

Tom Girardi's Shocking \$1 Million Payment to California Bar Investigator Revealed



Disbarred California lawyer Tom Girardi, known for his high-profile work as a national plaintiffs' attorney, has been found to have built "an extensive network of connections" at the state bar that was supposed to act as an attorney watchdog, according to a recent report. The report, commissioned by the California bar, was conducted by law firm Halpern May Ybarra Gelberg, which was tasked with investigating the State Bar of California's handling of disciplinary complaints against Girardi.

The investigation was prompted by accusations made in December 2020 that Girardi had used settlement funds for the families of victims of a 2018 airplane crash in Indonesia to bankroll a luxurious Hollywood lifestyle. Since then, Girardi has been disbarred and forced into bankruptcy alongside his now-defunct law firm, Girardi Keese. Last month, Chicago and Los Angeles prosecutors leveled criminal charges against the 83-year-old Girardi, accusing him of stealing more than \$18 million from his firm's clients.

The investigation found that it was "more likely than not" that Girardi's extensive connections with state bar employees had affected the State Bar of California's handling of disciplinary complaints against him. The report found that at least nine former state bar employees had connections with or received gifts from Girardi, including former bar investigator Tom Layton and his wife, who received over \$1 million, including at least \$600,000 in payments from Girardi's law firm, as well as free meals, private jet flights and tickets to sporting events.

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While none of the individuals in the report are still at the State Bar, the findings reveal persistent institutional failure and a shocking past culture of unethical and unacceptable behavior, according to Ruben Duran, chair of the organization's board of trustees. The Girardi saga has been an embarrassing chapter for the California bar, which regulates lawyers across the state.

The report concluded that it could not "establish that Layton's connections to Girardi directly influenced the outcome of any Girardi case." However, the findings raise serious questions about the state bar's ability to regulate attorneys and hold them accountable for unethical behavior effectively.

Girardi's legal team has stated that he has Alzheimer's disease, and the courts have entered not-guilty pleas on his behalf as they assess his competence to stand trial. Girardi's brother Robert, who handles his legal and financial affairs as his conservator, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The case against Girardi highlights the importance of upholding ethical standards in the legal profession and the need for effective regulation and oversight of attorneys. The California bar has vowed to address the institutional failures revealed by the report and ensure that such misconduct does not occur in the future. However, it remains to be seen how effective these measures will be in preventing similar scandals from arising in the future.