

ACCOUNTANCY EXAMINING BOARD[193A]

Adopted and Filed

Rulemaking related to disciplinary investigations

The Accountancy Examining Board hereby rescinds Chapter 15, “Disciplinary Investigations,” Iowa Administrative Code, and adopts a new chapter with the same title.

Legal Authority for Rulemaking

This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 542.4.

State or Federal Law Implemented

This rulemaking implements, in whole or in part, Iowa Code chapter 542 and Executive Order 10 (January 10, 2023).

Purpose and Summary

These amendments implement changes recommended by Executive Order 10. Chapter 15 covers disciplinary investigations, highlighting the Board’s process for resolving complaints against licensees.

Public Comment and Changes to Rulemaking

Notice of Intended Action for this rulemaking was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on January 10, 2024, as **ARC 7398C**. Public hearings were held on January 30, 2024, and January 31, 2024, at 12:30 p.m. at 6200 Park Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa. No one attended the public hearings. No public comments were received. No changes from the Notice have been made.

Adoption of Rulemaking

This rulemaking was adopted by the Board on February 15, 2024.

Fiscal Impact

This rulemaking has no fiscal impact to the State of Iowa. No current fees are being changed, and no new fees are being imposed.

Jobs Impact

After analysis and review of this rulemaking, no impact on jobs has been found.

Waivers

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rulemaking would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to 481—Chapter 6.

Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rulemaking by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or group, review this rulemaking at its [regular monthly meeting](#) or at a special meeting. The Committee’s meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

Effective Date

This rulemaking will become effective on April 10, 2024.

The following rulemaking action is adopted:

ITEM 1. Rescind 193A—Chapter 15 and adopt the following **new** chapter in lieu thereof:

CHAPTER 15
DISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATIONS

193A—15.1(17A,272C,542) Initiation of disciplinary investigations. The board may initiate a licensee disciplinary investigation upon the board’s receipt of information suggesting that a licensee may have violated a law or rule enforced by the board which, if true, would constitute grounds for licensee discipline. The board may also review the publicly available work product of licensees on a general or random basis to determine whether reasonable grounds exist to initiate disciplinary proceedings or to conduct a more specific investigation.

193A—15.2(17A,272C,542) 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 will abstain from participation in any consideration of the complaint and from participation in any disciplinary hearing that may result from the complaint.

193A—15.3(272C,542) Complaints. Written complaints may be submitted by any means and by anyone.

15.3(1) Contents of a written complaint. Written complaints may be submitted through the online complaint process. Written complaints, whether submitted on a board complaint form or in other written medium, will 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 (licensee 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 that 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.

15.3(2) Immunity. As provided by Iowa Code section 272C.8, a person is not civilly liable as a result of filing a report or complaint with the board unless such act is done with malice, nor may an employee be dismissed from employment or discriminated against by an employer for filing such a report or complaint.

15.3(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 that may be initiated by the board.

15.3(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 licensee discipline to be imposed, if any.

15.3(5) Initial complaint review. All written complaints received by the board are initially reviewed by the board’s administrator to determine whether the complaint allegations fall within the board’s investigatory jurisdiction and whether the facts presented, if true, would constitute a basis for licensee

disciplinary action. Complaints that are clearly outside the board's jurisdiction, which clearly do not allege facts upon which disciplinary action would be based, or which are frivolous, will be referred by the board administrator to the board for closure at the next scheduled board meeting.

193A—15.4(272C,542) Case numbers. Complaint files are tracked by a case numbering system. 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 records and prompt response.

193A—15.5(272C,542) Confidentiality of complaint and investigative information.

15.5(1) General provisions. All complaint and investigative information received or created by the board is privileged and confidential pursuant to Iowa Code section 272C.6(4). Such information will not be released to any person except as provided in that section and this rule.

15.5(2) Confidentiality of PCAOB information and records.

a. The PCAOB was created by the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (the Act) as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the District of Columbia. The duties of the PCAOB include the registration of public accounting firms that prepare audit reports for public companies; the promulgation of rules (as approved by the SEC) for auditing, quality control, ethics, independence and other standards relating to the preparation of audit reports; the inspection of registered public accounting firms; the investigation of alleged standards violations; and the imposition of appropriate sanctions following disciplinary proceedings.

b. Pursuant to Section 105(b)(5)(A) of the Act and PCAOB rules, PCAOB investigatory information and records are confidential and privileged and are exempt from disclosure under the federal Freedom of Information Act. PCAOB, in its discretion, may share such information and records, along with the nonpublic sections of inspection reports, with state regulatory authorities as necessary to accomplish the purposes of the Act or to protect investors. As provided in Section 105(b)(5)(B) of the Act, state regulatory authorities also maintain such information and records as confidential and privileged, and the board will maintain that information as confidential.

15.5(3) Disclosure to the subject of the investigation.

a. Legal authority. Pursuant to Iowa Code section 10A.506, the board may supply to a licensee who is the subject of a disciplinary complaint or investigation, prior to the initiation of a disciplinary proceeding, all or such parts of a disciplinary complaint, disciplinary or investigatory file, report, or other information as the board in its sole discretion believes would aid the investigation or resolution of the matter.

b. General rule. As a matter of general policy, the board will not disclose confidential complaint and investigative information to a licensee except as permitted by Iowa Code section 272C.6(4). Disclosure of a complainant's identity in advance of the filing of formal disciplinary charges, for instance, may adversely affect a complainant's willingness to file a complaint with the board.

c. Exceptions to general rule. The board may exercise its discretion to release information to a licensee that would otherwise be confidential under Iowa Code section 272C.6(4) under narrow circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

(1) Following a board determination that probable cause exists to file disciplinary charges against a licensee and prior to the issuance of the notice of hearing, the board may provide the licensee with a peer review or investigative report or expert opinions, as reasonably needed for the licensee to assess the merits of a settlement proposal.

(2) The board may release to a licensee who is the subject of a board-initiated investigation, including investigations initiated following the board's receipt of an anonymous complaint, such records or information as may aid the investigation or resolution of the matter.

(3) The board may release information from a peer review or consultant's report when the soliciting of the licensee's position will aid in making the probable cause determination and such disclosure can be

made to the licensee without revealing identifying information regarding the complainant, peer reviewer or consultant.

193A—15.6(17A,272C,542) Subpoena authority. Pursuant to Iowa Code sections 17A.13(1), 272C.6(3) and 542.11(1), 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 investigative subpoenas are set forth in 193—Chapter 6.

193A—15.7(17A,272C,542) Informal discussion. If the board considers it advisable, or if requested by the affected licensee, the board may grant the licensee an opportunity to appear for a voluntary informal discussion of the facts and circumstances of an alleged violation, subject to the provisions of this rule.

15.7(1) An informal discussion is intended to provide a licensee an opportunity to share the licensee's side of a complaint in an informal setting before the board determines whether probable cause exists to initiate a disciplinary proceeding. A licensee may attend an informal discussion but is not compelled to do so. Because disciplinary investigations are confidential, a licensee is not permitted to bring persons other than legal counsel to an informal discussion. Where an allegation is made against a firm, the firm may be represented by a managing partner, member or other firm representative.

15.7(2) Unless disqualification is waived by the licensee, 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 licensee who desires to attend an informal discussion waives 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 licensee would not be waiving the right to seek disqualification on any other ground. By electing to attend an informal discussion, a licensee 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.

15.7(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.

15.7(4) The board may propose a consent order at the time of the informal discussion. If the licensee agrees to a consent order, a statement of charges is filed simultaneously with the consent order as provided in rule 193—7.4(17A,272C).

193A—15.8(17A,272C,542) Closing complaint files.

15.8(1) *Grounds for closing.* 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 have complaints, it is not possible to catalog all possible reasons why the board may close a complaint file.

15.8(2) *Closing orders.* The board's administrator may enter an order stating the basis for the board's decision to close a complaint file. If entered, the order will not contain the identity of the complainant or the respondent and will not disclose confidential complaint or investigative information.

If entered, a closing order will be indexed by case number and is a public record pursuant to Iowa Code section 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.

15.8(3) *Cautionary letters.* The board may issue a confidential letter of caution to a licensee when a complaint file is closed that informally cautions or educates the licensee about matters that could form the basis for disciplinary action in the future if corrective action is not taken by the licensee. Informal cautionary letters do not constitute disciplinary action, but the board may take such letters into consideration in the future if a licensee continues a practice about which the licensee has been cautioned.

15.8(4) *Reopening closed complaint files.* The board may reopen a closed complaint file if additional information arises after closure that provides a basis to reassess the merits of the initial complaint.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code chapters 17A, 272C and 542.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For replacement pages for IAC, see IAC Supplement 3/6/24.