

Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection

2014 Annual Report

The Maine Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection (Fund) was created by an Order of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, dated July 1, 1997. The purpose of the Fund is to promote public confidence in the administration of justice and the integrity of the legal profession, by reimbursing clients who suffer losses caused by an attorney's dishonest conduct. The Fund was not designed to address losses caused by professional malpractice and no amounts are payable to clients for such activity.

TRUSTEES

The Fund is administered by a Board of seven trustees, appointed by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. The trustees determine the eligibility of claims filed with the Fund and manage the Fund's assets. Trustees are appointed to three year terms and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. Trustees are volunteers and serve without compensation but are reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses incurred in the discharge of their duties. The trustees for the calendar year 2014 were:

OFFICERS

Paul H. Sighinolfi, Esq., Chair

Raymond J. Cota, Treasurer

Martha C. Gaythwaite, Esq., Secretary

TRUSTEES

Meris J. Bickford, Esq.

Jared S. des Rosiers, Esq.

Jeffrey W. Porter

Honorable Warren M. Silver, Court Liaison

STAFF

The Fund retains the Board of Overseers of the Bar for its administrative, financial, and case investigation functions.

CLAIM INTAKE AND EVALUATION

A claimant seeking reimbursement from the Fund must complete a claim form. Upon receipt, the office of Bar Counsel of the Board of Overseers of the Bar investigates the alleged loss, prepares a record, and submits a report with recommendation to the trustees. The claimant has the duty to supply relevant evidence to support the claim.

TRUSTEE REVIEW

When the report and recommendations are complete, the trustees act on the claim. The approval or denial of a claim requires the affirmative votes of at least four trustees. Notice of the decision is given to the claimant and the lawyer. Reimbursement from the Fund is a matter of grace. No person has the right to reimbursement from the Fund whether as claimant, third-party beneficiary or otherwise. The decisions and actions of the Fund trustees are not reviewable on any ground in any court or other tribunal.

CLAIMS RECEIVED AND PROCESSED

In 2014, 37 new claims for reimbursement were received by the Fund. The trustees held three meetings over the course of the year and considered 25 claims involving nine attorneys. Of those, nine claims were approved for reimbursement, four claims were found to be ineligible for reimbursement, and twelve claims were withdrawn as a result of settlement. At the close of the calendar year, seventeen claims remained pending.

2014 CLAIM ACTIVITY

CASE NUMBER	ATTORNEY	APPROVED PAYMENT	AREA OF LAW
LFCP-14-163	Carolyn M. Asquith	\$8,365.50	Family
LFCP-14-077	Charles R. Bean	\$2,000.00	Bankruptcy
LFCP-14-150	Scott David Giese	\$1,500.00	Criminal
LFCP-14-168	Scott David Giese	\$2,500.00	Family
LFCP-14-183	Scott David Giese	\$2,500.00	Wills/Estates/Probate
LFCP-14-303	Scott David Giese	\$1,000.00	Contracts/Consumer
LFCP-14-334	Scott David Giese	\$2,500.00	Employment
LFCP-13-362	Warren M. Turner	\$5,500.00	Real Estate

Total: \$25,865.50

Since its inception in 1997, the Fund has approved claims totaling \$368,528. Pursuant to Rule 13 of the Rules for Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection, the maximum amount of reimbursement to a claimant is capped from both an individual claimant and attorney perspective. Because of the cap, the Fund has paid \$340,664 to 97 claimants.

FINANCES

The Fund is supported by an annual assessment against all Maine judges and attorneys. Its fiscal year runs from July 1st through June 30th. FY-2014, the Fund collected \$109,340 in assessments and generated \$18,488 from investments.

The Fund's accounts were audited by Runyon, Kersteen & Ouellette of South Portland, Maine. The fund balance on June 30, 2014 was \$1,365,660.

CONCLUSION

This report confirms the fact that the overwhelming majority of Maine attorneys observe the high standards of integrity when entrusted with client monies or property. However, the dishonest acts of a few can affect the public's image and confidence in the legal profession as a whole. The Lawyer's Fund for Client Protection endeavors to restore public confidence in the legal profession by reimbursing clients for losses sustained as a result of the dishonest conduct of their attorneys.

Paul H. Sighinolfi, Esq.
Fund Chair