

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

In the Matter of:)	
)	
RONALD RICHARD DUEBBERT,)	
)	Commission No. 2020PR00034
Attorney-Respondent,)	
)	
No. 6203242.)	

COMPLAINT

Jerome Larkin, Administrator of the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission, by his attorney, Scott Renfro, pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 753(b), complains of Respondent Ronald Richard Duebbert, who was licensed to practice law in Illinois on May 10, 1990, and alleges that Respondent has engaged in the following conduct which subjects him to discipline pursuant to Supreme Court Rule 770:

COUNT I

(False Statements to Police Concerning David Fields)

A. *Background*

1. Respondent met David Fields in 2013, and thereafter developed and maintained a close personal relationship with Fields. In the summer of 2015, Fields pled guilty to aggravated assault on a pregnant person and was sentenced to a period of incarceration, which he began to serve in August of that year.

2. Respondent and Fields remained in contact during Fields's incarceration, including through telephone calls, written correspondence, and Respondent's personal visits and attorney visits to Fields. On October 24, 2016 Fields was released from incarceration on mandatory supervised release.

3. Beginning during the period when Fields was incarcerated, Respondent submitted applications to the Illinois Department of Corrections seeking approval for Fields to reside in Respondent's home in Belleville upon Fields's release from incarceration. These applications were initially denied based on the presence of firearms in Respondent's home, and upon his release Fields went to live at his mother's home in Shiloh, Illinois.

4. Respondent subsequently agreed to remove certain firearms from his home so that Fields could move in with him. On or about November 4, 2016, Fields moved from his mother's residence to Respondent's residence in Belleville. On or about December 2, 2016, Fields moved from Respondent's home back to his mother's home in Shiloh.

B. Respondent Provides a Cell Phone to Fields

5. Beginning in 2015 Respondent periodically provided Fields with a cellular phone that Fields could use to communicate with Respondent and others. In 2015, Respondent first provided Fields with this cellular telephone, which was associated with a phone number containing the digits 650 (hereinafter referred to at times as "the 650 phone"). The 650 phone was in Respondent's name and Respondent paid the monthly bill, but Fields was the phone's primary user when he had it in his possession, including for several months after Respondent first gave it to him in 2015.

6. Respondent also possessed and operated another cell phone with a phone number containing the digits 117 (referred to hereinafter as "the 117 phone"). Respondent used the 117 phone himself, including using it to communicate with Fields on the 650 phone.

7. Before he was incarcerated in 2015, Fields returned the 650 phone to Respondent, and it remained in Respondent's possession while Fields was incarcerated.

8. After Fields was released from custody in 2016, Respondent allowed Fields to regain possession of and use the 650 phone. Fields kept and used the phone for several weeks thereafter, including during the period when Fields lived in Respondent's home in November and December of 2016. In or about mid-December 2016, Respondent retook possession of the 650 phone, which had previously been in Fields's possession.

9. At some later point prior to December 29, 2016, Fields contacted Respondent and requested that Respondent return the 650 phone to Fields.

10. On the night of December 29, 2016, Respondent met Fields in a gas station parking lot in Belleville. At that meeting, Respondent gave Fields a bag containing various personal effects belonging to Fields that had been stored at Respondent's home. Prior to or during this meeting, Respondent also returned the 650 phone to Fields.

11. Respondent and Fields subsequently communicated during the night of December 29, 2016, through text messages exchanged between the 117 phone, which was in Respondent's possession, and the 650 phone, which was in Fields's possession.

12. Early the next morning, at or about 5:00 a.m. on December 30, 2016, Carl Silas was killed. The police investigating the killing identified Fields as a suspect in the killing soon thereafter.

13. Later that morning of December 30, 2016, Respondent received a call from a woman who was an acquaintance of Fields, and she informed Respondent that she had heard reports that Fields was involved in a possible murder. Shortly after Respondent's call with Fields's acquaintance, Fields himself called Respondent from a phone belonging to a different female acquaintance of Fields. Respondent and Fields had a conversation lasting just over three

minutes. By no later than noon on December 30, 2016, Respondent was aware that Fields was a suspect in a homicide investigation.

C. *Respondent's False Statements to Police Investigators*

14. At or about 1:15 p.m. on December 30, 2016, Special Agent Patrick McGuire and Detective Timothy Lawrence, police officers involved in the investigation of Silas's killing, contacted Respondent and asked to speak with him. At approximately 3:45 p.m. that afternoon, the officers met Respondent at his home, where the officers conducted a video- and audio-recorded interview of Respondent in connection with the Silas investigation. The interview lasted approximately one hour.

15. During the interview, Respondent told the officers that he had delivered a bag containing clothing and some documents to Fields the previous evening. Also during the interview, the officers asked Respondent questions about the use and whereabouts of the 650 phone. During the discussion regarding the 650 phone, Respondent told the officers "The phone, I determined that it wasn't smart to let him [Fields] have that phone. So I took it back. Actually I didn't. My sister had it. So he doesn't have it right now." Respondent further told the officers that the 650 phone number "is not his [Fields's] phone number anymore."

16. One of the officers then asked Respondent, "Do you have that phone?" Respondent answered, "I do." One of the officers then asked Respondent: "How long ago did you have it back for? Roughly. I don't expect you to know the exact day." Respondent answered: "Early December, late November. I don't know. I said you gotta [sic] get your own phone here. And he said he would." Respondent did not tell the police officers that he had given the 650 phone to Fields the previous evening.

17. Respondent's statements to the police concerning the 650 phone's whereabouts were false, because by telling the police investigators that he had gotten the 650 phone back in early December or late November, and that he then had the phone, Respondent created the false impression that he or his sister had maintained continuous possession of the 650 phone between late November or early December 2016 and the time of the interview on December 30, 2016.

18. Respondent knew his statements to the police were false, because he knew he had recently given the 650 phone back to Fields, and Fields had possession of the phone the night before Respondent was interviewed by the police. In fact, Fields had used the 650 phone to communicate directly with Respondent the night of the homicide the officers were investigating.

19. During the interview, Respondent also discussed whether he had recently been in contact with Fields. Respondent did not tell the police officers that he had exchanged text messages with Fields the previous night or that he had spoken to Fields by telephone that morning. Near the end of the interview Respondent stated: "And if I think of anything else, if he contacts me, I'm going to one, tell him to turn himself in. Number two, I will let you know. But he hasn't" – and, while pointing at his cell phone (the 117 phone) lying on the table in front of him – Respondent said "I mean, here it is. I'll let you know everything."

20. Later in the interview, Respondent again stated that he had not recently been contacted by Fields, stating: "And again, I haven't. If I'm contacted, I will tell him exactly what I said, because I'm very worried."

21. Respondent's statements to the police concerning his recent contacts with Fields were false, because Respondent exchanged messages with Fields the previous night and had been contacted by Fields earlier that morning and had spoken to him by telephone for approximately three minutes.

22. Respondent knew his statements to the police were false at the time he made them. While Respondent told the investigators that Fields had not yet contacted him, he knew that he had exchanged messages with Fields the previous night and that Fields had contacted him earlier that day by telephone and that the two men had spoken for approximately three minutes.

23. Later that day, the police officers learned that the 650 phone had been used the night before Silas's killing. Respondent met again with the police investigators later that day, both in a bedroom and in the garage of his home and at a friend's house. During the meeting in his garage, Respondent gave the 650 phone to the police.

24. During all of his meetings with the police on December 30, 2016, Respondent did not disclose facts that he knew were relevant to the homicide investigation the officers were conducting: for example, Respondent did not tell the police officers that Fields had regained possession of the 650 phone at or around the time of Respondent's meeting with Fields on December 29, 2016, at the gas station, nor did Respondent tell the police officers that Fields had communicated with Respondent via text message from the 650 phone on the night of December 29, 2016, or that Respondent had spoken to Fields on the telephone earlier that same day.

25. Respondent did not reveal this information to the officers despite searching and viewing the 117 phone's call log and text message history during the interview, and despite identifying and informing the officers of other calls and communications that had occurred over the previous two days.

26. By reason of the conduct described above, Respondent has engaged in the following misconduct:

- a. conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation, by conduct including providing false and misleading information to the police during the interview concerning his recent contacts with Fields and the whereabouts of

the 650 phone, in violation of Rule 8.4(c) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct.

COUNT II

(Respondent's False Testimony Before the Judicial Inquiry Board)

27. On May 12, 2017, Respondent (who was a circuit court judge at the time of the police interview alleged in Count I, above) appeared before the Illinois Judicial Inquiry Board (“the Board”) and testified under oath about events at issue in the Board’s investigation of his alleged misconduct, including his interview with the police on December 30, 2016. Respondent returned on June 9, 2017, and completed his sworn testimony before the Board about the same investigation.

28. Respondent testified before the Board that, at the time of the December 30, 2016 interview with the police investigators, he believed the 650 phone was in Fields’s possession, and that he told the officers during the interview that the phone was then in Fields’s possession. Respondent also testified before the Board that soon after his initial interview with the police, he discovered the 650 phone was sitting in his garage, that he was “totally and utterly in shock and stunned” to find the phone, and that he thought “this is surreal. This is like a bad nightmare.” When asked why he felt that way, Respondent answered: “Because it couldn’t be there because I had given him [Fields] the phone before.”

29. Respondent’s testimony to the Board was false, because Respondent had actually told the police that he or his sister had had possession of the 650 phone since late November or early December of 2016, and he did not tell the investigators that Fields had possessed the phone on December 29, 2016.

30. Respondent knew that his testimony before the Board about what he told the police concerning the whereabouts of the 650 phone was false, because Respondent had actually told the police that he or his sister had possession of the 650 phone.

31. Respondent also testified before the Board that, during his December 30, 2016 interview, he had informed the officers that he exchanged text messages with David Fields the night of December 29, 2016.

32. Respondent's testimony before the Board that he had told the police about having exchanged text messages with Fields the night before the interview was false, because he had not provided that information to the police during his December 30, 2016 interview.

33. Respondent knew that his testimony before the Board was false, because he knew he had not told the police about the text messages.

34. Respondent also testified before the Board that Fields had contacted him on the morning of December 30, 2016; that Respondent had informed Fields on that call that he heard Fields was involved in a murder; that Respondent advised Fields to turn himself in and get a lawyer; and that during his December 30, 2016 police interview, he informed the officers that he had spoken with Fields earlier that morning and told Fields to turn himself in.

35. Respondent's testimony before the Board that he had told the police of his December 30, 2016 conversation with Fields was false, because he had not provided that information to the police during his interview with them.

36. Respondent knew that his testimony before the Board about what he told the police was false, because he knew that he had not told the police, during his December 30, 2016 interview, about his conversation with Fields earlier on the day of the interview.

37. Respondent also testified before the Board that, during his December 30, 2016 interview, he had been truthful with the police, told them everything he knew that was relevant, and that he did not withhold any information he thought was relevant concerning Fields or the investigation that the police did not ask about.

38. Respondent's testimony about the extent of his cooperation with the police was false, because he had not been candid or cooperative with the police. Instead, he made false statements about certain topics and withheld other information from the police.

39. Respondent knew that his testimony before the Board was false, because he knew that he had not been candid or cooperative in his interview with the police.

40. By reason of the conduct described above, Respondent has engaged in the following misconduct:

- a. knowingly making a false statement of fact to a tribunal, by conduct including testifying falsely before the Judicial Inquiry Board about what he told the police investigators and the extent of his candor and cooperation during the police interview, in violation of Rule 3.3(a)(1) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct;
- b. knowingly making a false statement of material fact in connection with a disciplinary matter (the Judicial Inquiry Board investigation into his conduct), by conduct including testifying falsely before the Judicial Inquiry Board about what he told the police in the interview and the extent of his candor and cooperation, in violation of Rule 8.1(a) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct; and
- c. conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation, by conduct including testifying falsely before the Judicial Inquiry Board about what he told the police during the interview and the extent of his candor and cooperation, in violation of Rule 8.4(c) of the Illinois Rules of Professional Conduct.

