

**IN THE MATTER OF PART 3 OF THE
LEGAL PROFESSION ACT, RSA 2000, c. L-8**

AND

**IN THE MATTER OF A HEARING REGARDING
THE CONDUCT OF RONALD BILLINGSLEY
A MEMBER OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF ALBERTA**

Hearing Committee

Ken Warren, KC – Chair and Former Benchers
Corie Flett, KC – Former Benchers
Patti Grier – Public Adjudicator

Appearances

Sakeb Nazim – Counsel for the Law Society of Alberta (LSA)
Ronald Billingsley – Self-represented

Hearing Date

June 30, 2026

Hearing Location

Virtual Hearing

HEARING COMMITTEE REPORT

Overview

1. The following citation was directed to hearing by a Conduct Committee Panel on June 16, 2024:
 - 1) It is alleged that Ronald S. Billingsley communicated with his client in a manner that lacked courtesy, civility, and professionalism and that such conduct is deserving of sanction.
2. Mr. Billingsley graduated from McGill University in 2001 and was called to the bar in New York state in 2002. He was admitted as a member of the LSA on November 21, 2011. Since then, he practiced in small firm settings and most recently operated his own firm in Edmonton as a family and divorce lawyer. On the date of the hearing, Mr. Billingsley was a suspended member of the LSA, having been interim suspended on November 27, 2025.
3. On June 30, 2026, the Hearing Committee (Committee) convened a hearing into the conduct of Mr. Billingsley to address the above citation.

4. After reviewing the Statement of Admitted facts, Exhibits and Admission of Guilt (SAF) and hearing the submissions and arguments of the LSA and Mr. Billingsley, for the reasons set out below, the Committee finds Mr. Billingsley guilty of conduct deserving of sanction on the single citation pursuant to section 71 of the *Legal Profession Act* (the *Act*).
5. The Committee also finds that, based on the facts of this case and the authorities considered, the appropriate sanction is a two-week suspension, to run concurrently with Mr. Billingsley's current interim suspension, in accordance with section 72(1) of the *Act*.
6. In addition, pursuant to section 72(2) of the *Act*, the Committee orders the payment of costs in the amount of \$6,461.26, to be paid by June 30, 2028.

Preliminary Matters

7. There were no objections to the constitution of the Committee or its jurisdiction and a private hearing was not requested, so a public hearing into Mr. Billingsley's conduct proceeded. Mr. Billingsley confirmed that that he was prepared to proceed without counsel. As Mr. Billingsley could not access a hard copy of the exhibit binder, an electronic copy was sent to him during the hearing and documents were screen shared with him without objection.

Agreed Statement of Facts/Background

8. The SAF was found by the Conduct Committee of the LSA on June 16, 2026 to be in a form acceptable to it, resulting pursuant to section 60(4) of the *Act* in a deemed finding that Mr. Billingsley's admitted conduct is deserving of sanction.

Admitted Facts

9. The complainant (the Client) is a former client of Mr. Billingsley who had filed for divorce from her husband in 2020. She represented herself in a three-day Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta trial in March, 2022 and also filed Notices of Appeal from the trial judgment. On April 25, 2022, the Client contacted Mr. Billingsley and asked if he could assist her in assessing the merits of her appeals relating to the matrimonial proceedings involving her ex-spouse.
10. On April 28, 2022, the Client paid a retainer of \$10,000.00, which was later supplemented by a payment of \$3,000.00 on May 31, 2022, and \$3,000.00 on June 3, 2022. Mr. Billingsley was formally retained on or about May 1, 2022, after the Client provided him with a signed retainer letter. The retainer concluded on or about June 6, 2022 when the Client retrieved her file materials from Mr. Billingsley. Mr. Billingsley invoiced a total of \$14,791.61 for his services. That amount was reduced to \$12,355.61 by a Reviewing Officer in April 2024.

11. The Client filed her complaint on June 28, 2022.
12. On April 29, 2022, the Client dropped off her file materials in person at Mr. Billingsley's home office, during which interaction he was rude to her. Mr. Billingsley texted her an apology the following day that provided, "...I'm sorry I was unkind...had a very bad day yesterday...I'll be more sensitive to your situation...promise...thank you...have a restful good weekend ma'am."
13. Unfortunately, for both the Client and Mr. Billingsley, the record demonstrates that Mr. Billingsley did not honor his promise. He admitted to the LSA investigators that his communications to the Client were "uncivil and rude". The SAF includes the following examples of Mr. Billingsley's offensive communications:
 - In an invoice, he referred to emailing the Client on May 6 to request that she "stop bombarding me with information" and calling her to tell her to "STOP harassing me and be patient".
 - In a May 7 text he wrote, "I am working this weekend on OTHER files, your matter for the tenth time now or so, has to wait, or I can't do it."
 - In a May 9 text he wrote, "Do you drink? I have a bottle of Reisling I want to give you the next time we meet if you want it. You can trust me. You just need to be patient with me please and chill out."
 - In communications with opposing counsel, he repeatedly referred to the Client's file materials as a "2-foot pile". In his account for services, he referred to on June 2 "reviewing 2-foot mess you left me in several unannounced dropping off of more paper to review". In an interview on November 2, 2022 with a LSA investigator, Mr. Billingsley referred to the Client's file materials as a "disorganized pile of shit to go through".
 - In response to a June 2 text from the Client in which she had mistakenly referred to Mr. Billingsley as "Ryan", he responded, "The name is RON, not Ryan! Please get my name straight."
 - In response to the client questioning why Mr. Billingsley could not do the work during the week, rather than on a weekend at a higher rate, Mr. Billingsley responded by text on June 2, "Because it's a big job and requires my undivided attention and I am very busy with other files emails and calls. Please stop questioning everything I say."
 - On June 3, Mr. Billingsley left a voicemail message for the client advising her that he had reviewed her file and that he would not be representing her on her appeals. He included the following comments in his voicemail, "...Ma'am it's my professional and personal opinion that you need therapy and not a lawyer, ok? I'm sorry. If you harass me or come to my house uninvited, I'm gonna call the police, ok? You are, you're not well, you're not well [the Client's name]. I've read the transcript and it's really really bad, ok?"

- Within minutes of that voicemail message, Mr. Billingsley sent an email to the Client that included, "... You need medical counseling and therapy... I give you ZERO chance of success after my careful review. I also now see why 10 lawyers refused your file. I am professional and personally embarrassed to take you on as a client, and I cannot jeopardize my other clients or my reputation by continuing to represent you...Your flash drive with all the documents and your original binders of evidence I will return to you. I'm keeping some of it for my own file and personal records to substantiate my opinion letter which I will send to you WHEN I have the time to get to it...Please don't harass me with texts, voicemails and emails and start bullying me too, I will not tolerate it and I will call the police and/or block you. You are not well ma'am. You need serious medical help."
 - On June 6, in an exchange with the client about retrieving her file materials, Mr. Billingsley texted, "Best of luck representing yourself. You are going to lose ma'am."
 - On or around the same time, Mr. Billingsley texted the Client, "These are all photos of organizational work I did on your file...do not ever contact me again or I will have you charged with harassment. Get psychological help!!!! You are a vengeful vindictive woman."
14. In an October 31, 2022 response to the complaint, Mr. Billingsley admitted that he lost his patience and temper with the Client more than once. He complained that the Client was not polite, came to his house numerous times unannounced, would not follow his instructions, had no patience and was erratic and unstable. He described the Client as one of the most difficult clients he had ever had. On the same day, he sent an email to the Client offering an apology of sorts, "Please accept this short email as my formal apology for any untoward or rude comments I made to you during my representation. I found you very impatient and rude yourself at times, but that was no excuse for some of the things I said to you. I'm sorry."
15. Mr. Billingsley was at some point diagnosed with a mental health condition that coincided with his dealings with the Client during the summer of 2022 and resulted in his hospitalization from August 31, 2022 to September 3, 2022. No medical evidence was adduced to the Committee.

Joint Submission on Sanction

16. In his opening statement to the Committee, counsel for the LSA referred to a joint submission on sanction providing for a two-week suspension and payment of costs. Mr. Billingsley acknowledged agreement with the two-week suspension but expressed objection to an award of costs against him. He indicated a preference for a longer suspension in lieu of a costs award.
17. Section 72(1) of the *Act* provides that a hearing committee that finds a member guilty of conduct deserving of sanction shall order either that the member be disbarred,

suspended or reprimanded. Section 72(2) of the *Act* provides that in addition to any order made under section 72(1), a hearing committee may order one or more of conditions on the member's suspension or practice, the payment of a fine not exceeding \$10,000.00 or an order for payment of the costs of the proceeding.

18. The Committee considers the joint submission to relate to the suspension and its duration only. The Committee retains discretion under section 72(2) of the *Act* to deal with any award of costs based upon the submissions of the parties and the authorities.
19. The LSA Pre-Hearing and Hearing Guideline (2026) (Hearing Guideline) summarizes the benefits to both the member and the LSA of a joint submission on sanction:
 - a) it is a more efficient means of concluding the proceedings, saving time costs and resources;
 - b) it provides the parties with certainty regarding the outcome, particularly in cases where either party faces challenging evidentiary issues;
 - c) complainants and other witnesses are spared from having to testify publicly;
 - d) complainants may perceive the lawyer's Admission as an important acknowledgment of responsibility or an expression of remorse;
 - e) an Admission and a joint submission on sanction provides the lawyer with an opportunity to demonstrate accountability for their conduct.
20. The Hearing Guideline confirms the applicability of the "public interest test" when considering a joint submission on sanction in a LSA conduct proceeding. The joint submission should be accepted unless the proposed sanction would bring the administration of justice into disrepute or is otherwise contrary to the public interest.
21. Counsel for the LSA submitted a number of authorities for consideration by the committee. With two exceptions, none of the authorities dealt with facts similar to those here. The sanctions tended to be reprimands coupled with fines and/or costs: *Law Society of Alberta v. Forsyth-Nicholson*, 2013 ABLS 24; *Law Society of Alberta v. Rauf*, 2022 ABLS 1; *Law Society of Alberta v. Robert Christensen*, 2007 LSA 3; *Law Society of Alberta v. Smith*, 2024 ABLS 12; and *Law Society of Alberta v. Scott*, 2025 ABLS 21. In *Law Society of Alberta v. Forsyth-Nicholson*, 2010 ABLS 7, the sanction was a 7-day suspension, a fine and costs.
22. The two authorities that aligned most closely with the facts here are prior discipline decisions involving Mr. Billingsley, each arising from family law matters. In *Law Society of Alberta v. Billingsley*, Order of the Hearing Committee, the sanction was a reprimand, a fine of \$2,000.00 and costs of \$866.20 payable within one year. The citations included one for communicating with his client in a manner that lacked courtesy, civility and professionalism, conduct that was admitted by Mr. Billingsley. In *Law Society of Alberta v. Billingsley*, 2023 ABLS 22, the citations were that Mr. Billingsley failed to provide his client with conscientious, candid and diligent service, conduct admitted by Mr. Billingsley.

The sanction was a reprimand, a fine of \$5,000.00 and costs of \$3,500.00 payable within one year. The reprimand included an admonition that Mr. Billingsley must work on his client communications and handle his clients' concerns more respectfully.

Decision on Sanction

23. The Hearing Guideline provides that the fundamental purposes of sanctioning are to ensure the public is protected from acts of professional misconduct and to protect the public's confidence in the integrity of the profession. It further notes that suspension is appropriate for repeated misconduct and that aggravating and mitigating factors may be recognized in determining the length of the suspension.
24. Mr. Billingsley has repeatedly displayed an inappropriate communication style with his clients. A prior reprimand for similar misconduct did not prevent the misconduct in this case. The second reprimand, that included comments directed at Mr. Billingsley's client communication tendencies, was not delivered until after the misconduct in this case but the timing of its underlying complaint confirms that the first reprimand was not effective.
25. Mr. Billingsley's communications with the Client were in numerous instances highly discourteous, uncivil and unprofessional both in substance and in tone. A demanding client does not give a lawyer license to behave unprofessionally and rudely in response. The converse is in fact required. The lawyer must exercise diligence to ensure that impatience or frustration does not provoke a breach of the lawyer's professional obligations.
26. The Committee considers Mr. Billingsley's prior discipline record and seniority as a practicing lawyer to be aggravating factors. The Hearing Guideline provides in paragraph 205 that misconduct sanctions are cumulative and prior misconduct will result in increasingly serious sanctions. Less than three years elapsed between the first reprimand to Mr. Billingsley and his misconduct in this case.
27. Although not considered by the Committee to be an additional aggravating factor, Mr. Billingsley's conduct in the hearing concerned the Committee. He appeared at best unprepared or disorganized. He initially did not have a copy of the SAF and expressed doubt about whether he had signed it. The SAF bears the signature of Mr. Billingsley and is dated May 16, 2026. Due to a technical error, at one point in the hearing, Mr. Billingsley became aware that the Client was a member of the public gallery. The tone of his attempts to then communicate with her was in the Committee's view inconsistent with any prior expressions of remorse for his misconduct.
28. The Committee considers Mr. Billingsley's agreement to the SAF and the joint submission on sanction and his acknowledgement of wrongdoing during the investigation process to be mitigating factors. The committee cannot weigh the impact of Mr. Billingsley's medical condition without evidence. His email apology to the Client in the fall of 2022 is given little weight as the Committee questions its sincerity based on his

conduct during the hearing and his statement to the LSA investigator that “the only thing I regret is “some rude comments”. During the hearing, Mr. Billingsley referred to the Client as “deeply disturbed” and “disrespectful, barrier-crossing, vexatious, perturbed and psychiatrically ill”.

29. As outlined above, the public interest test requires the Committee to give significant deference to a joint submission on sanction. The imposition of a short suspension represents a step up from the prior sanctions levied against Mr. Billingsley. The Committee is satisfied, based on the facts and authorities, that the two-week suspension is a reasonable and appropriate sanction that is in the public interest and that will not bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

Costs

30. Turning to the matter of costs, the Committee, pursuant to section 72(2)(c) of the *Act* and Rule 99 of the Rules of the LSA, may order a lawyer found guilty of conduct deserving of sanction to pay all or part of the costs of the Conduct Proceedings. The Committee may also determine the deadline for payment of any costs awarded.
31. The LSA’s default position in argument, consistent with the statement in the Hearing Guideline at paragraph 221, is that a lawyer found guilty of conduct deserving of sanction should pay the actual costs of the hearing because the hearing expenses incurred in the exercise of the LSA’s statutory obligations are appropriately charged to the lawyer whose conduct is under scrutiny.
32. Mr. Billingsley submits that the hourly rate for LSA counsel is excessive and that the Client was “troubled”. However, his primary argument against any costs award is claimed impecuniosity. He said he had earned no income since his interim suspension on November 24, 2025. He said he had no savings, was receiving Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and had applied for CPP disability benefits. In response to LSA’s counsel advising the Committee that Mr. Billingsley’s suspension did not prevent him from working other than as a lawyer, Mr. Billingsley claimed to have applied unsuccessfully for hundreds of jobs.

Decision on Costs

33. The issue of impecuniosity was considered in *Law Society of Alberta v. Torske*, 2016 ABLS 27 and *Law Society of Alberta v. Randhawa*, 2022 ABLS 15. The hearing committee in *Torske* held that current impecuniosity was not a reason to alter the default rule on costs. The Appeal Panel in *Randhawa* accepted that principle and added that bare assertions of impecuniosity were insufficient. The member had led no evidence supporting his claim to be impecunious. That is also the case here.
34. However, both *Torske* and *Randhawa* were decided before the recent decision of a five person appeal panel of the Alberta Court of Appeal in *Charkhandeh v. College of Dental*

Surgeons of Alberta, 2025 ABCA 258. The court addressed costs in professional disciplinary proceedings in a “fresh manner” and set out an analytical framework to guide decision makers. A helpful and thorough summary of the *Charkhandeh* framework and its application to the *Act* is found in *Law Society of Alberta v. Scott*, 2025 ABLS 21.

35. The single bench hearing committee chair in *Scott* identified four issues to be decided under the *Charkhandeh* framework:

- a) Where should the costs burden fall?;
- b) Application of the relevant factors when awarding costs;
- c) Limits on quantum of costs;
- d) Types of costs that can fairly be imposed on the professional.

36. *Charkhandeh* dealt directly with the *Health Professions Act*, RSA 2000, c. H-7, the Court stating at paragraph 136:

There is no presumption in the statutory language one way or another. Therefore, it would be an error for a hearing tribunal or appeal panel to award costs based on a presumption that costs should be awarded, or that either the disciplined member or the College should bear the costs. In every case the decision maker must carefully consider whether, first of all, costs are warranted, and second, the quantum of costs.

37. The Committee finds, as did the hearing committee in *Scott*, that statement to apply with equal force to the *Act*. Costs are not presumed to be payable by Mr. Billingsley merely because he has been found guilty of conduct deserving of sanction. The LSA’s default position advocated by counsel for the LSA, as set out in the Hearing Guideline at paragraph 221, is inconsistent with the Court’s statement in the preceding paragraph. A hearing committee constituted under the *Act* must, in every case, carefully consider whether costs are warranted and their quantum.

38. The Committee finds that costs are warranted against Mr. Billingsley. While Mr. Billingsley admitted in the interview by the LSA investigator in November 2022 that his communications has been uncivil and rude, he simultaneously continued to blame the Client, calling her “crazy”, needing to be “scolded”, “one of the most difficult clients to control” and “seriously disturbed”. He did not formally admit guilt until the month before the hearing. Mr. Billingsley is a repeat offender with respect to this type of misconduct and committed the misconduct in this case after being reprimanded only about three years earlier.

39. *Charkhandeh* provides at paragraph 138 that a costs award is not intended to be another form of sanction. Its intention of a costs award is to allocate the cost of the process and proceedings. Mr. Billingsley’s late entry into the SAF and joint submission on sanction do not obviate the factors set out in the preceding paragraph. His repeated misconduct after his reprimand led to the justified complaint, investigation, citation and constitution of a

three-person hearing committee to deal with the required discipline. The Committee finds that full costs are warranted in the circumstances.

40. *Charkhandeh*, at paragraph 144, requires costs awards to be reasonable and proportional:
- a) The expenses must be reasonably incurred having regard to the nature of the investigation, the allegations and the hearing process.
 - b) The quantum paid by the regulator must be fair and reasonable;
 - c) It must not only have been reasonable for the College to have incurred the costs (in substance and as to quantum) but it must also be reasonable to transfer the burden of those costs to the professional...;
 - d) The costs award must be proportionate to the issues involved, the circumstances of the member, and the overall burden it places on him or her.
41. The \$6,461.26 costs award sought by the LSA here is modest in relation to the costs in *Charkhandeh* (exceeding \$300,000.00) or *Randhawa* (about \$80,000.00). The amount is also proportionate under the step-up principle as costs of about \$1,000.00 were awarded against Mr. Billingsley in his first discipline proceeding and costs of about \$3,500.00 were awarded in his second discipline proceeding. The Committee has considered Mr. Billingsley's declared personal financial circumstances and has addressed that by giving him two years to pay the costs award.
42. *Charkhandeh*, at paragraphs 149-152, provides direction on the types of costs that can be fairly imposed on a professional:
- a) The decision maker must have a reasonable idea of the types of expenses that are included in the costs sought and make some assessment of whether those expenses were reasonably incurred.
 - b) A professional should not have to pay all or a significant portion of the expenses associated with the infrastructure of the hearing. The professional should only be expected to pay those costs discreetly associated with the hearing itself.
 - c) Legal fees must be examined for reasonableness, including hourly rate, number and seniority of counsel, and duration and intensity of preparation, and for whether the ultimate charges are proportionate to the issues.
43. The costs sought here are detailed in the Estimated Statement of Costs tendered for the hearing. The Committee finds the hours and hourly rates for the investigation and for legal counsel to be reasonable having regard to the materials and issues. The Committee notes the increase in counsel's hourly rate for the hearing, in contrast to rate for the prior steps. The \$125.00 per hour rate had been in effect since 1999 and was markedly out of touch with the inflationary increase in market legal rates since that time. The \$300.00 hourly rate became effective on June 1 of this year. Counsel for the LSA at the hearing has been at the Alberta bar over 10 years. Mr. Billingsley, a member of the

LSA since 2011, charged the Client \$400.00 per hour. The Committee finds the LSA's current counsel rate to be reasonable in this case.

44. Applying the directions of the Alberta Court of Appeal in *Charkhandeh*, the Committee finds the costs award against Mr. Billingsley in the amount of \$6,461.26 to be reasonable and proportionate. The costs are to be paid by June 30, 2028.

Concluding Matters

45. The Committee orders, pursuant to section 72 of the *Act*, that Mr. Billingsley be suspended for two weeks, starting immediately and to run concurrently with Mr. Billingsley's current interim suspension, and to pay costs in the amount of \$6,461.26 by June 30, 2028.
46. A Notice to the Attorney General is not required.
47. A Notice to the Profession is required pursuant to section 85 of the *Act*.
48. The exhibits, other hearing materials, and this report will be available for public inspection, including the provision of copies of exhibits for a reasonable copy fee, except that identifying information in relation to persons other than Mr. Billingsley will be redacted and further redactions will be made to preserve client confidentiality and solicitor-client privilege (Rule 98(3)).

Dated August 31, 2026.

Ken Warren, KC

Corie Flett, KC

Patti Grier