

Wisconsin Attorney Michael Petersen Charged with Forgery



Summary: A Wisconsin defense attorney already convicted for deceiving a client is now charged with forging a judge's signature.

An Appleton, Wisconsin defense attorney was already in trouble for tricking a client into pleading to a higher charge back in 2015. Now attorney Michael D. Petersen is accused of forging a judge's signature on a separate case. Petersen was convicted of contempt of court in the first incident but is now looking at a felony for the forgery charge, according to the [Post Crescent](#). The new case was filed March 1 against the 35-year-old from Fond du Lac.

The allegations outlined in the charges are similar to the same ones litigated in the first case from August 2015. The charges from both cases come from a criminal case in Outagamie County that he worked on in 2014. Petersen faces two felony charges. If convicted of forgery and uttering a forgery, he could face up to 12 years in prison. The first court date is set for May 1.

The latest charges accuse Petersen of forging the signature of an Outagamie County Judge on a court order allowing his client's charge to be reduced to a misdemeanor from a felony once the client completes a "substantial part" of his sentence.

The criminal complaint details how an Appleton police sergeant was notified in September 2016 by someone who believed Petersen had tricked them during his representation of them in a felony drunken driving case. The man told the officer that Petersen told him to plea to a felony as part of an agreement that would allow his charge to be amended to a misdemeanor if he did not violate the terms of his probation.

The man entered the plea and later went to check on the status of it but there was no indication that there was an agreement allowing for an amendment to the charge. The man called Petersen, who gave the man an unsigned copy of the order for amendment. Petersen allegedly told the client he would give him a signed copy later. The man never received that signed copy so he went to Petersen's office where Petersen gave him a copy of an order signed by an Outagamie County Judge. However, the judge says he never signed the order.

The judge explained to the police that he never saw the document even though the signature looks like his. The judge "knows he never signed the order because the order related to a case pending before another judge and if he should be called upon to sign an order in such a circumstance, he would make note of it above his signature" but "no such note is made on this order." The judge also declared that he would never amend a felony drunken driving charge down to a misdemeanor.

Petersen had admitted to the Wisconsin Office of Lawyer Regulation to preparing the document but that the judge did not actually sign it. Petersen's law license is already suspended for a year starting January 26 for his original conviction.

Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Ann Walsh Bradley wanted to see a harsher punishment. She wrote in her dissenting opinion, "Attorney Petersen's misconduct was egregious. He repeatedly lied to his clients about the terms of the State's plea offer. He told his client that certain charges would be amended when Attorney Petersen knew this was untrue. He then falsified an email purportedly written by an Assistant District Attorney in furtherance of the lies and falsely reported that the judge agreed with the amended charges. It gets worse. Attorney Petersen apparently forged a judge's signature on a fabricated court order, lied to the court and to the police, all the while continuing the lies to his client."

Online records indicate that Petersen graduated from [William Mitchell College of Law](#) in 2008. He has been a licensed attorney in the state for over eight years. On Avvo, he has six reviews, five of which gave him a five-star rating and only one reviewer giving him one star.

Do you think Petersen should serve some jail time and lose his law license? Share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

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