

VIRGINIA:

BEFORE THE VIRGINIA STATE BAR DISCIPLINARY BOARD

**IN THE MATTER OF
TASO RASHID NOEL SAUNDERS**

VS B DOCKET NO.: 26-000-138018

RECIPROCAL MEMORANDUM ORDER

A panel of the Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board (the “Board”) heard this matter on March 27, 2026, on the Rule to Show Cause and Notice of Hearing entered on February 27, 2026, (the “Rule to Show Cause”). The panel members were Alison G.M. Martin, First Vice Chair (“Chair”); Robin J. Kegley; Melanie A. Friend; Michael C. Moore; and Samuel Massenberg, Lay Member. The Chair polled the members of the Panel as to whether any of them had any personal or financial interest that might affect or reasonably be perceived to affect their ability to be impartial, to which inquiry each member responded in the negative.

Elizabeth K. Shoenfeld, Senior Assistant Bar Counsel, represented the Virginia State Bar (“Bar” or “VSB”). Respondent Taso Rashid Noel Saunders (“Respondent”) was present and acted *pro se*.

Court reporter Lisa A. Wright, of Chandler and Halasz; P.O. Box 1975; Mechanicsville, Virginia 23116; (804) 730-1222, after being duly sworn, reported the hearing and transcribed the proceedings.

The Clerk of the Disciplinary System (the “Clerk”) timely sent all required notices to Respondent by certified mail in the manner prescribed by the *Rules of the Supreme Court of Virginia* (the “Rules”), Part Six, § IV, ¶12.

In accordance with Part Six, Section IV, Paragraph 13-24 of the *Rules*, the purpose of the hearing was to provide the Respondent with an opportunity to show cause, if any, by clear and convincing evidence, as to why the same discipline that was imposed upon him by the United

States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia (“U.S. District Court”) should not be imposed by the Board. The Board took Judicial Notice of the Rule to Show Cause, which included as an attachment the order of the U.S. District Court that indefinitely suspended the right of the Respondent to practice law in the U.S. District Court and the Rule to Show Cause and attachment were admitted as Board Exhibit 1.¹

At the March 13, 2026, pre-trial conference, Respondent advised that he needed additional time to seek the assistance of counsel. The Chair had directed Respondent to file a written motion requesting to continue the hearing date **before** the hearing. Respondent did not file a written motion to continue. At the beginning of the hearing, Respondent made an oral motion to continue the hearing so he could seek the assistance of counsel. He did not explain his failure to file a written motion before the hearing. The Board denied his oral motion to continue by unanimous vote.

Pursuant to the Prehearing Conference Order, VSB Exhibits 1-11 were admitted during the hearing without objection. Respondent’s Exhibit 1 was also admitted without objection. The Board also heard a proffer of evidence and testimony from the Respondent, who was sworn under oath, and argument of counsel.

The Board then retired to deliberate as to whether the Respondent had proven, by clear and convincing evidence, any of the grounds under Paragraph 13-24.C of the *Rules* for imposing a lesser discipline or for dismissing the show cause.

Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

The Board made the following findings of fact by clear and convincing evidence:

¹ The U.S. District Court’s December 11, 2025 Order imposed a suspension of the Respondent’s right to practice before that court pending further court order (“Suspension Order”). The underlying criminal case, *United States v. Jason C. Walton and Beth M. Walton*, Case No. 1:25-cr-256-AJT (E.D.Va.) can be accessed through PACER: <https://pcl.uscourts.gov/pcl/>.

1. The U.S. District Court is a “Jurisdiction” under Paragraph 13-24.A of the *Rules*. Its Suspension Order, through which the Respondent’s right to practice law in the U.S. District Court was suspended pending further order of that court, has become final, as Respondent did not seek reconsideration of or appeal the Suspension Order. Respondent’s suspension from the U.S. District Court began on December 11, 2025.

2. The Chair, acting on behalf of the Board, entered the Rule to Show Cause on February 27, 2026, in accordance with Paragraph 13-24.B of the *Rules*.

3. The Respondent failed to file a written response under Paragraph 13-24.C of the *Rules*. Nonetheless, the Board allowed Respondent to proffer evidence as to three of the grounds set out in Paragraph 13-24.C for imposing a lesser discipline or for dismissing the show cause: first, that the proceeding before the U.S. District Court lacked sufficient due process (§13-24.C.1); second, that the imposition of a one-year suspension from practicing law in Virginia would result in an injustice (§13-24.C.2); and third, that the same conduct would not be grounds for equivalent discipline in Virginia (§13-24.C.3).

4. As an attorney admitted to practice in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Respondent received notices of electronic filing (NEFs) at the email address taso@saunderslaw.com. VSB Ex. 1.

5. Jason C. Walton was charged in U.S. District Court under Case No. 1:25-cr-256-AJT with conspiracy to distribute and distribution of methamphetamine, fentanyl, and cocaine, as well as possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. On June 24, 2025, Respondent entered his appearance as counsel of record for Mr. Walton in that matter. VSB Ex. 1.

6. At Mr. Walton's arraignment on September 19, 2025, the Court conducted an inquiry pursuant *Missouri v. Frye* and found that Respondent had taken a plea offer to Mr. Walton, who had rejected the proposed plea agreement. At that time, Respondent was notified that a hearing on pending motions was scheduled for November 18, 2025.

7. On October 1, 2025, the government sent a new plea offer to Respondent. The government followed up by email with Respondent on approximately a dozen separate occasions. The government also followed up by phone and left messages with Respondent's receptionist. Respondent did not respond to government's inquiries on the plea offer by email, phone, or in person communication.

8. On October 31, 2025, Respondent received a NEF for the government's motion in limine to admit marital communications² and on November 14, 2025, received a NEF for the already-scheduled November 18, 2025 hearing on that motion. VSB Ex. 5.

9. On November 18, 2025, the Court held a hearing on the government's motion in limine to admit marital communications. Respondent failed to appear at this hearing. Before the start of the hearing, the U.S. Marshals relayed that the defendant had not heard from defense counsel in approximately two months. The defendant was not aware of the motions hearing scheduled for November 18, 2025. During the hearing, the defendant asked the Court whether his attorney or the government had requested the motions hearing. On that same date, the government filed a motion for appointment of new defense counsel. VSB Ex. 2.

10. The Court ordered Respondent to appear before it on November 24, 2025 to show cause why he should not be sanctioned for his failure to appear. VSB Ex. 5. It also ordered him to file a response to the government's motion to appoint counsel. VSB Ex. 8.

² Walton's wife, Beth, was his co-defendant in the criminal case.

11. Respondent failed to appear at the November 24, 2025, hearing and did not comply with the Court's order to file a response to the government's motion to appoint counsel. The Court issued a summons for the U.S. Marshals to serve on Respondent, which was returned unexecuted on December 9, 2025. VSB Ex. 8.

12. On December 11, 2025, the Court indefinitely suspended Respondent's license to practice in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia pending further order of that Court.

13. In October 2025 Respondent began suffering from various physical problems which progressed to extreme fatigue, body aches, breathing problems, and swelling in his lower extremities by late November 2025. He did not seek medical treatment, however, until November 30, 2025, when he was diagnosed with pneumonia and told he could return to work on December 3, 2025. He saw a nurse practitioner on December 8, 2025, and was told at that time that he could return to work on December 12, 2025. He was hospitalized from December 22 through December 28, 2025, and diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Respondent's Exhibit 1.

14. Respondent acknowledged that taso@saunderslaw.com was the email address at which he received NEFs. He did not deny receiving NEFs for the government's motion in limine and the November 18 and 24, 2025 hearings at that email address and conceded that he was checking that email address during his representation of Mr. Walton. However, he claimed that he did not see the NEFs. RE 1. Respondent admitted that he was notified of the November 18, 2025 hearing date in open court on September 19, 2025.

15. Respondent testified that he had a member of his staff contact the government to determine its position on the continuance of the trial and other pending motions in the federal criminal case given his health problems and claimed that he did not receive a response from the

government. He was unable to explain why he did not then file a motion for a continuance or other relief. Respondent admitted that on November 18, 2025, he had done nothing to notify the Court or opposing counsel that he would not be in court on that date.

16. Respondent's conduct in this matter violated the following Rules of Professional Conduct: **Rule 1.1** (“[a] lawyer shall provide competent representation to a client”); **Rule 1.3(a)** (“[a] lawyer shall act with reasonable diligence and promptness in representing a client”), and **Rule 3.4(d)** (“[a lawyer shall not] [k]nowingly disobey or . . . disregard a standing rule or a ruling of a tribunal made in the course of a proceeding”).

Ruling of the Board

After adjourning to deliberate and consider the evidence and arguments of the Bar and Respondent, the Board returned and announced that it found that Respondent had failed to show by clear and convincing evidence that the proceeding before the U.S. District Court lacked sufficient due process, that that the same conduct would not be grounds for equivalent discipline in Virginia, or that the same conduct would warrant substantially less discipline in Virginia. However, the Board announced further that Respondent had shown by clear and convincing evidence that the imposition of the same sanction imposed by U.S. District Court would result in an injustice.

The Board then heard argument of counsel on the appropriate discipline to be imposed.

Sanction

After considering the exhibits, testimony, and argument, the Board was guided by the relevant mitigating and aggravating factors articulated in the Annotated Standards for Imposing Lawyer Sanctions, Second Edition (ABA 2019).

The Board considered as aggravating factors: – (1) The vulnerability of the victim in this matter, who was detained pending trial on serious federal drug and firearm charges carrying substantial mandatory minimum terms of incarceration; and (2) That Respondent has substantial experience in the practice of law. Another aggravating factor was that Respondent expressed limited remorse and minimized his misconduct.

The Board considered as mitigating factors: – (1) Respondent's absence of serious prior disciplinary record; (2) Respondent's absence of dishonest or selfish motive; (3) Respondent's serious illness during the time of the misconduct; and (4) The sanction of indefinite suspension the U.S. District Court already imposed on Respondent.

After due deliberation, the Board reconvened and announced its unanimous decision to suspend Respondent's license to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia for six months.

Accordingly, the Board **ORDERS** that Respondent's license to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia is suspended for six months as of March 27, 2026.

The Board further **ORDERS** that, as directed in the Board's March 27, 2026, Summary Order in this matter, the Respondent must comply with the requirements of Part Six, § IV, ¶ 13-29 of the Rules. The Respondent must forthwith give notice by certified mail of the Revocation/Suspension of his license to practice law in the Commonwealth of Virginia, to all clients for whom he is currently handling matters and to all opposing Attorneys and presiding Judges in pending litigation. The Respondent must also make appropriate arrangements for the disposition of matters then in his care in conformity with the wishes of his clients. The Respondent must give such notice immediately and in no event later than fourteen (14) days of the effective date of the Suspension, and make such arrangements as are required herein as soon as is practicable and in no event later than forty-five (45) days of the effective date of the Suspension. The

Respondent must also furnish proof to the Clerk of the Disciplinary System of the Virginia State Bar within sixty (60) days of the effective date of the Revocation/Suspension that such notices have been timely given and such arrangements have been made for the disposition of matters.

The Board further **ORDERS** that if the Respondent is not handling any client matters on the effective date of the Suspension, he shall submit an affidavit to that effect within sixty (60) days of the effective date of the Suspension to the Clerk of the Disciplinary System at the Virginia State Bar. The Board must decide all issues concerning the adequacy of the notice and arrangements required herein. The burden of proof shall be on the Respondent to show compliance. If the Respondent fails to show compliance, the Board may impose a sanction of Revocation or additional Suspension for failure to comply with the requirements of subparagraph 13-29.

The Board **ORDERS** that pursuant to Part Six, § IV, ¶ 13-9.E. of the *Rules*, the Clerk of the Disciplinary System shall assess all costs against the Respondent.

The Board further **ORDERS** that the Clerk of the Disciplinary System shall mail an attested copy of this Order to Respondent by electronic, first-class mail and certified mail, return receipt requested, to his address of record with the Virginia State Bar: Taso Rashid Noel Saunders; The Saunders Law Firm, PLLC; 10615 Judicial Drive, Ste. 302, Fairfax, Virginia 22030; and a copy by electronic mail to Respondent, and to Elizabeth K. Shoenfeld, Senior Assistant Bar Counsel.

ENTERED on April 8th, 2026.

VIRGINIA STATE BAR DISCIPLINARY BOARD



Alison G.M. Martin, First Vice Chair