

Illinois Lawyers Face Tough Process to Regain Suspended Licenses



Rich Juliano is one of the few lawyers to be reinstated in Illinois after being disbarred. Juliano was disbarred after being convicted of mail fraud in 2002 during a federal public corruption investigation while working as a former Illinois Governor George Ryan (R) campaign aide. Juliano described the reinstatement process as lengthy and expensive but worth it for its sense of redemption.

A Bloomberg Law analysis of Illinois state data shows that just 20 out of roughly 1,200 lawyers who have been disbarred since the 1930s have been reinstated. Just 44 lawyers applied for reinstatement out of the 1,242 lawyers who were disbarred or disbarred on consent in the last 90 years. Similarly, of the 626 lawyers suspended in Illinois for a specific period of time or until further order of the state Supreme Court, just 25 have been reinstated.

The reinstatement process for disbarred lawyers and those suspended until further order of the court is challenging, with lawyers required to provide "reams of information," according to Juliano. The process can take up to two years to complete and cost between \$25,000 and \$40,000 in attorneys' fees alone.

Former Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission (ARDC) administrator Mary Robinson, who now counsels lawyers facing disciplinary investigations, described the reinstatement process for disbarred and suspended lawyers as putting them "through the wringer."

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An applicant's chance of reinstatement is improved if they have conquered an impairment, helped others facing similar problems, and contributed to society. Successful reinstatements usually involve underlying misconduct related to addiction or mental health issues that have been remedied. The lawyer has contributed to making people whole if there was a financial detriment.

The process of applying for reinstatement is arduous and involves investigations into an applicant's credit history, taxes, driving records, and every credit card they have. Applicants are deposed, and character witnesses are presented during the reinstatement process. Applicants must prepare a detailed petition and take continuing legal education classes to demonstrate they are willing and able to keep up with legal developments.

Applicants must also document their public speaking engagements at law schools and other venues about their disbarment, their actions as a cooperating witnesses, and how they rehabilitated their legal careers. In Juliano's case, he even shared a stage with the federal judge who sentenced him to probation.

Despite the challenges, Juliano recommends the reinstatement process, describing it as heartening. The hearing board and ARDC appeals board recommended Juliano's reinstatement, appreciating the context of what happened, his role in it, and his commitment to rehabilitation. Juliano believes that we are the sum of our experiences, good and bad, and he stands for high ethical standards in his work.

In conclusion, the reinstatement process for disbarred and suspended lawyers in Illinois is rigorous and expensive. However, successful reinstatements are possible, particularly if the underlying misconduct relates to addiction or mental health issues that have been remedied, and the lawyer has made efforts to rehabilitate their career and contribute to society. Despite the challenges, those who have been reinstated view the process as a form of redemption and a way to return to their profession with a greater appreciation for ethical standards.