State Bar Court of California **Hearing Department** San Francisco **ACTUAL SUSPENSION** For Court use only Counsel For The State Bar Case Number(s): 15-O-11666-PEM PUBLIC MATTER Robert A. Henderson Supervising Senior Trial Counsel 180 Howard St. San Francisco, CA 94105 (415) 538-2385 AUG 1 5 2016 Bar # 173205 Counsel For Respondent STATE BAR COURT CLERK'S OFFICE SAN FRANCISCO Jonathan I. Arons Law Office of Jonathan I. Arons 100 Bush St., Suite 918 San Francisco, CA 94104 (415) 957-1818 Submitted to: Settlement Judge STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND Bar # 111257 DISPOSITION AND ORDER APPROVING In the Matter of: ESTHER M. KIM **ACTUAL SUSPENSION** PREVIOUS STIPULATION REJECTED Bar # 271155 A Member of the State Bar of California

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 October 28, 2010.
- (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 12 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."

(Respondent)

(Do no	ot write	above this line.)				
(5)		Conclusions of law, drawn from and specifically referring to the facts are also included under "Conclusions of Law".				
(6)		parties must include supporting authority for the recommended level of discipline under the heading pporting Authority."				
(7)	No r	nore than 30 days prior to the filing of this stipulation, Respondent has been advised in writing of any fing investigation/proceeding not resolved by this stipulation, except for criminal investigations.				
(8) Payment of Disciplinary Costs—Respondent acknowledges the provisions of Bus. & Prof. Code § 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 5.130, Rules of Procedure. Costs are to be paid in equal amounts prior to February 1 for the following membership years: Three billing cycles immediately following the effective date of the Supreme Court Order in this matte (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". 					
r	Aggra Visco equi	avating Circumstances [Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional onduct, standards 1.2(h) & 1.5]. Facts supporting aggravating circumstances are red.				
(1)	□ (a)	Prior record of discipline 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)		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.				

(Do no	ot write	above this line.)				
(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.				
(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				
(10)		consequences of his or her misconduct. 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)	\boxtimes	Multiple Acts: Respondent's current misconduct evidences multiple acts of wrongdoing. See Attachment to Stipulation at p. 9.				
(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:						
		ating Circumstances [see standards 1.2(i) & 1.6]. Facts supporting mitigating mstances 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.				
(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.				
(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				

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		produ or dis	uct of a	any illegal conduct by the member, such as illegal drug or substance abuse, and the difficulties es no longer pose a risk that Respondent will commit misconduct.		
(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 convincing proof of subsequent rehabilitation.				
(13)		No n	nitigat	ting circumstances are involved.		
Addi	tiona	al mit	igatin	g circumstances:		
	P	re-tria	al Stip	pulation - See Attachment to Stipulation at p. 9.		
D. E)isci	pline	e:			
(1)	\boxtimes	Stay	ed Su	spension:		
	(a)	\boxtimes	Resp	condent 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 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.		
		íii.		and until Respondent does the following:		
	(b)	\boxtimes	The	above-referenced suspension is stayed.		
(2)	\boxtimes	Probation:				
	Res dat	espondent must be placed on probation for a period of two years , which will commence upon the effective ate of the Supreme Court order in this matter. (See rule 9.18, California Rules of Court)				
(3)	\boxtimes	Actual Suspension:				
	(a)	\boxtimes	Resport of 30	condent must be actually suspended from the practice of law in the State of California for a period days.		
		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.		

(Do not write above this line.)							
(10)	(10) The following conditions are attached hereto and incorporated:						
			Substance Abuse Conditions		Law Office Management Conditions		
			Medical Conditions		Financial Conditions		
F. O	the	r Con	ditions Negotiated by the Parties	s:			
(1)	\boxtimes	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 with one year, whichever period is longer. Failure to pass the MPRE results in actual suspension with further hearing until passage. But see rule 9.10(b), California Rules of Court, and rule 5.162(A) & (E), Rules of Procedure.					
		<u> </u>	No MPRE recommended. Reason:				
(2)		Cali	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)		day perl	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 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)		peri	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)		Oth	er Conditions:				

ATTACHMENT TO

STIPULATION RE FACTS, CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND DISPOSITION

IN THE MATTER OF:

ESTHER M. KIM

CASE NUMBER:

15-O-11666-LMA

FACTS AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW.

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

Case No. 15-O-11666 (Complainant: Harjinder Pal and Meena Kumari)

FACTS:

- 1. In 2013, Harjinder Pal ("Pal") and Meena Kumari ("Kumari") hired respondent to represent them as plaintiffs in a matter involving an automobile accident.
 - 2. Pal and Kumari received an undated contract that had not been signed by respondent.
- 3. On November 18, 2013, respondent spoke with Michael Katz the adjuster for AAA Insurance ("AAA"). In the conversation there was an offer of settlement for Kumari.
- 4. On November 22, 2013, a written offer of settlement was made by AAA of \$16,000 for Pal and a memorialization of a settlement of \$1,200 for Kumari. Follow-up letters on the offer to settle were sent by AAA on January 8, 2014 and June 4, 2014. Although respondent verbally confirmed the settlement of Kumari's claim, she never provided the signed release. Although respondent received the letters, she did not provide AAA with a response to any of the letters.
- 5. Respondent did not inform Pal and Kumari of the settlement offers by AAA, but respondent's brother did inform Pal of the offer months after the fact.
- 6. On July 17, 2014, Pal emailed respondent expressing concern about a lack of communication. The email referenced "many" voicemails that had been left for respondent without a response.
- 7. On September 4, 2014, and November 12, 2014, Pal and Kumari contacted the State Bar complaining about respondent's lack of communication.
- 8. On December 26, 2014, respondent filed *Pal v. Mead*, Santa Clara County Superior Court case no. 114CV274965. Respondent failed to serve the defendant. The initial Case Management Conference was set for April 21, 2015. Respondent ceased communicating with Pal and Kumari subsequent to filing and thereby constructively terminated her employment. Subsequent to the filing, respondent did not take any steps to protect the interests of Pal and Kumari, including failing to notify Pal and Kumari that she would no longer be working on the matter.

- 9. On March 13, 2015, the County of Santa Clara filed a Notice of Lien in the matter, which was served on respondent. Respondent did not notify Pal and Kumari of the lien.
- 10. On April 21, 2015, a Case Management Conference was held in the matter. Respondent failed to appear. The court set an Order to Show Cause hearing for June 25, 2015 re: failure to appear and serve the defendant. Respondent received the order, but did not inform Pal and Kumari.
- 11. In May 2015, respondent vacated her office in Santa Clara. Respondent did not change her official membership address until February 2016. Respondent did not provide Pal and Kumari new contact information.
- 12. On June 25, 2015, respondent failed to appear and the matter was continued to August 27, 2015. Respondent received notice of the continuance, but did not inform Pal and Kumari.
 - 13. In August 2015, Pal and Kumari hired Matthew Webb ("Webb") to take over the matter.
- 14. On August 13, 2015, Pal and Kumari signed a substitution of attorney form, which was also signed by successor counsel Webb. Although Webb attempted to get respondent to sign the substitution of attorney, he was unsuccessful. Webb was forced to file an Ex Parte Application to Remove respondent as counsel.
- 15. On August 27, 2015, respondent failed to appear and the matter was continued to December 3, 2015. Thereafter, Webb successfully entered the representation of Pal and Kumari. Thereafter, respondent failed to communicate with successor counsel and did not turn over the file.
- 16. On December 9, 2014, May 13, 2015 and July 17, 2015, letters were sent to respondent by a State Bar investigator requesting a substantive written response to the complaints of Pal and Kumari. Respondent received these letters, but failed to provide a substantive response.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

- 17. By failing to respond to settlement offers made by AAA Insurance, failing to serve the defendant after filing the lawsuit, failing to appear at the Case Management Conference and by failing to appear at the OSC set for June 25, 2015 and continued to August 27, 2015, respondent intentionally, recklessly, or repeatedly failed to perform legal services with competence in willful violation of Rules of Professional Conduct, rule 3-110(A).
- 18. By failing to respond promptly to the email and numerous voicemails of Pal requesting a status update, respondent willfully failed to provide reasonable status updates in a matter in which respondent had agreed to provide legal services, in willful violation of Business and Professions Code, section 6068(m).
- 19. By failing to inform Pal and Kumari that AAA had made an offer of settlement, that AAA had not been served the complaint, that the County of Santa Clara had asserted a lien, that respondent failed to appear at the Case Management Conference and that an Order to Show Cause re: Dismissal had been filed, respondent willfully failed to keep a client informed of significant developments in a matter in which respondent had agreed to provide legal services in willful violation of Business and Professions Code, section 6068(m).

- 20. By failing to attend the April 21, 2015, Case Management Conference as ordered on December 26, 2014, and by failing to appear at the Order to Show Cause hearing set for June 25, 2015 and continued to August 27, 2015, as ordered on April 21, 2015, respondent willfully disobeyed an order of the court, requiring respondent to do or forbear an act connected with her profession, which respondent ought in good faith to do or forbear, in willful violation of Business and Professions Code, section 6103.
- 21. By failing to take any action on behalf of Pal and Kumari after the filing of December 26, 2014, and by constructively terminating her employment thereafter without taking any steps to protect the interests of Pal and Kumari, respondent failed upon termination to take reasonable steps to avoid reasonably foreseeable prejudice to respondent's clients, in willful violation of Rules of Professional Conduct, rule 3-700(A)(2).
- 22. By failing to release the client file to successor counsel, respondent failed to promptly release the client file after termination of employment, in willful violation of Rules of Professional Conduct, rule 3-700(D)(1).
- 23. By failing to respond to the State Bar investigator's letters of December 9, 2014, May 13, 2015 and July 17, 2015, respondent willfully violated Business and Professions Code, section 6068(i).
- 24. By failing to update her official membership records address within 30-days of closing her Santa Clara office in May 2015, respondent willfully violated Business and Professions Code, section 6068(j).

AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

Multiple Acts of Misconduct (Std. 1.5(b)): Respondent has committed eight violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct and Business and Professions Code, which constitute multiple-acts of misconduct.

FACTS SUPPORTING MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES.

Pretrial Stipulation: By entering into this stipulation, respondent has acknowledged misconduct and is entitled to mitigation for recognition of wrongdoing and saving the State Bar significant resources and time. (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]; In the Matter of Spaith (Review Dept. 1996) 3 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 511, 521 [where the attorney's stipulation to facts and culpability was held to be a mitigating circumstance].)

AUTHORITIES SUPPORTING DISCIPLINE.

The Standards for Attorney Sanctions for Professional Misconduct "set forth a means for determining the appropriate disciplinary sanction in a particular case and to ensure consistency across cases dealing with similar misconduct and surrounding circumstances." (Rules Proc. of State Bar, tit. IV, Stds. for Atty. Sanctions for Prof. Misconduct, std. 1.1. All further references to Standards are to this source.) The Standards help fulfill the primary purposes 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" and should be followed "whenever possible" in determining level of discipline. (In re Silverton (2005) 36 Cal.4th 81, 92, quoting In re Brown (1995) 12 Cal.4th 205, 220 and In re Young (1989) 49 Cal.3d 257, 267, fn. 11.) Adherence to the standards in the great majority of cases serves the valuable purpose of eliminating disparity and assuring consistency, that is, the imposition of similar attorney discipline for instances of similar attorney misconduct. (In re Naney (1990) 51 Cal.3d 186, 190.) If a recommendation is at the high end or low end of a Standard, an explanation must be given as to how the recommendation was reached. (Std. 1.1.) "Any disciplinary recommendation that deviates from the Standards must include clear reasons for the departure." (Std. 1.1; Blair v. State Bar (1989) 49 Cal.3d 762, 776, fn. 5.)

In determining whether to impose a sanction greater or less than that specified in a given standard, in addition to the factors set forth in the specific standard, consideration is to be given to the primary purposes of discipline; the balancing of all aggravating and mitigating circumstances; the type of misconduct at issue; whether 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).)

In this matter, respondent's professional misconduct is in a single client matter. The applicable Standard is 2.12 which states:

(a) Disbarment or actual suspension is the presumed sanction for disobedience or violation of a court order related to the member's practice of law, the attorney's oath, or the duties required of an attorney under Business and Professions Code section 6068(a)(b)(d)(e)(f) or (h).

Case law supports a suspension. In *In the Matter of Riordan* (Review Dept. 2007) 5 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 41, the court recommended a six-month stayed suspension for an attorney who, in a single client matter, failed to perform in criminal appellate and habeas corpus proceedings, failed to obey court orders and failed to report sanctions. In aggravation, the court found multiple acts of misconduct and harm. In mitigation, the court found no prior record of discipline in 17 years of practice, no further misconduct, good character and cooperation for entering into a fact stipulation.

Unlike *Riordan*, respondent has the single mitigating factor of a pre-trial stipulation. Respondent as did *Riordan*, failed to obey a court order, failed to perform and has other acts of misconduct. Respondent did not return the client file or provide a substantive response to the State Bar, so a higher level of discipline is appropriate. However, as the misconduct is limited to a single client matter, discipline on the low end of the Standard is appropriate. On balance a 30 day actual suspension will follow the applicable Standard and is adequate to protect the profession and the public.

COSTS OF DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS.

Respondent acknowledges that the Office of Chief Trial Counsel has informed Respondent that as of July 11, 2016, the prosecution costs in this matter are \$5,680. 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 <u>not</u> receive MCLE credit for completion of State Bar Ethics School, State Bar Client Trust Accounting School, and/or any other educational course(s) to be ordered as a condition of reproval or suspension. (Rules Proc. of State Bar, rule 3201.)

(Do not write above this line.)		
In the Matter of: ESTHER M. KIM	Case number(s): 15-O-11666-PEM	

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.

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Date	7		
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espondent's Signature

Respondent's Counsel Signature

Deputy Trial Counsel's Signature

Esther M. Kim

Print Name

Jonathan I. Arons

Print Name

Sherrie B. McLetchia

Print Name

In the Matter of:	Case Number(s):
ESTHER M. KIM	15-O-11666-PEM

ACTUAL 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.)

to 2016

LUCY ARMENDARIZ

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 San Francisco, on August 15, 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 San Francisco, California, addressed as follows:

JONATHAN IRWIN ARONS LAW OFC JONATHAN I ARONS 100 BUSH ST STE 918 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94104

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

SHERRIE B. McLETCHIE, Enforcement, San Francisco

I hereby certify that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed in San Francisco, California, on August 15, 2016.

Bernadette Molina Case Administrator State Bar Court