

Recommendations of the Unbundling of Legal Services Committee  
a subcommittee of the State Bar's Legal Assistance Committee  
Mary Triggiano, chair

As presented to the State Bar Board of Governors on May 7, 2004

## COMPARISON TO ETHICS 2000

### SCR 20:1.2 Scope of representation.

(c) A lawyer may limit the scope of the representation if the limitation is reasonable under the circumstances and the client gives informed consent.

(d) A lawyer who appears in court on a limited basis for a client who is otherwise unrepresented must give written notice to the court and all other parties of the tasks for which the lawyer is engaged and must promptly notify the court and all other parties in writing of the termination of the lawyer's appearance in the case upon the completion of such tasks.

**Services Limited in Objectives, Scope or Means.** The objectives or scope of services provided by a lawyer may be limited by agreement with the client or by the terms under which the lawyer's services are made available to the client. For example, a retainer may be for a specifically defined purpose. Representation provided through a legal aid agency may be subject to limitations on the types of cases the agency handles. When a lawyer has been retained by an insurer to represent an insured, the representation may be limited to matters related to the insurance coverage. The terms upon which representation is undertaken may exclude specific means that might otherwise be used to accomplish the client's objectives. Such limitations may exclude objectives or means that the client thinks are too costly or that the lawyer regards as repugnant

Although this Rule affords the lawyer and client substantial latitude to limit the representation, the limitation must be reasonable under the circumstances. If, for example, a client's objective is limited to securing general information about the law the client needs in order to handle a common and typically uncomplicated legal problem, the lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer's services will be limited to a brief consultation. Such a limitation, however, would not be reasonable if the time allotted was not sufficient to yield advice upon which the client could rely.

A lawyer and client may agree that the representation will be limited to providing assistance out of court, including providing advice on the operation of the court system and drafting pleadings and responses. If the lawyer assists a *pro se* litigant by drafting any document to be submitted to a court, the client is not obligated to reveal the identity of the lawyer and the lawyer is not obligated to sign the document. However, to avoid the impression that the litigant is acting without the assistance of counsel, such a document must state that it was prepared with the assistance of counsel.

A lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer will represent the client in court at a single hearing or trial, or during proceedings regarding a discreet issue in the litigation. For example, a lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer will represent the client in court at a hearing regarding child support and not in any other hearings. The lawyer shall communicate to the

client the specific boundaries and limitations of the representation so that the client is able to give informed consent to the representation. If the attorney and client agree to limit the scope of the representation, the lawyer shall advise the client, as provided in SCR 20:4.2, that another lawyer is not barred from communicating directly with the client about subjects outside the scope of the limited representation.

The purposes served by paragraph (d) are threefold: (1) alert the court to limitations governing the representation so that the court does not schedule the proceedings upon an unwarranted expectation that the lawyer will be participating in proceedings beyond the limits of the representation; (2) alert the court and the parties so that the lawyer receives notice of all pertinent proceedings; and (3) alert the parties so that their lawyers do not engage in communication that violates SCR 20:4.2. If any of these purposes is impeded by a change to the scope of the limited representation that occurs after the filing of the notice required by paragraph (d), a lawyer shall provide written notice to the court and to the other parties of such changes as soon as practical.

An agreement concerning the scope of representation must accord with the Rules of Professional Conduct and other law. Thus, the client may not be asked to agree to representation so limited in scope as to violate Rule 1.1, or to surrender the right to terminate the lawyer's services or the right to settle litigation that the lawyer might wish to continue. Although an agreement for limited representation does not exempt a lawyer from the duty to provide competent representation, the limitation is a factor to be considered when determining the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for representation.

**Revisions to current SCRs 20:1.2, 20:1.16, & 20:4.2**

*Revision 3 -- June 28, 2004*

**SCR 20:1.2 Scope of representation. (a)** A lawyer shall abide by a client's decisions concerning the objectives of representation, subject to paragraphs (c), (d) and (e), and shall consult with the client as to the means by which they are to be pursued. A lawyer shall inform a client of all offers of settlement and abide by a client's decision whether to accept an offer of settlement of a matter. In a criminal case or any proceeding that could result in deprivation of liberty, the lawyer shall abide by the client's decision, after consultation with the lawyer, as to a plea to be entered, whether to waive jury trial and whether the client will testify.

**(b)** A lawyer's representation of a client, including representation by appointment, does not constitute an endorsement of the client's political, economic, social or moral views or activities.

**(c)** A lawyer may limit ~~the objectives~~ the scope of the representation if the ~~client consents after consultation~~ limitation is reasonable under the circumstances and the client gives informed consent.

**(d)** A lawyer who appears in court on a limited basis for a client who is otherwise unrepresented must give written notice to the court and all other parties of the tasks for which the lawyer is engaged and must promptly notify the court and all other parties in writing of the termination of the lawyer's appearance in the case upon the completion of such tasks.

~~(d)~~ **(e)** A lawyer shall not counsel a client to engage, or assist a client, in conduct that the lawyer knows is criminal or fraudulent, but a lawyer may discuss the legal consequences of any proposed course of conduct with a client and may counsel or assist a client to make a good faith effort to determine the validity, scope, meaning or application of the law.

~~(e)~~ **(f)** When a lawyer knows that a client expects assistance not permitted by the Rules of Professional Conduct or other law, the lawyer shall consult with the client regarding the relevant limitations on the lawyer's conduct.

**Comment: Scope of Representation.** Both lawyer and client have authority and responsibility in the objectives and means of representation. The client has ultimate authority to determine the purposes to be served by legal representation, within the limits imposed by law and the lawyer's professional obligations. Within those limits, a client also has a right to consult with the lawyer about the means to be used in pursuing those objectives. At the same time, a lawyer is not required to pursue objectives or employ means simply because a client may wish that the lawyer do so. A clear distinction between objectives and means sometimes cannot be drawn, and in many cases the client-lawyer relationship partakes of a joint undertaking. In

questions of means, the lawyer should assume responsibility for technical and legal tactical issues, but should defer to the client regarding such questions as the expense to be incurred and concern for third persons who might be adversely affected. Law defining the lawyer's scope of authority in litigation varies among jurisdictions. In a case in which the client appears to be suffering mental disability, the lawyer's duty to abide by the client's decisions is to be guided by reference to Rule 1.14.

**Independence From Client's Views or Activities.** Legal representation should not be denied to people who are unable to afford legal services, or whose cause is controversial or the subject of popular disapproval. By the same token, representing a client does not constitute approval of the client's views or activities.

**Services Limited in Objectives, Scope or Means.** The objectives or scope of services provided by a lawyer may be limited by agreement with the client or by the terms under which the lawyer's services are made available to the client. For example, a retainer may be for a specifically defined purpose. Representation provided through a legal aid agency may be subject to limitations on the types of cases the agency handles. When a lawyer has been retained by an insurer to represent an insured, the representation may be limited to matters related to the insurance coverage. The terms upon which representation is undertaken may exclude specific ~~objectives or means~~ that might otherwise be used to accomplish the client's objectives. Such limitations may exclude objectives or means that the client thinks are too costly or that the lawyer regards as repugnant or imprudent.

Although this Rule affords the lawyer and client substantial latitude to limit the representation, the limitation must be reasonable under the circumstances. If, for example, a client's objective is limited to securing general information about the law the client needs in order to handle a common and typically uncomplicated legal problem, the lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer's services will be limited to a brief consultation. Such a limitation, however, would not be reasonable if the time allotted was not sufficient to yield advice upon which the client could rely.

A lawyer and client may agree that the representation will be limited to providing assistance out of court, including providing advice on the operation of the court system and drafting pleadings and responses. If the lawyer assists a *pro se* litigant by drafting any document to be submitted to a court, the client is not obligated to reveal the identity of the lawyer and the lawyer is not obligated to sign the document. However, to avoid the impression that the litigant is acting without the assistance of counsel, such a document must state that it was prepared with the assistance of counsel.

A lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer will represent the client in court at a single hearing or trial, or during proceedings regarding a discreet issue in the litigation. For example, a lawyer and client may agree that the lawyer will represent the client in court at a hearing regarding child support and not in any other hearings. The lawyer shall communicate to the client the specific boundaries and limitations of the representation so that the client is able to give informed consent to the representation. If the lawyer and client agree to limit the scope of

the representation, the lawyer shall advise the client, as provided in SCR 20:4.2, that another lawyer is not barred from communicating directly with the client about subjects outside the scope of the limited representation.

The purposes served by paragraph (d) are threefold: (1) alert the court to limitations governing the representation so that the court does not schedule the proceedings upon an unwarranted expectation that the lawyer will be participating in proceedings beyond the limits of the representation; (2) alert the court and the parties so that the lawyer receives notice of all pertinent proceedings; and (3) alert the parties so that their lawyers do not engage in communication that violates SCR 20:4.2. If any of these purposes is impeded by a change to the scope of the limited representation that occurs after the filing of the notice required by paragraph (d), a lawyer shall provide written notice to the court and to the other parties of such changes as soon as practical.

An agreement concerning the scope of representation must accord with the Rules of Professional Conduct and other law. Thus, the client may not be asked to agree to representation so limited in scope as to violate Rule 1.1, or to surrender the right to terminate the lawyer's services or the right to settle litigation that the lawyer might wish to continue. Although an agreement for limited representation does not exempt a lawyer from the duty to provide competent representation, the limitation is a factor to be considered when determining the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for representation.

**Criminal, Fraudulent and Prohibited Transactions.** A lawyer is required to give an honest opinion about the actual consequences that appear likely to result from a client's conduct. The fact that a client uses advice in a course of action that is criminal or fraudulent does not, of itself, make a lawyer a party to the course of action. However, a lawyer may not knowingly assist a client in criminal or fraudulent conduct. There is a critical distinction between presenting an analysis of legal aspects of questionable conduct and recommending the means by which a crime or fraud might be committed with impunity.

When the client's course of action has already begun and is continuing, the lawyer's responsibility is especially delicate. The lawyer is not permitted to reveal the client's wrongdoing, except where permitted by Rule 1.6. However, the lawyer is required to avoid furthering the purpose, for example, by suggesting how it might be concealed. A lawyer may not continue assisting a client in conduct that the lawyer originally supposes is legally proper but then discovers is criminal or fraudulent. Withdrawal from the representation, therefore, may be required.

Where the client is a fiduciary, the lawyer may be charged with special obligations in dealings with a beneficiary.

Paragraph (d) applies whether or not the defrauded party is a party to the transaction. Hence, a lawyer should not participate in a sham transaction; for example, a transaction to effectuate criminal or fraudulent escape of tax liability. Paragraph (d) does not preclude undertaking a criminal defense incident to a general retainer for legal services to a lawful

enterprise. The last clause of paragraph (d) recognizes that determining the validity or interpretation of a statute or regulation may require a course of action involving disobedience of the statute or regulation or of the interpretation placed upon it by governmental authorities.

**Committee Comment:** In paragraph (a), the committee extended coverage in the last sentence to include proceedings that could result in a deprivation of liberty.

**SCR 20:1.16 Declining or terminating representation. (a)** Except as stated in paragraph (c), a lawyer shall not represent a client or, where representation has commenced, shall withdraw from the representation of a client if:

(1) the representation will result in violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct or other law;

(2) the lawyer's physical or mental condition materially impairs the lawyer's ability to represent the client; or

(3) the lawyer is discharged.

**(b)** Except as stated in paragraph (c), a lawyer may withdraw from representing a client if withdrawal can be accomplished without material adverse effect on the interests of the client, or if:

(1) the client persists in a course of action involving the lawyer's services that the lawyer reasonably believes is criminal or fraudulent;

(2) the client has used the lawyer's services to perpetrate a crime or fraud;

(3) a client insists upon pursuing an objective that the lawyer considers repugnant or imprudent;

(4) the client fails substantially to fulfill an obligation to the lawyer regarding the lawyer's services and has been given reasonable warning that the lawyer will withdraw unless the obligation is fulfilled;

(5) the representation will result in an unreasonable financial burden on the lawyer or has been rendered unreasonably difficult by the client; or

(6) other good cause for withdrawal exists.

**(c)** When ordered to do so by a tribunal, a lawyer shall continue representation notwithstanding good cause for terminating the representation.

**(d)** Upon termination of representation, a lawyer shall take steps to the extent reasonably practicable to protect a client's interests, such as giving reasonable notice to the client, allowing

time for employment of other counsel, surrendering papers and property to which the client is entitled and refunding any advance payment of fee that has not been earned. The lawyer may retain papers relating to the client to the extent permitted by other law.

**Comment:** A lawyer should not accept representation in a matter unless it can be performed competently, promptly, without improper conflict of interest and to completion.

**Mandatory Withdrawal** A lawyer ordinarily must decline or withdraw from representation if the client demands that the lawyer engage in conduct that is illegal or violates the Rules of Professional Conduct or other law. The lawyer is not obliged to decline or withdraw simply because the client suggests such a course of conduct; a client may make such a suggestion in the hope that a lawyer will not be constrained by a professional obligation.

When a lawyer has been appointed to represent a client, withdrawal ordinarily requires approval of the appointing authority. See also Rule 6.2. Difficulty may be encountered if withdrawal is based on the client's demand that the lawyer engage in unprofessional conduct. The court may wish an explanation for the withdrawal, while the lawyer may be bound to keep confidential the facts that would constitute such an explanation. The lawyer's statement that professional considerations require termination of the representation ordinarily should be accepted as sufficient.

**Discharge.** A client has a right to discharge a lawyer at any time, with or without cause, subject to liability for payment for the lawyer's services. Where future dispute about the withdrawal may be anticipated, it may be advisable to prepare a written statement reciting the circumstances.

Whether a client can discharge appointed counsel may depend on applicable law. A client seeking to do so should be given a full explanation of the consequences. These consequences may include a decision by the appointing authority that appointment of successor counsel is unjustified, thus requiring the client to represent himself.

If the client is mentally incompetent, the client may lack the legal capacity to discharge the lawyer, and in any event the discharge may be seriously adverse to the client's interests. The lawyer should make special effort to help the client consider the consequences and in an extreme case, may initiate proceedings for a conservatorship or similar protection of the client. See Rule 1.14.

**Optional Withdrawal.** A lawyer may withdraw from representation in some circumstances. The lawyer has the option to withdraw if it can be accomplished without material adverse effect on the client's interest. Withdrawal is also justified if the client persists in a course of action that the lawyer reasonably believes is criminal or fraudulent, for a lawyer is not required to be associated with such conduct even if the lawyer does not further it. Withdrawal is also permitted if the lawyer's services were misused in the past even if that would materially prejudice the client. The lawyer also may withdraw where the client insists on a repugnant or



imprudent objective.

A lawyer may withdraw if the client refuses to abide by the terms of an agreement relating to the representation, such as an agreement concerning fees or court costs or an agreement limiting the objectives of the representation.

**Assisting the Client Upon Withdrawal.** Even if the lawyer has been unfairly discharged by the client, a lawyer must take all reasonable steps to mitigate the consequences to the client. The lawyer may retain papers as security for a fee only to the extent permitted by law.

Whether or not a lawyer for an organization may under certain unusual circumstances have a legal obligation to the organization after withdrawing or being discharged by the organization's highest authority is beyond the scope of these Rules.

**Committee Comment:** The word “representation” in these rules and comments refers also to limited representation agreements in accordance with SCR 20:1.2.

**SCR 20:4.2 Communication with person represented by counsel. (a)** In representing a client, a lawyer shall not communicate about the subject of the representation with a party the lawyer knows to be represented by another lawyer in the matter, unless the lawyer has the consent of the other lawyer or is authorized by law to do so.

**(b)** A lawyer shall not communicate with a party the lawyer knows to be represented under a limited representation agreement in accordance with SCR 20:1.2 about the subject matter of the limited representation, but it does not bar communication about matters outside the limited scope of the representation.

**Comment:** This rule does not prohibit communication with a party, or an employee or agent of a party, concerning matters outside the representation. For example, the existence of a controversy between a government agency and a private party, or between two organizations, does not prohibit a lawyer for either from communicating with nonlawyer representatives of the other regarding a separate matter. Also, parties to a matter may communicate directly with each other and a lawyer having independent justification for communicating with the other party is permitted to do so. Communications authorized by law include, for example, the right of a party to a controversy with a government agency to speak with government officials about the matter.

In the case of an organization, this rule prohibits communications by a lawyer for one party concerning the matter in representation with persons having a managerial responsibility on behalf of the organization, and with any other person whose act or omission in connection with that matter may be imputed to the organization for purposes of civil or criminal liability or whose statement may constitute and admission on the part of the organization. If an agent or employee of the organization is represented in the matter by his or her own counsel, the consent by that counsel to a communication will be sufficient for purposes of this rule. Compare Rule 3.4(f).

This rule also covers any person, whether or not a party to a formal proceeding, who is represented by counsel concerning the matter in question.

**PROPOSED SUPREME COURT RULE 20:6.5**

**NONPROFIT AND COURT-ANNEXED**

**LIMITED LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS**

(a) A lawyer who, under the auspices of a program sponsored by a nonprofit legal services organization, bar association, accredited law school or court, provides short-term limited legal services to a client without expectation by either the lawyer or the client that the lawyer will provide continuing representation in the matter:

(1) is subject to Rules 1.7 and 1.9(a) only if the lawyer knows that the representation of the client involves a conflict of interest; and

(2) is subject to Rule 1.10 only if the lawyer knows that another lawyer associated with the lawyer in a law firm is disqualified by Rule 1.7 or 1.9(a) with respect to the matter.

(b) Except as provided in paragraph (a)(2), Rule 1.10 is inapplicable to a representation governed by this Rule.

**ABA Commentary**

[1] Legal services organizations, courts and various nonprofit organizations have established programs through which lawyers provide short-term limited legal services – such as advice or the completion of legal forms – that will assist persons to address their legal problems without further representation by a lawyer. In these programs, such as legal-advice hotlines, advice-only clinics or pro se counseling programs, a client-lawyer relationship is established, but there is no expectation that the lawyer’s representation of the client will continue beyond the limited consultation. Such programs are normally operated under circumstances in which it is not feasible for a lawyer to systematically screen for conflicts of interest as is generally required before undertaking a representation. See, e.g., Rules 1.7, 1.9 and 1.10.

[2] A lawyer who provides short-term limited legal services pursuant to this Rule must secure the client’s informed consent to the limited scope of the representation. See Rule 1.2 (c). If a short-term limited representation would not be reasonable under the circumstances, the lawyer may offer advice to the client but must also advise the client of the need for further assistance of counsel. Except as provided in this Rule, the Rules of Professional Conduct, including Rules 1.6 and 1.9 (c), are applicable to the limited representation.

[3] Because a lawyer who is representing a client in the circumstances addressed by this Rule ordinarily is not able to check systematically for conflicts of interest, paragraph (a) requires compliance with Rules 1.7 or 1.9(a) only if the lawyer knows that the representation presents a conflict of interest for the lawyer, and with Rule 1.10 only if the lawyer knows that another lawyer in the lawyer's firm is disqualified by Rules 1.7 or 1.9(a) in the matter.

[4] Because the limited nature of the services significantly reduces the risk of conflicts of interest with other matters being handled by the lawyer's firm, paragraph (b) provides that Rule 1.10 is inapplicable to a representation governed by this Rule except as provided by paragraph (a)(2). Paragraph (a)(2) requires the participating lawyer to comply with Rule 1.10 when the lawyer knows that the lawyer's firm is disqualified by Rules 1.7 or 1.9(a). By virtue of paragraph (b), however, a lawyer's participation in a short-term limited legal services program will not preclude the lawyer's firm from undertaking or continuing the representation of a client with interests adverse to a client being represented under the program's auspices. Nor will the personal disqualification of a lawyer participating in the program be imputed to other lawyers participating in the program.

[5] If, after commencing a short-term limited representation in accordance with this Rule, a lawyer undertakes to represent the client in the matter on an ongoing basis, Rules 1.7, 1.9(a) and 1.10 become applicable.

Committee Comment: Full scope, conflict free, representation of indigents in criminal cases and pro bono representation under SCR 20:6.1 remains the standard. Nothing in this Rule sets a lesser standard of competence nor justifies a lesser commitment of public funding and professional resources to indigent defense and civil legal needs of the poor. This Rule responds to a concern that strict application of conflict of interest rules may deter lawyers from serving as volunteers in settings where short-term, free, limited legal services are provided clients in a program sponsored by a court or nonprofit organization. Court systems, bar associations, volunteer lawyer projects, law schools and legal aid programs offer clinics, hotlines and outreach, the purpose of which is to provide brief service such as legal information, form preparation, advice and referral to persons of limited means who would otherwise go unrepresented. A lawyer who actually knows that the limited representation involves a conflict of interest is not protected by this rule and must comply with the general conflict of interest rules. Except for limiting disqualification for conflict of interest under Rules 1.7, 1.9 and 1.10, the lawyer must comply with the Rules of Professional Conduct when providing limited legal services. Should a lawyer who initially intends to provide only brief services decide to provide more extensive legal services, the lawyer must conduct a comprehensive conflicts check as done in the office practice setting and comply with the general conflict of interest rules.

