

CHAPTER 6
DISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATIONS

193G—6.1(17A,272C,544C) Investigative authority. The board is authorized by Iowa Code sections 17A.13(1), 272C.3, 272C.4 and 272C.6(4) to conduct disciplinary investigations to determine whether grounds exist to initiate a disciplinary proceeding against a registrant.

193G—6.2(17A,272C,544C) Initiation of disciplinary investigations. The board may initiate a registrant disciplinary investigation upon the board's receipt of information suggesting that a registrant may have violated a law or rule enforced by the board which violation, if true, would constitute grounds for registrant discipline. The board may also review the publicly available work product of a registrant on a general or random basis to determine whether reasonable grounds exist to initiate disciplinary proceedings or to conduct a more specific investigation.

193G—6.3(272C,544C) Sources of information. Without limitation, the following nonexclusive list of information sources may form the basis for the initiation of a disciplinary investigation or proceeding:

1. General or random review of publicly available work product.
2. News articles or other media sources.
3. Reports filed with the board by the commissioner of insurance pursuant to Iowa Code subsection 272C.4(9).
4. Complaints filed with the board by any member of the public.
5. Registration applications or other documents submitted to the board.
6. Reports to the board from any regulatory or law enforcement agency from any jurisdiction.
7. Board audits of registrant compliance with conditions for registration, such as continuing education.

193G—6.4(17A,272C,544C) Conflict of interest. If the subject of a complaint is a member of the board, or if a member of the board has a conflict of interest in any disciplinary matter before the board, that member shall abstain from participation in any consideration of the complaint and from participation in any disciplinary hearing that may result from the complaint.

193G—6.5(272C,544C) Complaints. Written complaints may be submitted to the board office by mail, E-mail, facsimile, or personal delivery by members of the public, including clients, business organizations, nonprofit organizations, governmental bodies, registrants, or other individuals or entities with knowledge of possible law or rule violations by registrants.

6.5(1) Contents of a written complaint. Written complaints may be submitted on forms provided by the board which are available from the board office and on the board's Web site. Written complaints, whether submitted on a board complaint form or in other written medium, shall contain the following information:

- a. The full name, address, and telephone number of the complainant (person complaining).
- b. The full name, address, and telephone number of the respondent (registrant against whom the complaint is filed).
- c. A statement of the facts and circumstances giving rise to the complaint, including a description of the alleged acts or omissions which the complainant believes demonstrate that the respondent has violated or is violating laws or rules enforced by the board.
- d. If known, citations to the laws or rules allegedly violated by the respondent.
- e. Evidentiary supporting documentation.
- f. Steps, if any, taken by the complainant to resolve the dispute with the respondent prior to filing a complaint.

6.5(2) Immunity. As provided by Iowa Code section 272C.8, a person shall not be civilly liable as a result of filing a report or complaint with the board unless such act is done with malice, nor shall an employee be dismissed from employment or discriminated against by an employer for filing such a report or complaint.

6.5(3) *Role of complainant.* The role of the complainant in the disciplinary process is limited to providing the board with factual information relative to the complaint. A complainant is not party to any disciplinary proceeding which may be initiated by the board based in whole or in part on information provided by the complainant.

6.5(4) *Role of the board.* The board does not act as an arbiter of disputes between private parties, nor does the board initiate disciplinary proceedings to advance the private interest of any person or party. The role of the board in the disciplinary process is to protect the public by investigating complaints and initiating disciplinary proceedings in appropriate cases. The board possesses sole decision-making authority throughout the disciplinary process, including the authority to determine whether a case will be investigated, the manner of the investigation, whether a disciplinary proceeding will be initiated, and the appropriate registrant discipline to be imposed, if any.

6.5(5) *Initial complaint screening.* All written complaints received by the board shall be initially screened by the board's executive officer to determine whether the allegations of the complaint fall within the board's investigatory jurisdiction and whether the facts presented, if true, would constitute a basis for disciplinary action against a registrant. Complaints which are clearly outside the board's jurisdiction, which clearly do not allege facts upon which disciplinary action would be based, or which are frivolous shall be referred by the board's executive officer to the board for closure at the next scheduled board meeting. All other complaints shall be referred by the board's executive officer to the board's disciplinary committee for committee review as described in rule 193G—6.8(17A,272C,544C).

193G—6.6(272C,544C) *Case numbers.* Whether based on a written complaint received by the board or a complaint initiated by the board, all complaint files shall be tracked by a case numbering system. Complaints are assigned case numbers in chronological order with the first two digits representing the year in which the complaint was received or initiated, and the second two digits representing the order in which the case file was opened (e.g., 01-01, 01-02, 01-03, etc.). The board's executive officer shall maintain a case file log noting the date each case file was opened, whether disciplinary proceedings were initiated in the case, and the final disposition of the case. Once a case file number is assigned to a complaint, all persons communicating with the board regarding that complaint are encouraged to include the case file number to facilitate accurate record keeping and a prompt response.

193G—6.7(272C,544C) *Confidentiality of complaint and investigative information.* All complaint and investigative information received or created by the board is privileged and confidential pursuant to Iowa Code subsection 272C.6(4). Such information shall not be released to any person except as provided in that subsection.

193G—6.8(17A,272C,544C) *Investigation procedures.*

6.8(1) *Disciplinary committee.* The board chairperson shall annually appoint, as needed, two to four members of the board to serve on the board's disciplinary committee to review and process disciplinary complaints. The disciplinary committee is a purely advisory body which shall review complaint files referred by the board's executive officer, generally supervise the investigation of complaints, and make recommendations to the full board on the disposition of complaints. Members of the committee shall not personally investigate complaints, but they may review the investigative work product of others in formulating recommendations to the board.

6.8(2) *Committee screening of complaints.* Upon the referral of a complaint from the board's executive officer or from the full board, the committee shall determine whether the complaint presents facts which, if true, suggest that a registrant may have violated a law or rule enforced by the board. If the committee concludes that the complaint does not present facts which suggest such a violation or that the complaint does not otherwise constitute an appropriate basis for disciplinary action, the committee shall refer the complaint to the full board with the recommendation that the complaint be closed with no further action. If the committee determines that the complaint does present a credible basis for disciplinary action, the committee may either immediately refer the complaint to the full board recommending that a disciplinary proceeding be commenced or initiate a disciplinary investigation.

6.8(3) *Committee procedures.* If the committee determines that additional information is necessary or desirable to evaluate the merits of a complaint, the committee may assign an investigator or expert consultant, appoint a peer review committee, provide the registrant an opportunity to appear before the disciplinary committee for an informal discussion as described in rule 193G—6.9(17A,272C,544C), or request board staff to conduct further investigation. Upon completion of an investigation, the investigator, expert consultant, peer review committee or board staff shall present a report to the committee. The committee shall review the report and determine what further action is necessary. The committee may:

- a. Request further investigation.
- b. Determine there is not probable cause to believe a disciplinary violation has occurred and refer the case to the full board with the recommendation of closure.
- c. Determine there is probable cause to believe that a law or rule enforced by the board has been violated, but that disciplinary action is unwarranted on other grounds, and refer the case to the full board with the recommendation of closure. The committee may also recommend that the registrant be informally cautioned or educated about matters which could form the basis for disciplinary action in the future.
- d. Determine there is probable cause to believe a disciplinary violation has occurred, and refer the case to the full board with the recommendation that the board initiate a disciplinary proceeding (contested case).

6.8(4) *Subpoena authority.* Pursuant to Iowa Code subsections 17A.13(1) and 272C.6(3), the board is authorized in connection with a disciplinary investigation to issue subpoenas to compel witnesses to testify or persons to produce books, papers, records and any other real evidence, whether or not privileged or confidential under law, which the board deems necessary as evidence in connection with a disciplinary proceeding or relevant to the decision of whether to initiate a disciplinary proceeding. Board procedures concerning investigatory subpoenas are set forth in 193—Chapter 6.

193G—6.9(17A,272C,544C) *Informal discussion.* If the disciplinary committee considers it advisable, or if requested by the affected registrant, the committee may grant the registrant an opportunity to appear before the committee for a voluntary informal discussion of the facts and circumstances of an alleged violation, subject to the provisions of this rule.

6.9(1) An informal discussion is intended to provide a registrant an opportunity to share the registrant's account of a complaint in an informal setting before the board determines whether probable cause exists to initiate a disciplinary proceeding. A registrant is not required to attend an informal discussion. Because disciplinary investigations are confidential, the registrant may not bring other persons to an informal discussion, but registrants may be represented by legal counsel.

6.9(2) Unless disqualification is waived by the registrant, board members or staff who personally investigate a disciplinary complaint are disqualified from making decisions or assisting the decision makers at a later formal hearing. Because board members generally rely upon investigators, peer review committees, or expert consultants to conduct investigations, the issue rarely arises. An informal discussion, however, is a form of investigation because it is conducted in a question and answer format. In order to preserve the ability of all board members to participate in board decision making and to receive the advice of staff, a registrant who desires to attend an informal discussion must therefore waive the right to seek disqualification of a board member or staff based solely on the board member's or staff's participation in an informal discussion. A registrant would not waive the right to seek disqualification on any other ground. By electing to attend an informal discussion, a registrant accordingly agrees that participating board members or staff are not disqualified from acting as a presiding officer in a later contested case proceeding or from advising the decision maker.

6.9(3) Because an informal discussion constitutes a part of the board's investigation of a pending disciplinary case, the facts discussed at the informal discussion may be considered by the board in the event the matter proceeds to a contested case hearing and those facts are independently introduced into evidence.

6.9(4) The disciplinary committee, subject to board approval, may propose a consent order at the time of the informal discussion. If the registrant agrees to a consent order, a statement of charges shall be filed simultaneously with the consent order, as provided in rule 193—7.4(17A,272C).

193G—6.10(17A,272C,544C) Closing complaint files.

6.10(1) *Grounds for closing.* Upon the recommendation of the board's executive officer pursuant to subrule 6.5(5), the recommendation of the disciplinary committee pursuant to rule 193G—6.8(17A,272C,544C), or on its own motion, the board may close a complaint file, with or without prior investigation. Given the broad scope of matters about which members of the public may complain, it is not possible to catalog all possible reasons why the board may close a complaint file. The following nonexclusive list is, however, illustrative of the grounds upon which the board may close a complaint file:

- a. The complaint alleges matters outside the board's jurisdiction.
- b. The complaint does not allege a reasonable or credible basis to believe that the subject of the complaint violated a law or rule enforced by the board.
- c. The complaint is frivolous or trivial.
- d. The complaint alleges matters more appropriately resolved in a different forum, such as civil litigation to resolve a contract dispute, or more appropriately addressed by alternative procedures, such as outreach education or rule making.
- e. The matters raised in the complaint are situational, isolated, or unrepresentative of a registrant's typical practice, and the registrant has taken appropriate steps to ensure future compliance and prevent public injury.
- f. Resources are unavailable or better directed to other complaints or board initiatives in light of the board's overall budget and mission.
- g. Other extenuating factors weigh against the imposition of public discipline when considered in the context of the board's purpose and mission.

6.10(2) *Closing orders.* The board's executive officer may enter an order stating the basis for the board's decision to close a complaint file. If entered, the order shall not contain the identity of the complainant or the respondent and shall not disclose confidential complaint or investigative information. If entered, a closing order will be indexed by case number and shall be a public record pursuant to Iowa Code subsection 17A.3(1)(d). A copy of the order may be mailed to the complainant, if any, and to the respondent. The board's decision whether or not to pursue an investigation, to institute disciplinary proceedings, or to close a file is not subject to judicial review.

6.10(3) *Cautionary letters.* The board may issue a confidential letter of caution to a registrant when a complaint file is closed which informally cautions or educates the registrant about matters which could form the basis for disciplinary action in the future if corrective action is not taken by the registrant. Informal cautionary letters do not constitute disciplinary action, but the board may take such letters into consideration in the future if a registrant continues a practice about which the registrant has been cautioned.

6.10(4) *Reopening closed complaint files.* The board may reopen a closed complaint file if additional information arises after closure which provides a basis to reassess the merits of the initial complaint.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code chapters 17A, 272C and 544C.

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