBLIC MATTER
Counsel For The State Bar Heather L. Meyers Contract Deputy Trial Counsel 845 S. Figueroa Street Los Angeles, CA 90017 (213) 765-1075 Bar # 302264	Case Number(s): 15-O-11106	For Court use only FILED JUN 10 2016 STATE BAR COURT CLERK'S OFFICE LOS ANGELES	
In Pro Per Respondent Eric Martin Sippel 49 Plaza Drive Berkeley, CA 94705 (510) 420-1160 Bar # 152876	Submitted to: Settlement Judge STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND DISPOSITION AND ORDER APPROVING STAYED SUSPENSION; NO ACTUAL SUSPENSION <input type="checkbox"/> PREVIOUS STIPULATION REJECTED		
In the Matter of: Eric Martin Sippel Bar # 152876 A Member of the State Bar of California (Respondent)			

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 **June 6, 1991**.
- (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."

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- (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.
- (8) Payment of Disciplinary Costs—Respondent acknowledges the provisions of Bus. & Prof. Code §§6086.10 & 6140.7. (Check one option only):
 - ☒ Costs are added to membership fee for calendar year following effective date of discipline.
 - ☐ Costs are to be paid in equal amounts prior to February 1 for the following membership years: (Hardship, special circumstances or other good cause per rule 5.132, Rules of Procedure). If Respondent fails to pay any installment as described above, or as may be modified by the State Bar Court, the remaining balance is due and payable immediately.
 - ☐ Costs are waived in part as set forth in a separate attachment entitled "Partial Waiver of Costs".
 - ☐ Costs are entirely waived.

B. Aggravating Circumstances [Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct, standards 1.2(h) & 1.5]. Facts supporting aggravating circumstances are required.

- (1) ☐ **Prior record of discipline**
 - (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 or a separate attachment entitled "Prior Discipline."
- (2) ☐ **Intentional/Bad Faith/Dishonesty:** Respondent's misconduct was dishonest, intentional, or surrounded by, or followed by bad faith.
- (3) ☐ **Misrepresentation:** Respondent's misconduct was surrounded by, or followed by misrepresentation.
- (4) ☐ **Concealment:** Respondent's misconduct was surrounded by, or followed by concealment.
- (5) ☐ **Overreaching:** Respondent's misconduct was surrounded by, or followed by overreaching.
- (6) ☐ **Uncharged Violations:** Respondent's conduct involves uncharged violations of the Business and Professions Code, or the Rules of Professional Conduct.
- (7) ☐ **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..

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- (8) ☐ **Harm:** Respondent's misconduct harmed significantly a client, the public, or the administration of justice.
- (9) ☐ **Indifference:** Respondent demonstrated indifference toward rectification of or atonement for the consequences of his or her misconduct.
- (10) ☐ **Candor/Lack of Cooperation:** Respondent displayed a lack of candor and cooperation to victims of his/her misconduct, or to the State Bar during disciplinary investigations or proceedings.
- (11) ☐ **Multiple Acts:** Respondent's current misconduct evidences multiple acts of wrongdoing.
- (12) ☐ **Pattern:** Respondent's current misconduct demonstrates a pattern of misconduct.
- (13) ☐ **Restitution:** Respondent failed to make restitution.
- (14) ☐ **Vulnerable Victim:** The victim(s) of Respondent's misconduct was/were highly vulnerable.
- (15) ☒ **No aggravating circumstances** are involved.

Additional aggravating circumstances

C. Mitigating Circumstances [see standards 1.2(i) & 1.6]. 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 likely to recur. **See Attachment page 7**
- (2) ☐ **No Harm:** Respondent did not harm the client, the public, or the administration of justice.
- (3) ☒ **Candor/Cooperation:** Respondent displayed spontaneous candor and cooperation with the victims of his/her misconduct or to the State Bar during disciplinary investigations and proceedings. **See Attachment page 7**
- (4) ☐ **Remorse:** Respondent promptly took objective steps demonstrating spontaneous 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 with a good faith belief that was honestly held and objectively reasonable.
- (8) ☐ **Emotional/Physical Difficulties:** At the time of the stipulated act or acts of professional misconduct Respondent suffered extreme emotional difficulties or physical or mental 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 the difficulties or disabilities no longer pose a risk that Respondent will commit misconduct.

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- (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 extraordinarily 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 subsequent rehabilitation.
- (13) ☐ **No mitigating circumstances** are involved.

Additional mitigating circumstances

Community Service. See Attachment page 7
Pre-filing stipulation. See Attachment page 7

D. Discipline:

- (1) ☒ **Stayed Suspension:**
- (a) ☒ Respondent must be suspended from the practice of law for a period of **one (1) year**.
- i. ☐ and until Respondent shows proof satisfactory to the State Bar Court of rehabilitation and fitness to practice and present learning and ability in the general law pursuant to standard 1.2(c)(1), 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:

The above-referenced suspension is stayed.

- (2) ☒ **Probation:**

Respondent is placed on probation for a period of **one (1) year**, which will commence upon the effective date of the Supreme Court order in this matter. (See rule 9.18 California Rules of Court.)

E. Additional Conditions of Probation:

- (1) ☒ During the probation period, Respondent must comply with the provisions of the State Bar Act and Rules of Professional Conduct.
- (2) ☒ 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.
- (3) ☒ 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

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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.

- (4) ☒ 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.

- (5) ☐ 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.
- (6) ☒ 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.
- (7) ☒ 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 State Bar Ethics School, and passage of the test given at the end of that session.
- ☐ No Ethics School recommended. Reason: .
- (8) ☐ 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.
- (9) ☐ 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 within one year. **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 5.162(A) & (E), Rules of Procedure.**
- ☐ No MPRE recommended. Reason: .
- (2) ☐ **Other Conditions:**

ATTACHMENT TO
STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND DISPOSITION

IN THE MATTER OF: Eric Martin Sippel

CASE NUMBER: 15-O-11106

FACTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW.

Respondent admits that the following facts are true and that he is culpable of violations of the specified statutes and/or Rules of Professional Conduct.

Case No. 15-O-11106 (State Bar Investigation)

FACTS:

1. As a member of the State Bar, Eric Martin Sippel ("respondent") was required to complete 25 hours of Minimum Continuing Legal Education ("MCLE") during the period between February 1, 2011, and January 31, 2014 (the "compliance period").
2. On January 29, 2014, respondent affirmed under penalty of perjury to the State Bar that he had complied with the MCLE requirement, and in particular, that he had completed 25 hours of MCLE during the compliance period.
3. In fact, respondent had not completed any hours of MCLE during the compliance period. Respondent failed to review his records prior to affirming compliance, and erroneously believed that he had completed his requirements.
4. When respondent reported to the State Bar under penalty of perjury that he complied with the MCLE requirements, respondent failed to refer to any records or confirm that he had actually completed his MCLE requirements which rendered him grossly negligent in not knowing he had not completed his MCLE requirements during the compliance period as required.
5. By August 1, 2014, respondent completed the MCLE hours necessary to come into compliance after being contacted on July 7, 2014, by the State Bar's Office of Member Records and Compliance regarding an audit of MCLE compliance. Respondent timely complied with the audit.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

6. By reporting under penalty of perjury to the State Bar that he was in compliance with the MCLE requirements when he was grossly negligent in not knowing that he was not in compliance with MCLE requirements, respondent committed an act involving, moral turpitude in violation of Business and Professions Code section 6106.

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

No Prior Discipline (Std. 1.6(a)): Respondent was admitted to practice on June 6, 1991. At the time of the misconduct, Respondent had practiced law for approximately 22 and one half years without a record of discipline. Respondent's 22 and one half years of discipline free practice prior to the misconduct indicates that the present misconduct is an aberration and not likely to recur. While Respondent's conduct is serious, he is entitled to substantial mitigation for a discipline-free record after a significant number of years of practicing law. (*Hawes v. State Bar*, (1990) 51 Cal.3d 587, 596 [gave significant weight in mitigation to attorney practicing 10 years without discipline]; *In the Matter of Riordan* (Review Dept. 2007) 5 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 41 [mitigation credit for many years of discipline free practice given even when conduct is serious].)

Pro Bono Work/Community Service: Pro Bono and community service may mitigate an attorney's misconduct. (*Calvert v. State Bar* (1991) 54 Cal.3d 765, 785.) Respondent has served as a volunteer as on the Board of Directors for the East Bay United Soccer Club (hereafter, the "soccer club") for the past 10 years, the last seven of which he has served as the volunteer President. The soccer club serves approximately 3,000 youth players in the Oakland area. Since 2010, respondent has devoted between 30-60 hours per week to the soccer club. He has also volunteered as a coach for the youth league for 6 hours per week since 2010. Respondent's clear and continued commitment to the community warrants strong mitigation. (See *In the Matter of John Young Song* (Review Dept. 2013) 5 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 273, finding that an extensive history of community service and pro bono work merited significant mitigation).

Candor and Cooperation: Respondent responded to the MCLE audit by letter on August 1, 2014. In that letter respondent admitted that he relied on his memory when making his affirmation of compliance, that he realized that he is required by the rules to keep records of his compliance, and that he failed to do so. Respondent also admitted his failure to keep adequate records and refer to them prior to affirming compliance to State Bar investigators by letter on May 4, 2015. Respondent is entitled to mitigative credit for admitting his culpability to the misconduct at an early stage in the investigation. (*In the Matter of Yee* (Review Dept. 2014) 5 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 330, 335 [mitigative credit given where respondent admitted her misconduct to the investigator before trial].)

Prefiling Stipulation: Respondent is entitled to mitigation for entering into the stipulation prior to the filing of disciplinary charges, thereby preserving State Bar Court time and resources. (*Silva-Vidor v. State Bar* (1989) 49 Cal.3d 1071, 1079 [where mitigative credit was given for entering into a stipulation as to facts and culpability].) Entering into a prefiling stipulation is also evidence of his acknowledgment of his misconduct.

AUTHORITIES SUPPORTING DISCIPLINE.

The Standards "set forth a means for determining the appropriate disciplinary sanction in a particular case and to ensure consistence across cases dealing with similar misconduct and surrounding circumstances." (Std. 1.1) The Standards help fulfill the primary purpose of discipline, which include: protection of the public, the courts and the legal profession; maintenance of the highest professional standards; and, preservation of public confidence in the legal profession. (See Std. 1.1; *In re Morse* (1995) 11 Cal.4th 184, 205)

Although not binding, the Standards are entitled to “great weight” (*In re Silverton* (2005) 36 Cal 4th 81, 92, quoting *In re Brown* (1995) 12 Cal.4th 205, 220) as they “promote the consistent and uniform application of disciplinary measures” (*In re Silverton* at 91). As a result, the Standards should be followed “whenever possible” (*Id.* at 92, quoting *In re Young* (1989) 49 Cal.3d 257, 267) and deviations from the discipline stated in the Standards “should be elaborated with care.” (*Id.* at 92).

In determining whether to impose a sanction greater or less than the specified in a given Standard, attention should be paid to the factors set forth in the specific Standard, as well as the primary purposes of discipline; the balancing of all mitigating and aggravating circumstances; the type of misconduct at issue; whether and to what extent the client, public, legal system or profession was harmed; and the member’s willingness and ability to conform to ethical responsibilities in the future. (Stds. 1.7(b) and (c)).

Standard 2.11 applies to respondent’s acts of moral turpitude. Standard 2.11 states that the presumed discipline for an act of moral turpitude is disbarment or actual suspension. Standard 2.11 further states, “[t]he degree of sanction depends on the magnitude of misconduct; the extent to which the misconduct harmed or misled the victim, which may include the adjudicator; the impact on the administration of justice, if any; and the extent to which the misconduct related to the member’s practice of law.”

While Standard 2.11 calls for actual suspension, Standard 1.7(c) indicates that mitigating factors should be considered and may demonstrate the need for a lesser sanction than called for by the Standards. Here, respondent made a grossly negligent misrepresentation, under penalty of perjury, that he completed the required 25 hour MCLE requirement when he had in fact not completed any hours during the compliance period. Respondent’s misconduct circumvented the continuing legal education requirements established for the purpose of enhancing attorney competence and protecting the public. However, respondent’s mitigation tends to indicate that his misconduct is an aberration and unlikely to recur. Of note, respondent’s 22 and one half years discipline free practice provides substantial mitigation. Further, respondent has volunteered full-time for a youth soccer club serving the Oakland area since 2010. This community service warrants substantial mitigation. Respondent was candid and cooperative by admitting his culpability from the onset of the initial audit and throughout the State Bar investigation. Additionally, by entering into this pre-filing stipulation respondent shows that he recognized his misconduct, and saved State Bar time and resources. Further, there are no aggravating factors present. Therefore, a deviation from Standard 2.11 is warranted and a recommendation of a one year stayed suspension and one year of probation is appropriate in this matter.

Case law also supports this level of discipline. It is important to also consider the Review Department decision in *In the Matter of Yee* (Review Dept. 2014) 5 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 330. Attorney Yee submitted her MCLE compliance card and affirmed that she had completed the requisite 25 hours during her compliance period. However, during a subsequent audit and State Bar investigation, Yee was unable to produce any record of compliance. The Review Department found that “Yee’s failure to verify her MCLE compliance before affirming it constitutes gross negligence amounting to moral turpitude for discipline purposes” (*Yee* at 334), but declined to find she had misrepresented her MCLE compliance intentionally. The Review Department found strong mitigation in Yee’s case. In particular, the Review Department noted Yee’s: (1) 10 and one half years of discipline-free practice; (2) her candor and cooperation with the State Bar during the investigation; (3) her good character as evidenced by the testimony of eleven witnesses; (4) her immediate recognition of wrongdoing and creation of a plan to avoid such issues in the future; and, (5) her significant amount of pro bono work and service to the

community. *Id.* at 335-36. In *Yee*, the Review Department imposed discipline consisting of a public reproof.

Using *Yee* as a guide, respondent is afforded substantial mitigation for his 22 and one half years of practice without a record of discipline. Also like *Yee*, respondent provided substantial evidence of exemplary and extensive community service, and exhibited candor and cooperation with the State Bar by admitting culpability as early in the process as the audit. Unlike *Yee*, respondent has not offered any evidence of good character. Therefore, the application of the Standards and the findings in *Yee* support an outcome of public discipline greater than *Yee*.

In light of the totality of the facts and circumstances presently available, including the mitigation of candor and cooperation, exemplary community service, pre-filing stipulation and a discipline-free record, discipline consisting of a one year stayed suspension and one year of probation with conditions, is appropriate to protect the public, courts and the legal profession, to maintain high professional standards by attorneys, and to preserve public confidence in the legal profession.

COSTS OF DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.

Respondent acknowledges that the Office of Chief Trial Counsel has informed Respondent that as of May 10, 2016, the prosecution costs in this matter are \$3,139.00. 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.

EXCLUSION FROM MCLE CREDIT

Pursuant to rule 3201, respondent may not receive MCLE credit for completion of the ethics courses ordered as a condition of his probation. (Rules Proc. of State Bar, rule 3201.)

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In the Matter of:
ERIC MARTIN SIPPEL

Case number(s):
15-O-11106

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 Facts, Conclusions of Law, and Disposition.

5/16/16
Date

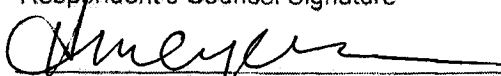

Respondent's Signature

ERIC MARTIN SIPPEL
Print Name

Date

5/25/16
Date

Respondent's Counsel Signature


Contract Deputy Trial Counsel's Signature

Print Name

HEATHER MEYERS
Print Name

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In the Matter of:
ERIC MARTIN SIPPEL

Case Number(s):
15-O-11106

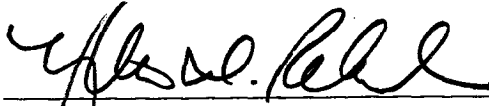
STAYED SUSPENSION ORDER

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 5.58(E) & (F), 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.)**

June 9, 2016
Date


Judge of the State Bar Court

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

[Rules Proc. of State Bar; Rule 5.27(B); 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 June 10, 2016, 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:

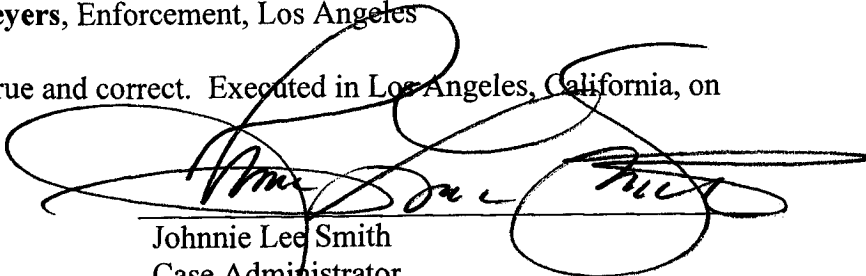
- ☒ by first-class mail, with postage thereon fully prepaid, through the United States Postal Service at Los Angeles, California, addressed as follows:

ERIC M. SIPPEL
49 PLAZA DR
BERKELEY, CA 94705

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

Heather L. Meyers, Enforcement, Los Angeles

I hereby certify that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed in Los Angeles, California, on June 10, 2016.



Johnnie Lee Smith
Case Administrator
State Bar Court