In re Mahdis Azimi
Respondent-Appellant

Commission No. 2023PR00003

Synopsis of Corrected Review Board Report and Recommendation
(February 2026)

The Administrator filed a ten-count disciplinary Amended Complaint ("Complaint") against Respondent, alleging that Respondent engaged in misconduct relating to ten immigration cases. The Complaint charged that Respondent failed to act with reasonable diligence; failed to promptly respond to clients and keep them informed; made misrepresentations to clients; failed to hold client funds in a client trust account; failed to refund unearned fees; failed to surrender client files; made a false statement in connection with a disciplinary matter; and failed to respond to the Administrator's request for information, in violation of Rules 1.3, 1.4(a)(3), 1.4(a)(4), 1.15(a), 1.16(d), 8.1(a), 8.1(b) and 8.4(c) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct (2010).

The Hearing Board found that Respondent engaged in all of the misconduct charged in the Complaint. The Hearing Board recommended that Respondent be suspended for three years, until further order of the Court ("UFO").

Respondent appealed, *pro se*, arguing that: (1) she did not commit the misconduct charged in certain counts, in whole or in part; (2) the Chair of the Hearing Board Panel ("Chair") abused his discretion in making several rulings; and (3) the sanction should be a suspension of five months, partially or wholly stayed by probation, without a UFO provision.

The Review Board affirmed all of the Hearing Board's findings of misconduct. The Review Board also affirmed the Chair's rulings that were challenged on appeal. The Review Board recommended that Respondent be suspended for two years, UFO.

BEFORE THE REVIEW BOARD
OF THE
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY REGISTRATION
AND
DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

MAHDIS AZIMI,

Respondent-Appellant,

No. 6320242.

Commission No. 2023PR00003

CORRECTED REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE REVIEW BOARD

Summary

The Administrator filed a ten-count disciplinary Amended Complaint ("Complaint") against Respondent, alleging that Respondent engaged in misconduct relating to ten immigration cases. The Complaint charged that Respondent failed to act with reasonable diligence; failed to promptly respond to clients and keep them informed; made misrepresentations to clients; failed to hold client funds in a client trust account; failed to refund unearned fees; failed to surrender client files; made a false statement in connection with a disciplinary matter; and failed to respond to the Administrator's request for information, in violation of Rules 1.3, 1.4(a)(3), 1.4(a)(4), 1.15(a), 1.16(d), 8.1(a), 8.1(b) and 8.4(c) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct (2010).

Respondent filed an Answer to the Complaint, in which she admitted some of the facts and some of the misconduct, but not all.

The disciplinary hearing was held on September 10 and 11, 2024, and Respondent was represented by counsel. Respondent is representing herself on appeal. At the disciplinary hearing, the Administrator presented testimony from seven witnesses, including Respondent as an adverse witness, and presented eleven exhibits. Respondent did not call any witnesses or offer any exhibits.

The Hearing Board found that Respondent engaged in all of the misconduct charged in the Complaint.[1] The Hearing Board recommended that Respondent be suspended for three years, until further order of the Court ("UFO").

Respondent appealed, *pro se*, arguing that: (1) she did not commit the misconduct charged in certain counts, in whole or in part; (2) the Chair of the Hearing Board Panel ("Chair") abused his discretion in making several rulings; and (3) the sanction should be a suspension of five months, partially or wholly stayed by probation, without a UFO provision.

The Administrator argues that there is no reversible error, and the sanction recommended by the Hearing Board is appropriate.

For the reasons set forth below, we affirm all of the Hearing Board's findings of misconduct. We also affirm all of the Chair's rulings that were challenged on appeal. We recommend that Respondent be suspended for two years, UFO.

Background

Respondent

Respondent was admitted to practice law in Illinois in 2015. She worked at a small law firm that specialized in immigration cases until 2018. In 2019, she started a solo practice, concentrating on immigration law. She testified that in 2023 she had between 15 and 20 cases pending at any one time. During 2023, in addition to her law practice, she had a full-time job with Loyola University School of Law ("Loyola") as an assistant director for student services. As discussed below, Respondent has one prior disciplinary case.

Overview

The summary set forth below is based on the Hearing Board's findings of facts. Respondent's misconduct involved ten immigration cases, and took place from approximately September 2021 to October 2023. Respondent failed to file immigration petitions, applications, or

forms (collectively referred to as "petitions") on behalf of her clients in seven cases. She also repeatedly ignored clients' efforts to communicate with her; she failed to refund unearned fees in six cases; she failed to surrender client files in four cases; and she failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena that required the production of four client files. Additionally, she made false statements in four cases; she failed to correct a false statement in one case; she made a false statement during her sworn statement; and the Hearing Board found that her testimony at the disciplinary hearing in 2024 was not credible concerning key issues. Although Respondent denied engaging in a substantial portion of the charged misconduct, she did admit the following:

- She failed to file immigration petitions on behalf of her clients in seven cases.
- She made false representations in two cases, in which she falsely stated that she had filed immigration petitions, even though she had not filed those petitions.
- She failed to provide the complete client files to her clients in three cases.
- She failed to refund unearned fees in two cases.
- She failed to comply with the subpoena from the Administrator, which required production of the client files in four cases.

The Hearing Board's Findings of Misconduct

The Hearing Board found that Respondent engaged in all of the misconduct charged in the Complaint, and made the following findings concerning that misconduct:

Count I: Respondent failed to perform the work that her client, Nageswar Linga, hired her to do, which involved filing an application for humanitarian parole for Linga's wife, Swarnlata Damor. Respondent admitted that she failed to file that application. Between September and November 2021, Respondent sent three text messages to Linga, in which Respondent falsely represented that she had filed that application. In her Answer to the Complaint, Respondent admitted she knew that those statements were false at the time she made them. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); and 8.4(c) (dishonesty and misrepresentation). (This misconduct was the basis of the original one-count Complaint, which was filed in January 2023.)

Count II: In October 2022, Respondent falsely represented to her client, Bulent Yurtsever, that she had filed an immigration form for Yurtsever's fiancée, even though she had not filed that form. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 8.4(c) (dishonesty and

misrepresentation); and 1.4(a)(3) (failing to keep her client informed). As discussed below, Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she made a false statement.

Count III: Respondent failed to perform the work that her client, Parvaneh Moghimzadeh, hired her to do, which involved filing petitions for three of Moghimzadeh's siblings in Iran. Respondent admitted that she did not file those petitions. In February 2022, Respondent sent an email to Moghimzadeh's daughter falsely representing that she had filed the applications for Moghimzadeh's siblings. Respondent admitted that her statement was not true. Respondent also failed to provide Moghimzadeh's client files to her after the representation ended in January 2023, despite Moghimzadeh's requests for the file. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.4(a)(4) (failing to comply with requests for information); Rule 1.16(d) (failing to provide the client's file); and Rule 8.4(c) (dishonesty and misrepresentation).

Count IV: Respondent failed to perform the work that her client, Belet Bodakh, hired her to do, which involved filing immigration documents for Bodakh's parents in Iran. Respondent said she would expedite the paperwork for Bodakh's mother because Bodakh was pregnant and had no family in the United States. Between August 2022 and March 2023, Respondent failed to file the immigration documents as promised. Respondent admitted that she did not file those documents. Respondent did not refund any money to Bodakh, even though Respondent admitted that Bodakh was owed a refund. Respondent told Bodakh that she had mailed a refund check to Bodakh, which the Hearing Board found to be a false statement. Respondent failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena to produce Bodakh's client file in October 2023. Respondent admitted that she was served with that subpoena and did not produce the entire client file for Bodakh. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.16(d) (failing to refund unearned fees); 8.4(c) (dishonesty and misrepresentation); and Rule 8.1(b) (failing to respond to the Administrator's lawful demand for information). Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that her failure to comply with the subpoena violated Rule 8.1(b).

Count V: Respondent failed to file a petition for adjustment of status on behalf of her client, Kseniia Cherkashina, and failed to correct a false statement made to Cherkashina. In August 2022, while Respondent was on suspension from her prior disciplinary case, someone who was acting on Respondent's behalf sent Cherkashina an email from Respondent's law firm that stated, "We filed your case early this week." That statement was not true. Respondent was copied on the email, which she admitted seeing when she returned to work in September 2022. Respondent failed to correct that false statement. Respondent also failed to provide the client file to Cherkashina. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.4(a)(3) (failing to keep the client informed); 1.16(d) (failing to provide the client's file); and 8.4(c) (dishonesty). As discussed below, Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she acted dishonestly.

Count VI: Between December 2022 and June 14, 2023, Respondent failed to perform the work that her clients, Saroose Mortazavi and his wife Asal Barakpour, hired Respondent to do, which involved filing a petition for adjustment of status for Barakpour. Respondent admitted that she failed to file that petition**.** Mortazavi paid Respondent $1,760 for filing fees and Respondent deposited those funds into her operating account, until she paid them to the Immigration Service, because Respondent did not have a client trust account. Respondent failed to refund unearned fees to Mortazavi. Respondent also failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena, which required production of Mortazavi's client file in October 2023. Respondent admitted that she was served with that subpoena and did not produce the entire client. The Hearing Board found that Respondent

violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.15(a) (failing to hold filing fees in a client trust); 1.16(d) (failing to return unearned fees); and 8.1(b) (failing to comply with the Administrator's subpoena). Respondent argues that her failure to comply with the subpoena did not violate Rule 8.1(b).

Count VII: Between March and May 2023, Respondent failed to file a petition for adjustment of status on behalf of her clients, Wilfred Kinyanjui, and his wife Purity Ngando. Respondent admitted that she did not file the petition. She also failed to respond promptly to the clients' emails. Although the clients sent Respondent two money orders totaling $1,760 for filing fees, she did not return the money orders or surrender the client file. Respondent failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena to produce Kinyanjui's client file in October 2023. Respondent admitted that she was served with that subpoena and did not produce Kinyanjui's client file. When Respondent appeared for a sworn statement in October 2023, she testified that she had mailed the money orders and the client documents to Kinyanjui; however, the Hearing Board found that her statement was false. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.4(a)(4) (failing to keep her clients informed); 1.15(a) (failing to safeguard property);[2] 1.16(d) (failing to return the money orders and the client file); Rule 8.1(b) (failing to comply with the subpoena); 8.1(a) (making a false statement to the Administrator); and 8.4(c) (dishonesty and misrepresentation). Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she made a false statement, and that she violated Rule 8.1(b).

Count VIII: Between November 2022 and April 2023, Respondent failed to perform the work that her client, Somayeh Mohammadi, hired her to do, which involved filing a petition for an alien worker pursuant to a national interest waiver. Respondent admitted that she did not file the petition. Mohammadi, who was a medical doctor in Iran, was conducting anesthesiology research at the University of Chicago. Her visa had expired and she needed to obtain a new visa as soon as possible. Mohammadi made numerous attempts to reach Respondent, without success. Respondent failed to provide the client file and unearned fees to Mohammadi, despite her requests. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.4(a)(4) (failing to keep her client informed); and 1.16(d) (failing to surrender the file and refund unearned fees).

Count IX: Between February 2023 and April 2023, Respondent failed to file a humanitarian parole application on behalf of her client, Arshia Tavakoli. Respondent admitted that she did not file the application. Tavakoli and his relatives made multiple attempts to contact Respondent, unsuccessfully. Tavakoli's aunt paid Respondent $625 for filing and administrative fees, and Respondent deposited those funds into her operating account, until she paid them to the Immigration Service, because she did not have a client trust account. She also failed to surrender the client file and refund unearned fess to Tavakoli, despite sending an email saying that she would do so. She failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena, which required production of Tavakoli's client file in October 2023. Respondent admitted that she was served with that subpoena and did not produce Tavakoli's client file. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); 1.4(a)(4) (failing to keep her client informed); 1.15(a) (failing to hold client funds in a client trust account); 1.16(d) (failing to refund unearned fees and provide the client's file); and 8.1(b) (failing to comply with the subpoena). Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she violated Rule 8.1(b) by failing to comply with the subpoena.

Count X: Respondent failed to provide information to her clients, Justin Fowlkes and Osaid Ahmed, concerning Ahmed's petition for adjustment status. During June and July 2023, the clients requested that Respondent send them tracking information concerning the petition. She

failed to provide tracking information or updates. The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rules 1.3 (lack of diligence); and 1.4(a)(4) (failing to keep her clients informed).

Respondent's Prior Discipline

Respondent has one prior disciplinary case. The Complaint in that case was filed in March 2021. In May 2022, the Court suspended Respondent for 90 days, effective June 9, 2022. The misconduct in that case, took place during 2017-2018. Respondent failed to file an immigration application on behalf of one of her clients, and falsely represented to the client that she had filed the application, even though she had not done so. Respondent also fabricated two emails that falsely appeared to be from the Immigration Service, which she sent to her client. *See In re Azimi*, *petition for discipline on consent allowed*, 2021PR00017, M.R. 031205 (May 19, 2022).

The misconduct in the instant case took place between approximately September 2021 and October 2023, while the prior case was pending, and after she was suspended.

Respondent's Mental Health Issues

Respondent testified that she was diagnosed with anxiety and depression when she was in high school, and she was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in approximately December 2022. Respondent argues that her mental health issues played a significant role in the misconduct.

Dr. Rone's Testimony

In May 2024, psychiatrist Lisa Rone, M.D., evaluated Respondent at the request of the Administrator. Dr. Rone prepared a report and testified at the hearing. The Hearing Board stated,

> Dr. Rone opined that Respondent's psychiatric diagnoses could have contributed to her difficulties with being organized and completing tasks .... However, the consistent pattern of dishonesty displayed in the disciplinary charges is not a symptom of Respondent's diagnosed conditions …. Dr. Rone opined that Respondent's current treatment from a therapist and a primary care physician is not adequate for the severity of her reported symptoms …. Dr. Rone opined that appropriate treatment for addressing Respondent's dishonesty would include Respondent identifying a particular pattern that is causing dysfunction in her life and undergoing rigorous psychotherapy to deal with that pattern.

> Dialectical behavioral therapy is the typical recommendation for dealing with patterns of dishonesty and addressing ways to change those patterns .... In Dr. Rone's opinion, Respondent would need to engage in this type of therapy for a period of years. **** Dr. Rone opined that Respondent has not demonstrated a willingness to identify the issues within herself that led to her misconduct. Until Respondent is able to do so, her prognosis for practicing in an ethical manner will be poor.

(Hearing Bd. Repot at 35-36) (citations omitted.) The Hearing Board also stated:

> [W]e agree with Dr. Rone's assessment that [Respondent] still has work to do on her accountability and commitment to complete honesty before she can responsibly represent clients. We have no reason to disagree with Dr. Rone's assessment that a period of years is needed to appropriately treat these issues. Therefore, in order to protect the public and safeguard the integrity of the profession, Respondent should be required to seek and obtain leave of court before she is permitted to return to practice."

(*Id*. at 42.) Set forth below are statements from Dr. Rone's report and testimony:

- [Ms. Azimi] has not sought a higher level of psychiatric care …. [H]er medication, level of care, and course of treatment are inadequate and out of proportion to the severity of symptoms she described having[.] (Dr. Rone's Report, Adm. Ex. 14 at 118-19.)

- Since Ms. Azimi has been investigated before by the ARDC and understood the scrutiny her cases were receiving in this investigation, misrepresenting herself, not responding to subpoenas, and actively being dishonest with her clients is a more severe form of self-defeating and unethical behavior. (*Id*. at 119.)

- Dr. Rone testified, "I would recommend that Ms. Azimi, first and foremost, would have to identify a particular pattern that is causing her dysfunction in her life … And then she would need to undergo particularly rigorous psychotherapy to try to deal with that pattern. And we're talking about dishonesty in particular, that would require a particular rigorous kind of psychotherapy. And dialectical behavioral psychotherapy is typically what is recommended in this situation …. Dialectical behavioral therapy is a therapy that really is intended to focus on patterns that cause difficulties in the here and now, and trying to address ways to change those patterns so that somebody could be more … functional over time …. I think particularly with the issue of dishonesty … this would be a much longer-term treatment. I would see that this would be something that would have to be addressed over years and not months." (Tr. 374-75.)

Dr. Rone's testimony and conclusions were unrebutted by any other expert opinion. Respondent did not call an expert witness or a mental health professional, and she did not present any medical records. Respondent had ample time to obtain an expert witness, but failed to do so.[3]

Mitigation and Aggravation

In mitigation, the Hearing Board considered Respondent's testimony that she was active in the community; provided *pro bono* services; and was dealing with a family member's health issues. The Hearing Board also gave Respondent's mental health issues some mitigating effect with respect to her lack of diligence and organization, and found that she had taken some steps to address her mental health issues.

In terms of aggravation, the Hearing Board found that Respondent failed to accept responsibility; she had harmed her clients; she failed to make restitution; she failed to open a trust account; she provided false testimony; and her prior discipline was a significant aggravating factor.

Sanction Recommendation

The Hearing Board recommended that Respondent be suspended for three years, UFO.

Analysis

The Hearing Board's factual findings generally will not be disturbed on review unless they are against the manifest weight of the evidence. See In re Timpone, 208 Ill. 2d 371, 380, 804 N.E.2d 560 (2004). A factual finding is against the manifest weight of the evidence where the opposite conclusion is clearly evident, or the finding is arbitrary, unreasonable, or not based on the evidence. In re Sides, 2020PR00047 (Review Bd. at 12), M.R. 031287 (Sept. 21, 2022). We afford deference to the Hearing Board because it is in the best position to observe the witnesses, assess their credibility, resolve conflicting testimony, and render fact-finding judgments. In re Thomas, 2012 IL 113035 at 466, 962 N.E.2d 454 (2012). Questions of law, including interpretation of rules, are reviewed de novo. See Thomas, Id.

Respondent argues that (1) the Hearing Board erred in finding that she committed the misconduct charged in certain counts, in whole or in part; (2) the Chair abused his discretion in making several rulings; and (3) the sanction should be a five-month suspension, without a UFO

provision. We have given careful consideration to all of the arguments Respondent presented on appeal, but we find that none of her arguments are persuasive.

We affirm the Hearing Board's findings of misconduct, and we affirm the Chair's rulings. We recommend that Respondent be suspended for two years, UFO.

We believe that a two-year suspension, UFO, will protect the public, and deter Respondent, because Respondent will be required to demonstrate that she is fit to practice law, before she is allowed to resume practicing law. In order to be reinstated to the practice of law, Respondent will be required to show that her mental health treatment has been effective, and that she can act ethically, as well as showing that she meets the other requirements for reinstatement. See Supreme Court Rule 767(f) (identifying certain factors to be considered for reinstatement, including whether the attorney has been rehabilitated; whether the attorney recognizes the nature and seriousness of the misconduct; whether the attorney has made restitution; the attorney's conduct since discipline was imposed; the attorney's good character and knowledge of the law; and the attorney's candor in presenting evidence to support the petition for reinstatement).

If, after a two-year suspension, Respondent is able to make that showing, then the recommended sanction will have been successful. If Respondent cannot make that showing, then Respondent will wait until a later date to file a petition for reinstatement, or her petition for reinstatement will be denied, and Respondent will continue to be suspended until the Court determines that reinstatement is warranted. In our view, a suspension of more than two years, UFO, will not serve any valuable purpose.

Findings of Misconduct

On appeal, Respondent argues the Hearing Board erred in finding that she engaged in the misconduct (in whole or in part) charged in the following Counts:

Count II: Making a false statement to a client in an exchange of messages;

Count V: Acting dishonestly by failing to correct a false statement made to the client;
Count VI: Failing to produce the clients' entire file, in response to a subpoena;
Count VII: Making a false statement to the Administrator during a sworn statement; and
Counts IV, VI, VII and IX: Engaging in misconduct by failing to comply with the Administrator's subpoena for client files in four matters.

Set forth below is a discussion of the Hearing Board's findings that are being challenged by Respondent. We affirm those findings.

Count II

Respondent argues that she did not make a false statement to her client, Burt Yurtsever, while exchanging messages. That argument fails.

Respondent was retained by Yurtsever to file a petition for his fiancée. The Hearing Board found that, in an exchange of messages, Respondent falsely represented she had filed the petition.

As set forth below, in one of her messages, Respondent said "Yes" in response to a question from Yurtsever. The issue is what she meant when she said yes. The Hearing Board found that Respondent meant that, "Yes," she had submitted the immigration petition. Respondent disputes that finding. The following messages were exchanged on October 26 and 27, 2022:

October 26, 2022

Yurtsever:	Good morning Mahdis[.] I need to meet you[.] It is urgent[.] Trying to get appointment for three weeks[.] I don't get respond since October 13th.
Response:	Thank you for contacting Azimi Law LLC! Please send us an email instead[.]

October 27, 2022

Yurtsever:	It is urgent. Your phone is not workin
Response:	Thank you for your message. We're unavailable right now. Please send us an email instead[.]
Yurtsever:	I need to talk to you urgent.
Respondent:	Hi. I have had a death in the family and just got back this week
Yurtsever:	**Have you submit my form** (Emphasis added.)
Respondent:	I have seen your emails but am still catching up. I will respond via email today **Yes** (Emphasis added.)
Yurtsever:	Can I register Embassy of Ankara
Respondent:	Not yet
Yurtsever:	Would you please respond me asap it is really urgent And your phone is not working
Respondent:	I will[.] But sending multiple messages does not make it faster. I see all of them. I think I told you before, my prior phone transfer did not work[.] I have a temporary line while they try to fix it.

(Adm. Ex. 1 at 4-7.)

The Hearing Board stated, "[W]e find that Respondent responded 'Yes,' to the question immediately preceding that response, namely, whether she filed the DS-160 form. Her response was a misrepresentation because she had not filed the form." (Hearing Bd. Report at 9.)

At the disciplinary hearing, Respondent's attorney asked Respondent which message she was replying to, when she said "yes", and she testified, "From my recollection, it was about my phone not working …. And so I was reading that message 'Your phone is not working' …. [T]hat's what I was addressing." (Tr. 276.) The Hearing Board stated, "We do not find this testimony credible. A review of the entirety of the message thread shows that Respondent did respond in sequence to Yurtsever's messages. Moreover, we find that 'Yes' is not a sensical response to the statement that Respondent's phone was not working." (Hearing Bd. Report at 8.)

We conclude that the Hearing Board's findings on this issue were not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

Count V

Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she acted dishonestly by failing to correct a false statement in an email sent to a client, which stated that the client's case had been filed. That argument us unpersuasive.

Respondent was hired by Kseniia Cherkashina to file a petition for adjustment of status for Cherkashina. In August 2022, while Respondent was on suspension from her prior disciplinary case, someone who was acting on Respondent's behalf sent Cherkashina an email from Respondent's law firm email address, which stated, "We filed your case early this week." That statement was not true. Respondent was copied on the email, which she admitted seeing, when she got back to work. Respondent returned to work on September 7, 2022. Cherkashina terminated the representation on September 24, 2022, and hired a new attorney, Oksana Specter, who asked Respondent to send proof that the petition had been filed. The Hearing Board found that Respondent acted dishonestly by failing to correct the false statement that Cherkashina's case had been filed. The Hearing Board stated,

> We find that the 17 days from Respondent's return to practice until the time Cherkashina ended the representation was a reasonable amount of time to review Cherkashina's matter, learn that the petition had not been filed, and inform Cherkashina that it was not filed.
> ***
> Respondent acknowledged that she saw the email containing the false statement when she came back from her suspension but asserts, she did not know the petition had not been filed. We do not find Respondent's testimony believable. Respondent did not correct the false statement even after attorney Specter asked Respondent for the [Immigration Service] receipt notices and Respondent stated she would send Cherkashina's file to Specter. Respondent surely would have learned that the petition had not been filed after Specter requested proof of filing, at the very latest. The fact that Respondent did not provide Specter with the client file or inform her that Cherkashina's forms were not filed leads to the reasonable inference that Respondent knew the forms were not filed and sought to conceal that information.

(Hearing Bd. Report at 17-18.) We conclude that the Hearing Board's findings are not against the manifest weight of the evidence.

Count VI

Respondent argues that the Hearing Board erred in finding that she failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena for Saroose Mortazavi's client file. Respondent argues that she complied with the subpoena by producing "some documents" to the Administrator. (Resp. Brief at 18.) That argument has no merit.

The subpoena required production of Mortazavi's client file, and Respondent did not produce the file, only a portion of it. That was not sufficient. Additionally, in Respondent's Answer to the Complaint, she admitted that she failed to produce Mortazavi's client file, stating, "Attorney-Respondent admits that she has not provided [to] the Administrator [Mortazavi's client] file materials." (Common Law Record ("C.") 203.) Given Respondent's failure to produce the entire client file, and in light of her admission, we affirm the Hearing Board's findings on this issue.

Count VII

Respondent challenges the Hearing Board's finding that she made a false statement during her sworn statement, when she testified that she had sent the clients' documents and money orders to the clients, Wilfred Kinyanjui and Purity Ngando. The Hearing Board stated, "Respondent … falsely testified that she sent the money orders and client file to the clients." (Hearing Bd. Report at 21.)

Kinyanjui gave Respondent two money orders totaling $1,760 for the filing fee. Kinyanjui testified that when he terminated the representation by Respondent, he asked Respondent to send his documents and money orders to him, but he never received the documents or the money orders.

During Respondent's sworn statement in October 2023, the following exchange took place (C. 207) concerning the money orders and documents that belonged to Kinyanjui and Ngando:

Administrator's Counsel:	Did you send the money orders for the filing fees with the client documents that you sent to them?
Respondent:	Yes.

The Hearing Board found that Respondent's answer to that question was false. Respondent denies that she answered falsely. She argues, "[T]he money orders – which were never 'cashed' or otherwise found – could have been misplaced through channels that were outside of the Respondent's control." (Resp. Brief at 19.) The Hearing Board stated,

> We find credible Kinyanjui's testimony that he never received the money orders that Respondent claims to have mailed to him. His testimony is corroborated by the evidence of his efforts to replace the money orders. There is no evidence to corroborate Respondent's testimony that she mailed the money orders. Given this lack of corroboration, Respondent's pattern of making false statements to clients, and our assessment that she was not a credible witness, we do not give her testimony any credence.
> ***

> [W]ith no evidence corroborating Respondent's assertion that she mailed the money orders and with ample evidence showing a pattern of making false statements and withholding information about her representation, we do not believe that Respondent mailed the money orders.

(Hearing Bd. Report at 24-25.) We affirm the Hearing Board's finding on this issue.

Failure to Comply with the Subpoena - Counts IV, VI, VII and IX

The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated Rule 8.1(b) (failing to respond to a lawful demand for information from a disciplinary authority in connection with a disciplinary matter). Respondent failed to comply with the Administrator's subpoena, which called for the production of four client files in October 2023, concerning clients Bodakh, Mortazavi, Kinyanjui, and Tavakoli, as charged in Counts IV, VI, VII and IX. Respondent admitted that she received the subpoena and failed to produce the files, but argues that she did not commit an ethical violation.

Respondent argues, "[T]he Hearing Board failed to give sufficient consideration to Respondent's significant personal difficulties during the time period[.]" (Resp. Brief at 19.) Respondent asserts that during the relevant time period, she had mental health issues and was distressed; she was caring for a family member who had health problems; and she changed attorneys representing her in the disciplinary action. Respondent argues that those factors "demonstrate a good-faith basis for the delay such that it did not rise to the level of unethical conduct." (*Id*. at 21.) We reject that argument.

The Hearing Board clearly took Respondent's personal difficulties into consideration. For example, the Hearing Board stated, "Respondent's … explanation for her conduct in … [the] matters before us is that she felt overwhelmed and distraught. While we sympathize with the challenges Respondent was experiencing, personal issues do not relieve her of her ethical obligations." (Hearing Bd. Report at 13.) We agree. Additionally, in discussing the mitigating evidence, the Hearing Board described Respondent's mental health issues and her treatment, and stated that Respondent was also dealing with a family member's health issues.

Respondent had ample time to produce the files. Respondent received the subpoena on August 30, 2023, and the due date for the client files was September 25, 2023, almost one month later. That date was extended to October 13, 2023, based on Respondent's request for an extension of time, which gave her additional time. She appeared for the sworn statement on October 13, 2023, but she did not produce the client files. Respondent also failed to produce the files before the Amended Complaint was filed in February 2024, five months after she received the subpoena.

We conclude that Respondent's personal difficulties do not explain or excuse her failure to comply with the subpoena. Respondent continued to practice law; she was working full time at Loyola; and she appeared for the sworn statement as directed by the subpoena. Nothing in the record, including Respondent's own testimony, shows that Respondent was so incapacitated that she could not produce four client files. The Hearing Board stated, "While Respondent repeatedly characterized her failure to produce information as an oversight, the number of times it occurred and the fact that the production of the requested information was potentially damaging to Respondent leads us to conclude that she intentionally withheld it from the Administrator."

(Hearing Bd. Report at 38-39.) We agree. We affirm the Hearing Board's finding that Respondent violated Rule 8.1(b) by knowingly failing to comply with the Administrator's subpoena.

The Chair's Rulings

Evidentiary, procedural, and discovery rulings are reviewed for an abuse of discretion. *See In re Chiang*, 2007PR00067 (Review Bd. at 10), M.R. 23022 (June 8, 2009); *In re Carroll*, 2015PR00132 (Review Bd. at 7), M.R. 029285 (June 14, 2018). An abuse of discretion occurs only when no reasonable person would take the position adopted by the Chair. *See Carroll*, at 7.

Respondent argues that the Chair abused his discretion by: (1) barring Respondent from presenting an expert witness, and denying Respondent's motion for additional time to disclose an expert witness; (2) allowing Dr. Rone to testify concerning certain issues; and (3) allowing the Administrator's Counsel to argue in closing that Respondent was not remorseful. She also argues that her due process rights were violated. We conclude that those arguments have no merit.

Expert Testimony

Respondent argues that the Chair erred by barring Respondent from presenting an expert witness at the hearing, and by denying Respondent's motion for additional time to disclose an expert witness. We reject those arguments.

Background: Set forth below is background information to place the matter in context:

- In January 2023, the initial one-count disciplinary Complaint was filed. In March 2023, Respondent filed her witness disclosure report in which she listed two mental health specialists as opinion witnesses concerning Respondent's mental health and treatment.
- In February 2024, the ten-count Amended Complaint was filed.
- In May 2024, Dr. Rone evaluated Respondent at the request of the Administrator, and Dr. Rone prepared a report dated June 10, 2024. According to Respondent, she received that report on or about July 16, 2024. (C. 334.)
- On August 12, 2024, the Chair issued an order granting Respondent's new attorney permission to file his appearance, and granting an extension of time, until August 27, for Respondent to disclose the identity and report/opinions of an expert witness, with the deposition of that witness to be completed on or before September 3, 2024. (C. 252-53.) Respondent did not disclose an expert witness or provide any reports or opinions by August 27 or September 3.

- On September 5, 2024, the Administrator filed a motion to bar Respondent from presenting an expert witness because Respondent had not disclosed an expert witness by that time, five days before the hearing.

- On September 9, 2024, the day before the scheduled disciplinary hearing, Respondent filed a Response to the Administrator's Motion, in which Respondent stated, "There was approximately a five-week delay between when Rone's report was finalized and when the Respondent received the report [on July 16]. This delay severely limited the Respondent's ability to prepare a defense and strategize with regards to her mental health conditions so they can properly be presented in this matter. WHEREFORE, Respondent, Mahdis Azimi, respectfully requests that the Chair deny the pending Motion and grant the respondent additional time to disclose an expert[.]" (C. 328.)

The Chair's Order: On September 9, 2024, the Chair issued an Order which stated:

The Chair having considered the Administrator's Motion to Bar Respondent from Presenting Opinion Witnesses (Motion to Bar) and Respondent's Response to Administrator's Motion to Bar … [and Respondent's Request] for Additional Time to Disclose an Expert Witness, IT IS ORDERED:

1. The Motion to Bar is granted. On March 10, 2023, Respondent filed a Rule 253 report that identified two individuals as treating professionals and opinion witnesses. The Administrator requested the complete records of one of these individuals in her request to produce of July 27, 2023. Respondent did not produce these records. Respondent was ordered to disclose any opinion witness with his or her report/opinions no later than August 27, 2024. There has been no indication that Respondent retained the identified persons as opinion witnesses or produced a report/opinions from either of them. Given Respondent's lack of compliance with the request to produce and the scheduling order, it would be prejudicial to the Administrator to allow Respondent to offer opinion witness testimony. Consequently, Respondent is barred from presenting any opinion witness testimony at hearing; and

2. Respondent's request for additional time to disclose an opinion witness is denied. The argument that the Administrator's purported five-week delay in producing her opinion witness report prejudiced Respondent's ability to retain an expert is not well taken. Respondent received the report by July 16, 2024, at the latest, well before the pre-hearing conference on August 8, 2024, which Respondent's counsel attended and at which Respondent was allowed an extension of time, until August 27, 2024, to disclose the identity and report/opinions of Respondent's opinion witness. Thus, even assuming *arguendo* that the five-week delay occurred, Respondent has already been given additional time to retain an expert since receiving the report. More importantly, this matter has been pending since January 26, 2023, so Respondent has had ample opportunity to obtain an opinion witness and disclose his or her opinions. For these reasons, Respondent will not be given more time, on the eve of hearing, to disclose an opinion witness or provide an opinion witness report/opinions.

(C. 336-37.) We agree with the Chair's analysis, conclusions, and rulings.

Barring the Expert: The Chair did not abuse his discretion in barring Respondent from presenting an expert witness. Respondent failed to comply with the order requiring her to disclose an expert witness by August 27, 2024. Her failure to comply with that deadline is an appropriate reason to bar her from calling an expert at the hearing.

Additionally, as of September 9, 2024, the day before the hearing, Respondent had not identified an expert, who was prepared to testify on her behalf at the hearing. There was no basis to allow Respondent to present an expert the next day at the hearing, since Respondent had not provided notice to the Administrator of the identity or opinions of an expert, or provided the Administrator an opportunity to depose the expert.

In *In re Walsh*, 1994PR00653, M.R. 16705 (June 30, 2000), the Review Board found that the Chair did not abuse his discretion by barring the respondent from presenting expert testimony, stating:

> Walsh objects to the Chair's pre-hearing ruling which barred her from presenting the testimony of her medical expert … and thus left her without medical support to substantiate her claims of a mental disorder. **** Our review of the pre-hearing transcripts indicates that the Chair's order … was based upon the continued refusal of Walsh's counsel's to commit to the use of an expert witness. **** Once a trial court orders sanctions for noncompliance with discovery orders, the sanctioned party has the burden of showing that its noncompliance was reasonable or warranted by extenuating circumstances. **** [W]e do not believe that Walsh has carried her burden of establishing that her noncompliance with discovery deadlines was reasonable or justified by extenuating circumstances. *** We cannot fault the Chair for adhering to the predetermined schedule.

(*Walsh*, Review Bd. at 12-15) (citations omitted.) In this case, as in *Walsh*, Respondent has not shown that her failure to identify an expert was reasonable or justified by extenuating circumstances. We affirm the Chair's decision to bar Respondent from presenting an expert witness at the hearing.

Extension of Time: We also find that the Chair did not abuse his discretion in denying Respondent's last minute request for additional time to disclose an expert witness.

Commission Rule 272 states, "The Chair may continue a hearing … at the Chair's discretion. No hearing … shall be continued at the request of any party except upon written motion supported by affidavit. No hearing shall be continued at the request of a party except under extraordinary circumstance."

Respondent failed to provide sufficient evidence to meet her burden of showing that extraordinary circumstances existed. *See In re Duric*, 2015PR00052 (Review Bd. at 9), M.R. 030734 (May 18, 2021) ("As the party seeking to continue the hearing, Respondent solely bore the burden of providing sufficient competent evidence to convince the hearing panel chair that extraordinary circumstances existed to warrant a continuance."). Additionally, Respondent's request for a continuance here was not supported by an affidavit as required by Rule 272. (*See* C. 327-35.)

Respondent's request for additional time was based solely on the fact that she received Dr. Rone's report on July 16, six weeks before she was required to disclose an expert witness. That

was not sufficient to establish extraordinary circumstances. Respondent failed to provide adequate information, or provide supporting evidence, concerning why she did not obtain an expert, and what steps she had taken to obtain an expert, after receiving Dr. Rone's report or during the year preceding the hearing; she also failed to explain when she would be ready to identify an expert. *See In re Murati*, 2023PR00026 (Review Bd. at 13-14), M.R. 032806 (Nov. 19, 2025) ("Respondent did not credibly demonstrate extraordinary circumstances that would justify a continuance. Respondent's motion failed to include key facts and lacked supporting evidence.")

The Chair stated in the Order, "[T] his matter has been pending since January 26, 2023, so Respondent has had ample opportunity to obtain an opinion witness and disclose his or her opinions." (C. 337.) We agree, and we conclude that the Chair did not abuse his discretion.

Dr. Rone's Qualifications

Respondent argues that Dr. Rone was unqualified to testify about ADHD and borderline and narcissistic personality disorders, and the Hearing Board erred by allowing Dr. Rone to provide testimony on those issues. That argument fails for several reasons.

First, at the disciplinary hearing, Respondent's attorney did not object to Dr. Rone's qualifications or her testimony concerning ADHD and borderline and narcissistic personality disorders, and on cross examination, the attorney specifically asked Dr. Rone questions about those issues. Consequently, Respondent's claim of error on appeal is forfeited. *See In re O'Shaughnessy-Marcanti*, 1996PR00001 (Review Bd. at 8), M.R. 14249 (Jan. 29, 1998) ("Generally, objections not raised in the trial court … may not be raised for the first time on appeal."); *In re Jennings*, 1999PR00032 (Review Bd. at 11), M.R. 17394 (May 25, 2001) (same); *People v. Houston*, 229 Ill. 2d 1, 9 n.3, 890 N.E.2d 424, 429 (2008); ("[F]orfeiture … is … the failure to make the timely assertion of [a] right.")

Second, Respondent does not cite to the record to support her argument that Dr. Rone is unqualified. Instead, she cites to materials outside the record. (*See* Resp. Brief at 24-25, n.17) (citing Dr. Rone's Faculty Profile from Northwestern, which is not in evidence); and (Reply Brief at 8, n.4) (citing Dr. Rone's "current professional profile," which is also not in evidence). Because those documents are not part of the record, we decline to consider them. *See In re Pondenis*, 2020PR00048 (Review Bd. at 5), M.R. 030903 (Sept. 23, 2021) ("Respondent cites purported facts that are not part of the record on appeal …. Accordingly, … this Board may not consider them on appeal."); *In re Lascia*, 2007PR00125 (Review Bd. at 8, 13), M.R. 23734 (May 18, 2010) ("[The Review] Board is not the fact-finder and does not consider evidence that is outside the record. *** The general rule is that it is improper to consider matters that are not part of the record.")

Third, based on the record, it is clear that Dr. Rone, who is a psychiatrist, is highly qualified. Dr. Rone testified that she has a medical degree from the University of Tennessee; she is on the medical staff at Northwestern Hospital and on the faculty at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine; she has been in private practice since 2000; she did a four-year psychiatric residency at Northwestern; she worked at the Veteran's Hospital; she was on the faculty and medical staff at Evanston Hospital; she has previously evaluated numerous attorneys; and she worked in a variety of settings including outpatient, community, substance abuse, and mental health clinics. In sum, we conclude that the Chair did not abuse his discretion concerning Dr. Rone's testimony.

Closing Argument

Respondent argues that the Chair erred by allowing the Administrator's Counsel to argue during her closing statement that Respondent did not show remorse. That argument has no merit.

Respondent's attorney did not object to Counsel's statement during her closing argument, and did not ask the Hearing Board to strike or disregard that statement. Therefore, Respondent's argument is forfeited on appeal. *See In re O'Shaughnessy-Marcanti*, and *Jennings*, *supra*.

Additionally, the Hearing Board is responsible for determining whether a respondent has expressed sincere remorse, and it was completely proper for Counsel to address that issue in closing, based on the evidentiary record. Accordingly, we find that the Chair did not abuse his discretion concerning this issue.

Due Process

Due process in a disciplinary proceeding requires notice of the allegations of misconduct, and a fair opportunity to defend against those allegations. *See In re Chandler*, 161 Ill. 2d 459, 470, 641 N.E.2d 473 (1994). Respondent argues that the Chair's rulings discussed above, in the aggregate, violated Respondent's due process rights. That argument is not persuasive.

None of the Chair's rulings constituted an abuse of discretion, and therefore, the aggregate of the rulings did not violate Respondent's due process rights. Moreover, the due process requirements were fully satisfied in this case, because the disciplinary Complaint provided proper notice of the allegations of misconduct, and Respondent had a fair opportunity to defend against those allegations.

Sanction Recommendation

We review the Hearing Board's sanction recommendation based on a *de novo* standard. *See In re Storment*, 2018PR00032 (Review Bd. at 15), M.R. 030336 (June 8, 2020). "Protection of the public is a paramount concern in attorney discipline." *In re Ford*, 2018PR00011 (Review Bd. at 10), M.R. 030123 (Jan. 17, 2020). We have considered the nature of the misconduct, and the aggravating and mitigating circumstances in this case, *see In re Gorecki*, 208 Ill. 2d 350, 360-61, 802 N.E.2d 1194 (2003), while keeping in mind that the purpose of discipline is not to punish but rather to protect the public, maintain the integrity of the legal profession, deter other misconduct, and protect the administration of justice from reproach. *See In re Discipio*, 163 Ill. 2d 515, 528, 645 N.E.2d 906 (1994).

Respondent argues that the sanction should not include a UFO provision. She also argues, "Respondent's suspension should be reduced to no more than five months, partially or wholly stayed upon the successful completion of probation." (Resp. Brief at 38.) We reject those arguments.

We conclude that a two-year suspension, UFO, is the appropriate sanction. It is severe enough to deter Respondent from engaging in misconduct, but it is not so long that it is likely to permanently end her legal career. It will also protect the public by requiring her to apply for reinstatement and prove that she is capable of practicing law ethically before she is allowed to practice law again. A two-year suspension, UFO, will give Respondent time to reassess her practice of law, reevaluate her dishonesty, establish a plan for practicing law in the future, and obtain treatment to address existing mental health issues.[4] If Respondent cannot satisfy the requirements for reinstatement, then the suspension will continue beyond the two-year period. In our view, a three-year suspension, UFO, is longer than necessary.

Respondent argues that a minimal sanction is warranted, primarily because she was suffering from severe mental health and personal issues. That argument is unpersuasive. Respondent failed to provide expert testimony concerning her mental health, in order to rebut Dr. Rone's testimony; and Respondent failed to provide any other evidence concerning her mental health and personal issues, except her own testimony. Moreover, she worked full time at Loyola; she continued to practice law; and she continued to take new clients, despite her mental health and personal issues. She also provided false testimony at the disciplinary hearing in September 2024, at a time when, according to Respondent, her mental health and personal issues had improved.

The Serious Nature of Respondent's Wrongdoing

We give substantial weight to the serious nature of Respondent's misconduct and the significant aggravating factors in this case. The Hearing Board stated, "We have serious concerns about Respondent's willingness or ability to comply with ethical standards in the future due to her

recidivism, the inadequacy of her treatment regimen to address her pattern of dishonesty, her failure to take responsibility for her misconduct, and her lack of knowledge about her ethical obligations." (Hearing Bd. Report at 41.) We agree.

Respondent's wrongdoing involved misconduct in ten separate immigration cases and involved multiple instances of dishonesty. She failed to communicate with clients; she did not refund unearned fees; she failed to return client files; she never opened a trust account; she caused harm to clients; she failed to take full responsibility for her misconduct; she did not comply with the Administrator's subpoena; she has prior discipline for similar misconduct; she failed to make restitution; she failed to present an adequate treatment plan; and her testimony at the disciplinary hearing was not credible concerning key points. We highlight some of the issues below.

Prior Misconduct: Significantly, Respondent's prior discipline did not deter her from engaging in the charged misconduct, which took place while the prior case was pending in 2021, and continued after Respondent was disciplined in 2022. In the prior case, Respondent failed to file an immigration application for her client; she lied to the client; and she created false evidence to support her lies. In light of the prior discipline, Respondent should have taken every step possible to avoid repeating that type (or any type) of wrongdoing; instead, she continued along the same unacceptable path and her misconduct escalated. Additionally, after the initial Complaint was filed in January 2023, Respondent still continued to engage in the charged misconduct through October 2023.

Respondent's Testimony: The Hearing Board concluded that Respondent's provided false testimony on key issues concerning many of the counts, as described below, which adds weight to our conclusion that she is currently unfit to practice law. *See In re Boscamp*, 2022PR00070 (Hearing Bd. at 17-18), M.R. 031859 (Sept. 21, 2023) ("An attorney's false testimony in a disciplinary hearing 'demonstrates a further unfitness to practice law.'")(Citation omitted). The Hearing Board stated, "[It is] our assessment that she was not a credible witness." (Hearing Bd. Report at 24). More specifically, the Hearing Board stated the following:

- "Respondent's testimony suggested that she was not responding to Yurtsever's messages in sequence and was responding to Yurtsever's statement that her phone was not working. We do not find this testimony credible." (*Id*. at 8) (Count II.)

- "[She testified] that she pulled the refund check from the mail after Bodakh submitted a request for investigation, … Respondent's explanation is not credible." (*Id*. at 14) (Count IV.)

- "Respondent … asserts she did not know the petition [for Cherkashina] had not been filed. We do not find Respondent's testimony believable." (*Id*. at 18) (Count V.)

- "While Respondent asserts in her defense that she performed work on this matter [for Mortazavi], we are dubious of this testimony given the lack of evidence before us of any work." (*Id*. at 20) (Count VI.)

- "Respondent … falsely testified that she sent the money orders and client file to the clients [Kinyanjui and Ngando]." (*Id*. at 21) (Count VII.)

- "[W]e do not believe her assertions that she provided the client file and earned the fees Mohammadi paid." (*Id*. at 27) (Count VIII.)

- "Respondent … denies that she failed to provide updates [to Tavakoli]. We do not find her denial credible." (*Id*. at 29.) Additionally, "[Respondent testified] that she did not provide the refund and client file because Tavakoli filed a request for investigation …. [W]e do not find her explanation credible or sincere." (*Id*. at 30) (Count IX.)

- "She has never produced her client files for several matters, nor did she respond to the Administrator's notice to produce. While Respondent repeatedly characterized her failure to produce information as an oversight, … [we] conclude that she intentionally withheld it from the Administrator." (*Id*. at 38-39) (Counts IV, VI, VII, and IX.)

Harm to Clients: Respondent harmed her clients and their families by failing to file immigration petitions; failing to give them information; making false statements; failing to refund unearned fees; and failing to provide client files. We note that immigration cases are a special type of legal matter, which involve issues concerning whether individuals will be permitted to live and work in the United States, and the consequences in immigration cases can be profound.

The record shows that Respondent caused her clients and their families needless anxiety and uncertainty; and she caused emotional and financial harm. Clients were upset, depressed, and felt helpless. Having immigration matters on hold, and waiting for Respondent to act, was very stressful. Two clients, who could not leave the country while they waited, were unable to visit sick relatives outside the country; another client was unable to work, while she waited; and one client, who was pregnant, was waiting for her parents to join her in this country.

Concealment: The record shows that Respondent intentionally attempted to conceal her misconduct, which included her on-going decisions not to file immigration petitions despite clients' requests, as well as making misrepresentations to clients, and failing to surrender files.

We note that Respondent's initial failure to file immigration petitions for clients could have been a result of negligence. According to Dr. Rone, Respondent's psychiatric diagnoses could have contributed to her difficulties with being organized and completing tasks. However, Respondent could have (and should have) rectified her failure to file petitions on a timely basis by filing those petitions at a later date, when clients contacted her asking about the petitions. However, she did not do so. We conclude that her failure to file those petitions, after the clients contacted her, was a conscious choice on her part; it was not simply a mistake or an oversight, and it did not result from a lack of organization; instead, it was an intentional decision, which helped conceal Respondent's initial failure to timely file the petitions.

For example, in Parvaneh Moghimzadeh's case, Respondent intentionally failed to file the relevant petitions, after the client asked about the petitions. Moghimzadeh retained Respondent in April 2021 to file immigration petitions for three of her siblings in Iran. Respondent failed to file those petitions on a timely basis. However, in February 2022, nine months after Respondent was retained, she was contacted by Moghimazdeh's daughter, who asked about the petitions; and Respondent falsely represented that the petitions had been filed. In her Answer to the Complaint, Respondent admitted that she knew that her statement was false when she made it. (C. 192.) At that point, Respondent could have filed the petitions, but she did not do so. Filing the petitions in

2022, would have disclosed Respondent's failure to file the petitions at an earlier date, in a timely fashion. Over the next year, between February 2022 and January 2023, Moghimzadeh periodically asked Respondent for status updates and proof that the applications had been filed, which again directed Respondent's attention to those petitions. (*See* Hearing Bd. Report at 10-12.) Nevertheless, Respondent did not file those petitions during that year. Even if Respondent's failure to file the petitions in 2021 involved negligence, we conclude that her failure to file the petitions in 2022 was intentional. As a result, Moghimzadeh and her family waited (uselessly) for almost two years.

Mitigating Evidence

In making our recommendation, we have also considered the mitigation in this case, which includes the following:

- Respondent testified that she was active in the community at various times between 2016 and 2024. She volunteered with the Minority Education Legal Resources group, which helped students prepare for the Bar exam, and she did similar volunteer work through Loyola. She was active in the American Immigration Lawyers Association, which included working on the Asylum Committee. She also provided *pro bono* services in cases referred to her through community organizations, including Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, Heartland Alliance, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

- Respondent testified that in February 2022, a close family member was diagnosed with cancer; he underwent major surgery in the spring of 2023, and he was hospitalized in the summer of 2023. Respondent testified that she provided help and support to her family, and she felt distressed and overwhelmed.

- In her report, Dr. Rone stated, "Psychotherapy can assist Ms. Azimi in understanding the basis of her dishonesty and in so doing, may begin to help her address it and change these patterns." (Adm. Ex. 14 at 122.)

- At the disciplinary hearing, Respondent provided testimony that indicates she recognizes the need for change. For example, she testified: "I am finally in a better place emotionally and mentally and health wise …. I feel clearer and more straightforward and understanding of what I need to do." (Tr. 215.) "I've been taking both Prozac and … my medication for ADHD and some other medications … for a little over a year. And I feel like a completely different person." (Tr. 241.) She testified that she had more control over her ability to work because she had been taking an increased dose of Prozac and Adderall. She also testified that she is willing to make restitution, and she has improved her system for keeping track of her work. Additionally, Respondent testified that she was participating in behavioral therapy once a week; she was talking to someone at the Lawyers Assistance Program every couple of weeks; and she was working with an ADHD coaching group for lawyers. In her *pro se* Reply Brief, Respondent states, "Ultimately, the Respondent is more than aware that mental health care and treatment is a long term commitment and she is willing to comply with her treatment plan so that she can comply with her ethical obligations as an attorney." (Reply Brief at 15.) In our view, Respondent's statements indicate that she is willing to take the steps needed in order to practice law ethically in the future.

- The Hearing Board found that Respondent had taken some steps to address her mental health issues.

- Respondent was a solo practitioner at the time of the misconduct; she was working without supervision or a mentor; she had almost no staff; and she had practiced law for only six years when the misconduct began in 2020.

- Although Respondent failed to fully accept responsibility, she did admit to a significant amount of wrongdoing, including that she failed to file immigration petitions in seven cases; she made false representation to two clients; she did not provide complete files to clients in three cases; and she failed to refund unearned fees in two cases. She also expressed some remorse, testifying, "[T]here are a lot of things that I do regret, including the way I interact with my clients and the things that I've done that have harmed them." (Tr. 267.)

- Respondent cooperated in the disciplinary proceedings, at least in part, by filing pleadings; appearing at a sworn statement; meeting with Dr. Rone for a forensic evaluation; and participating in the disciplinary hearing.

- Respondent has been an immigration attorney her entire career. We note that there is a need for immigration attorneys, and the record shows that Respondent is familiar with immigration laws and procedures, and she speaks Persian.

Relevant Legal Authority

We have carefully reviewed all of the cases cited by both parties and the Hearing Board. In making our recommendation, we have relied on cases involving similar misconduct, as discussed below. The recommended sanction of a two-year suspension, UFO, falls squarely within the range of sanctions imposed in those cases. Set forth below is a summary of comparable cases:

In ***In re Wright***, 1992PR00543 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 10665 (March 27, 1995), the attorney was suspended for two years, UFO. Wright neglected eleven client matters, made misrepresentations to seven of those clients, and failed to timely refund unearned fees or pay full restitution to seven clients. He failed to file two mechanic liens for a client, and the statute of limitations expired; he failed to file the papers for a woman's divorce, but told her to go ahead and get married, which she did; he failed to take necessary actions in six other cases involving divorce or child support, including one case in which the client's husband was abusive; he failed to take appropriate steps in two estate cases, which resulted in a $60,000 loss in one case, and a three-year delay in the other. In mitigation, he cooperated; he took steps to improve his legal practice; he called several character witnesses; and he had no prior discipline. However, the *Wright* Hearing Board stated, "There is little to suggest that he would not continue the pattern of neglect that is so apparent from the evidence without additional remedial efforts." (*Id.* at 31.)

In ***In re Bradley***, 2014PR00044, *petition for discipline on consent allowed*, M.R. 27490 (Sept. 21, 2015), the attorney was suspended for two years, UFO. Bradley failed to diligently

represent seven clients over a period of four years. He made misrepresentations to five of those clients. He failed to redeem a client's foreclosed property; he did not respond to motions in court; he failed to timely file a personal injury case; he failed to serve an opposing party; he failed to file appellate briefs in two civil appeals; he failed to inquire about assets in a divorce case; and he provided financial assistance to two clients. A psychiatrist, who examined Bradley, testified that his lack of diligence may have been related to his depression and anxiety, but his false statements were attributable to deep-seated personality issues. The psychiatrist recommended that he continue to receive psychiatric treatment for an extended period. In mitigation, he accepted responsibility; he had malpractice coverage; he closed his law office; and he had no prior discipline.

In ***In re Trigo****,* 2004PR00005 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 21661 (Sept. 18, 2007), the attorney was suspended for two years, UFO. He failed to file immigration forms in three cases; he failed to return documents and unearned fees. In aggravation, he provided false testimony; he failed to accept responsibility; and he had two prior disciplinary cases involving similar misconduct. He presented no mitigating evidence. The *Trigo* Hearing Board stated, "Respondent's similar previous misconduct, his lack of remorse and his less than candid testimony at the hearing shows an unwillingness to adhere to the professional standards of the legal profession. We note that in cases where as here, the attorney is unwilling or unable to meet professional standards of conduct, the suspension was continued until further order of court." (*Trigo*, Hearing Bd. at 25.)

In ***In re Houdek***, 113 Ill. 2d 323, 326-27, 497 N.E.2d 1169 (1986), the attorney was suspended for two-years, UFO. Houdek neglected a legal matter; made misrepresentations to a client; and fabricated evidence. Instead of addressing the original problem of neglect, Houdek made false representations, fabricated evidence, and testified falsely before the Commission. The Court stated, "The respondent's failure to remedy his neglect, when [the client] complained of it to him, his misrepresentation to [the client] that he had taken care of the matter, and his less than candid dealings with the Commission warrant a suspension of 24 months. Moreover, … the lack of any evidence that he is willing or able to meet professional standards of conduct in the future warrant suspension until further order of the court." 113 Ill. 2d at 327.

In ***In re*** **Holman**, 2005PR00123 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 21952 (Jan. 23, 2008) (cited by the Hearing Board in this case), the attorney was suspended for three years, UFO. Between 2001 and 2005, Holman failed to provide competent representation in seven cases and failed to keep his clients informed; he failed to consult with three clients before voluntarily dismissing their cases; he made misrepresentations to two clients; and he failed to respond to the Administrator's demands for information concerning two client matters. In one case, Respondent failed to meet the deadlines for filing an appellate brief, resulting in the appeal being dismissed, so his clients lost any chance of recovering on their claims. In another case, Respondent agreed to file an appeal on behalf of a client, but failed to tell the client that the time to file a notice of appeal had passed. The Hearing Board declined to consider Respondent's personal, physical, and mental health issues as mitigating factors. In aggravation, Holman had a prior disciplinary case twelve years before, in which he filed a baseless claim and failed to disclose an unfavorable doctor's report. The Hearing Board stated, "Respondent is an older and more experienced attorney than he was during the first disciplinary matter, yet he engaged in quantitatively more serious misconduct." (*Holman*, Hearing Bd. at 34.) Holman also failed to recognize the seriousness of his misconduct; he failed to apologize to his clients, including the clients who lost their legal claims; and he lacked genuine remorse. In mitigation, Holman engaged in charitable activities. Although *Holman* is similar to this case it is not identical. In *Holman*, the Hearing Board's recommendation was based in part on "the lack of

mitigating factors." (*Id*. at 36.) In our view, the mitigating factors in the instant case are more substantial than in *Holman*, including that Respondent acknowledged the significant need for change. Additionally, in *Holman*, some clients lost their legal claims. Holman was also an older and more experienced attorney.

In ***In re McFarland***, 2002PR00103 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 19393 (May 18, 2004) (cited by the Hearing Board in this case), the attorney was suspended for 2½ years, UFO, and until she paid restitution. McFarland neglected seven client matters; she failed to perform legal work for which she was retained and she failed to appear at court hearings; she failed to communicate with seven clients; she failed to refund unearned fees in a timely manner in four instances; and she dishonestly signed others' names to two settlement drafts. McFarland stated that she left the practice of law because she was unable to perform her duties and was causing harm to her clients. In aggravation, her neglect led to a $150,000 default judgment against one of her clients, and led to the cases of four clients being time-barred. She had no malpractice insurance. She failed to accept responsibility; she lacked an understanding of her misconduct and her obligations as an attorney; and she failed to make restitution. In mitigation, she had no prior discipline, she had done some *pro bono* work, and someone close to her passed away during the relevant time period. The Hearing Board found that she was unwilling or unable to meet professional standards of conduct in the future. The Hearing Board stated, "We also believe that the Respondent should not be reinstated until the completion of a mentoring program and courses in ethics and law office management. Lastly, inasmuch as the Respondent is making a claim of medical difficulties, she must submit medical documentation that states she is fit to return to the practice as a further condition of reinstatement." (*McFarland*, Hearing Bd. at 27.)

In ***In re Stark,*** 2013PR00027 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 27037 (Jan. 16, 2015), the attorney was suspended for one year, UFO. Stark neglected the cases of two clients; both lawsuits were dismissed and the cases were time-barred. In one of those cases, the client had a financial loss of $300,000, and Stark lied to that client about the status of his case. Stark waited three years to tell the other client that her case had been dismissed, and the case was time-barred; although Stark reached a $25,000 settlement with that client, he failed to pay her any money. He testified falsely at the disciplinary hearing concerning key issues. In aggravation, he had two prior disciplinary cases for similar misconduct, which were pending. In mitigation, he was active in the community and he called character witnesses. The *Stark* Hearing Board stated, "We find no basis for believing that a fixed-term of suspension will adequately protect the Respondent's future clients, the administration of justice, or the legal profession." (*Stark*, Hearing Bd. at 35.)

The cases cited above are generally comparable to the instant matter. In *Holman*, the Hearing Board stated, "Respondent has demonstrated that he is currently unfit to practice law .... We conclude that Respondent should receive a significant suspension and only be allowed to return to the practice of law after proving that he is capable of doing so." (*Id.* at 38.) Here, we also conclude that Respondent is unfit to practice law; she should receive a significant suspension; and

she should be required to prove that she capable of acting ethically before being reinstated. In our view, a two-year suspension, UFO, addresses those issues.

We find that the cases cited by Respondent are inapplicable. *See e.g.*, *In re Cagle*, 2005PR00023 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 21355 (April 9, 2007) (two-year suspension, where the misconduct was not the result of a dishonest, corrupt, or pecuniary motive); *In re Samuels*, 126 Ill. 2d 509, 535 N.E.2d 808 (1989) (one-year suspension, where there was no corrupt motive or moral turpitude involved in the case, and no prior discipline); *In re Liles*, 2020PR00022 (Hearing Bd.), M.R. 030948 (Dec. 7, 2021) (one-year suspension, UFO, stayed after six-months by two years of probation, where the attorney had been abusing alcohol, but had been sober for a year, and a psychiatrist testified that the attorney should be able to practice law without difficulty if he continued his abstinence from alcohol); *In re Taylor,* 66 Ill. 2d 567, 363 N.E.2d 845 (1977) (one year suspension, where there was a lack of overtly dishonest acts).

We find that a two-year suspension, UFO, is commensurate with Respondent's misconduct and consistent with discipline that has been imposed for comparable misconduct.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, we affirm all of the Hearing Board's findings of misconduct. We also affirm all of the Chair's rulings that were challenged on appeal. We recommend that Respondent be suspended for two years, UFO. That will give Respondent time to obtain mental health treatment; determine ways to revise her law practice; and obtain additional training; and it will require her to apply for reinstatement to the practice of law. At the end of the two years suspension, if Respondent is unready or unable to satisfy the requirements for reinstatement, her suspension will continue until she can demonstrate that she is capable of practicing law ethically. We conclude that the recommended sanction will serve the goals of attorney discipline, including

protecting the public, deterring respondent and other attorneys, and maintaining the integrity of the legal profession.

Respectfully submitted,

David W. Neal
Bradley N. Pollock
Juan R. Thomas

CERTIFICATION

I, Michelle M. Thome, Clerk of the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission of the Supreme Court of Illinois and keeper of the records, hereby certifies that the foregoing is a true copy of the Corrected Report and Recommendation of the Review Board, approved by each Panel member, entered in the above entitled cause of record filed in my office on February 23, 2026.

/s/ Michelle M. Thome
Michelle M. Thome, Clerk of the
Attorney Registration and Disciplinary
Commission of the Supreme Court of Illinois

4903-0460-9937, v. 1

[1] The Hearing Board found that Respondent violated the following Rules of Professional Conduct:
Rule 1.3: Failing to act with reasonable diligence and promptness (8 counts).
Rule 1.4(a)(3): Failing to keep the client reasonably informed of the status of the matter (2 counts).
Rule 1.4(a)(4): Failing to promptly comply with reasonable requests for information (5 counts).
Rule 1.15(a): Failure to hold property separate from the lawyer's property; failure to hold client funds in a client trust account; and failure to safeguard property (3 counts).
Rule 1.16(d): Failing to protect a client's interests after the representation ends, by failing to surrender the client's files (2 counts) or refund unearned fees (3 counts), or both (1 count).
Rule 8.1(a): Knowingly making a false statement in connection with a disciplinary matter (1 count).
Rule 8.1(b): Knowingly failing to respond to the Administrator's lawful demand for information (4 counts).
Rule 8.4(c): Engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation (6 counts).

[2] This Report has been corrected to address the Hearing Board's finding that Respondent violated Rule 1.15(a)(2010), as charged in Count VII. The original Review Board Report mistakenly cited to the version of Rule 1.15(a) that went into effect in July 2023, after Respondent's misconduct took place (earlier in 2023). We conclude that based on the version of Rule 1.15(a) that was in effect at the time of Respondent's misconduct, the Hearing Board is correct that Respondent violated Rule 1.15(a), as charged in Count VII, in that she failed to appropriately safeguard her

clients' property. On appeal, Respondent did not challenge the Hearing Board's finding on that issue. This correction does not affect our overall analysis or our sanction recommendation.

[3] The day before the disciplinary hearing, Respondent had not yet identified an expert witness or presented any opinions by an expert, as ordered. Therefore she was barred from calling an expert. (C. 336-37.) Respondent was also barred from presenting evidence relating to her psychotherapy treatment records, because she failed to produce those records to the Administrator prior to the hearing, in response to the Administrator's Request to Produce Documents. (Hearing Bd. Report at 35; footnote at 42.)

[4] We strongly recommend that while suspended, Respondent obtain mental health treatment, as describe by Dr. Rone. We also recommend that she obtain any counseling, mentoring, and training that will help her practice law ethically in the future. We note that reinstatement could include specific conditions, such as requiring supervision by another attorney, and treatment by a qualified mental health professional, if warranted. See In re Jones, 2020PR00057 (Review Bd.), M.R. 030490 (Nov. 23, 2022) (the attorney was reinstated with conditions including supervision and treatment).

BEFORE THE REVIEW BOARD
OF THE
ILLINOIS ATTORNEY REGISTRATION
AND
DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

In the Matter of: **MAHDIS AZIMI,** Respondent-Appellant, No. 6320242.	Commission No. 2023PR00003

PROOF OF SERVICE
OF THE CORRECTED REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
OF THE REVIEW BOARD

I, Michelle M. Thome, hereby certify that I served a copy of the Corrected Report and Recommendation of the Review Board on Respondent-Appellant listed at the address shown below by e-mail service on February 23, 2026, at or before 5:00 p.m. At the same time, a copy was sent to Counsel for the Administrator-Appellee by e-mail service.

Mahdis Azimi
Respondent-Appellant
mahdis@azimilaw.com

Under penalties as provided by law pursuant to Section 1-109 of the Code of Civil Procedure, the undersigned certifies that the statements set forth in this instrument are true and correct, except as to matters therein stated to be on information and belief and as to such matters the undersigned certifies as aforesaid that she verily believes the same to be true.

/s/ Michelle M. Thome
By: Michelle M. Thome
Clerk of the Attorney Registration and
Disciplinary Commission of the
Supreme Court of Illinois

4903-0460-9937, v. 1

FILED

February 23, 2026

ARDC CLERK