

COMMITTEE ON DISCIPLINARY RULES AND REFERENDA PROPOSED RULE CHANGES

Rule 4.03. Dealing With Unrepresented Persons

The Committee on Disciplinary Rules and Referenda, or CDRR, was created by Government Code section 81.0872 and is responsible for overseeing the initial process for proposing a disciplinary rule. Pursuant to Government Code section 81.0876, the committee publishes the following proposed rule. The committee will accept comments concerning the proposed rule through June 8, 2023. Comments can be submitted at texasbar.com/CDRR or by email to cdrr@texasbar.com. The committee will hold a public hearing on the proposed rule by teleconference on June 7, 2023, at 10 a.m. CDT. For teleconference participation information, please go to texasbar.com/cdrr/participate.

Proposed Rule (Redline Version)

Rule 4.03. Dealing With Unrepresented Persons

In dealing on behalf of a client with a person who is not represented by counsel, a lawyer shall not state or imply that the lawyer is disinterested. When the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that the unrepresented person misunderstands the lawyer's role in the matter, the lawyer shall make reasonable efforts to correct the misunderstanding. The lawyer shall not give legal advice to an unrepresented person, other than the advice to secure counsel, if the lawyer knows or reasonably should know that the interests of such a person are or have a reasonable possibility of being in conflict with the interests of the client.

Comment:

1. An unrepresented person, particularly one not experienced in dealing with legal matters, might assume that a lawyer is disinterested in loyalties or is a disinterested authority on the law even when the lawyer represents a client. During the course of a lawyer's representation of a client, the lawyer should not give advice to an unrepresented person other than the advice to obtain counsel. With regard to the special responsibilities of a prosecutor, see Rule 3.09.

2. The Rule distinguishes between situations involving unrepresented persons whose interests may be adverse to those of the lawyer's client and those in which the person's interests are not in conflict with the client's. In the former situation, the possibility that the lawyer will compromise the unrepresented person's interests is so great that the Rule prohibits the giving of any advice, apart from the advice to obtain counsel. Whether a lawyer is giving impermissible advice may depend on the experience and sophistication of the unrepresented person, as well as the setting in which the behavior and comments occur. This Rule does not prohibit a lawyer from negotiating the terms of a transaction or settling a dispute with an unrepresented person. So long as the lawyer has explained that the lawyer represents an adverse party and is not representing the person, the lawyer may inform the person of the terms on which the lawyer's client will enter into an agreement or settle a matter, prepare documents that require the person's signature and explain the lawyer's own view of the meaning of the document or the lawyer's view of the underlying legal obligations.

Proposed Rule (Clean Version)

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