

## Solo Practitioner Faces Sanctions for Misleading Website Claims



A solo practitioner, formerly based in Oakhurst, New Jersey, is now facing disciplinary action from the New Jersey Supreme Court for disseminating false and misleading statements on his law firm's website. In an order dated December 8, the court's disciplinary review board sanctioned lawyer Alan N. Walkow after identifying two instances of ethical violations, as reported by Law360.

### Unsubstantiated "Lowest Fees" Claim Draws Scrutiny

Walkow's law firm website featured a contentious claim of having the "lowest fees in the state," coupled with a promoted \$495 legal fee for real estate services "from contract to close." In a decision dated August 15, the disciplinary review board expressed skepticism about the claim, noting that substantiating such a statement would be challenging, given that Walkow couldn't have been aware of all lawyers' rates throughout the state.

Moreover, the board highlighted Walkow's failure to include a necessary disclaimer on his website, clarifying that it had not received approval from the New Jersey Supreme Court—a lapse contributing to the ethical violations.

### Misleading Use of "Our Attorneys" Term

The disciplinary review board also flagged a misleading aspect of Walkow's online representation, noting that despite being the sole practitioner in the firm, the website referenced "our attorneys." This misrepresentation raised concerns about the accuracy and transparency of the information presented.

### Mixed Rulings on Additional Allegations

While the disciplinary review board ruled in Walkow's favor regarding a photo featuring four unidentified individuals on his website and a claim of having "8 Locations in New Jersey," nuanced explanations accompanied these decisions. The image, lacking identification or suggesting that the individuals were attorneys, did not breach ethics. Similarly, the claim of having eight locations was not definitively proven to be an ethical violation, as the requirement for a specific disclaimer depended on whether the locations were virtual or satellite offices.

### Failure to Address Ethics Inquiries

The disciplinary reprimand extended beyond website claims to Walkow's failure to participate in the New Jersey Office of Attorney Ethics investigation. Despite repeated attempts by the Committee on Attorney Advertising and the Office of Attorney Ethics to contact Walkow, letters were returned as undeliverable, addresses proved unresponsive, and disciplinary notices published in newspapers went unanswered.

Although Walkow acknowledged being out of the country and his law office being closed, he failed to address the ethics complaints adequately.

### Past Reprimands for Ethical Lapses

This recent sanction adds to Walkow's history of disciplinary action. Previously, he faced reprimand for representing clients while his license was suspended due to non-compliance with continuing legal education requirements.