

**IN THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

In the Matter of	:	No. 2349 Disciplinary Docket No. 3
	:	
	:	No. 20 DB 2017
JOHN HARPER ESTEY	:	
	:	Attorney Registration No. 57186
PETITION FOR REINSTATEMENT	:	
	:	(Delaware County)

**ORDER**

**PER CURIAM**

**AND NOW**, this 6<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2026, the Petition for Reinstatement is granted. Petitioner is directed to pay the expenses incurred by the Board in the investigation and processing of the Petition for Reinstatement. See Pa.R.D.E. 218(f).

A True Copy Nicole Traini  
As Of 02/06/2026

Attest:   
Chief Clerk  
Supreme Court of Pennsylvania

BEFORE THE DISCIPLINARY BOARD OF THE  
SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

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	:	No. 20 DB 2017
JOHN HARPER ESTEY	:	
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PETITION FOR REINSTATEMENT	:	(Delaware County)

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF  
THE DISCIPLINARY BOARD OF THE  
SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

TO THE HONORABLE CHIEF JUSTICE AND JUSTICES  
OF THE SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA:

Pursuant to Rule 218(c)(5) of the Pennsylvania Rules of Disciplinary Enforcement, The Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania submits its findings and recommendations to your Honorable Court with respect to the above captioned Petition for Reinstatement.

I. FINDINGS OF FACTS

The Board makes the following factual findings:

1. Petitioner, John Harper Estey, was born in 1962 and was admitted to practice law in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on December

7, 1989. Estey is subject to the jurisdiction of the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

Estey's Legal Background

2. From December 7, 1989 until February 23, 2017, Estey was an active status member of the bar in Pennsylvania. Joint Stipulation of Facts ("JS") 2.
3. Between December 7, 1989 and February 23, 2017, Estey served as a law clerk to a federal judge, worked at several large Philadelphia law firms, served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Mayor Edward G. Rendell, served as Chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to Governor Edward G. Rendell, and worked in a non-legal capacity for a large not-for-profit organization. JS 3.
4. From 1989 to 1991, Estey served as a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Thomas N. O'Neill, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. N.T. 22-23.
5. In 1991, Estey commenced employment at Hangley Aronchick Segal & Pudlin in Philadelphia and began doing legal work on public interest matters. N.T. 23.
6. While at Hangley Aronchick, Estey began doing pro bono work. N.T. 85.
7. In 1997, Estey took a position as Deputy Chief of Staff to Philadelphia Mayor Rendell. Estey worked on a variety of projects, including those

that resulted in the construction of the Liberty Bell Pavilion and the Independence Visitor Center in Philadelphia. N.T. 24.

8. In 1999, Estey moved to Montgomery McCracken Walker & Rhoads, where he was a partner. In 2002, Estey moved to a partnership position at Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll. N.T. 25.
9. In 2003, Estey took the position of Chief of Staff to Governor Rendell and served in that position until 2007. He then served as Senior Advisor to Governor Rendell from 2007 to 2008. N.T. 25-26.
10. In 2008, Estey returned to Ballard Spahr as a partner. N.T. 26.
11. During his time as an active status attorney, Estey served on many Continuing Legal Education (“CLE”) panels and mentored young lawyers and young professionals. N.T. 85.

#### Estey's Misconduct

12. In 2009, Estey was an owner in a lobbying/government relations consulting firm. Estey was contacted by an undercover company (UCC) operated by the FBI to investigate allegations of public corruption in Pennsylvania. JS 5. Estey was not aware that the UCC was operated by the FBI. N.T. 41. The UCC claimed it wanted to pursue legislation to recycle textbooks from school districts and institutions of higher education in Pennsylvania; at that time obsolete textbooks in Pennsylvania were being discarded in landfills. N.T. 37-38.

13. Estey believed the recycling concept was a laudable initiative. N.T. 38.
14. From approximately the fall of 2009 through June 30, 2011, Estey, through the lobbying firm, represented the UCC in lobbying efforts before the Pennsylvania General Assembly. JS 6.
15. On or about April 28, 2011, Estey spoke on the telephone with an undercover FBI agent who was posing as an executive of the UCC. In this call, the undercover FBI agent told Estey that although the UCC “principals” (undercover agents) had made personal contributions to Pennsylvania elected officials in the past, the UCC no longer wanted its “principals” to make those types of contributions. Estey indicated to the undercover agent that the UCC should pay \$20,000 to the lobbying firm which Estey would then cause to be transferred to members of the General Assembly as campaign contributions. JS 7; N.T. 38-39.
16. A check in the amount of \$20,000 was thereafter paid by the UCC to the lobbying firm for use as campaign contributions to members of the General Assembly. JS 8.
17. The check was deposited into a bank account of the lobbying firm on May 10, 2011. JS 9.

18. On May 30, 2011, Estey wrote out a lobbying firm check in the amount of \$20,000 and caused the check to be deposited in a joint personal bank account. JS 10.
19. Estey made \$7,000 in campaign contributions and converted \$13,000 to his own use. JS 11.
20. In April 2012, Estey learned that he was possibly a subject of a criminal investigation being run out of the Middle District of Pennsylvania. Estey contacted his personal counsel who later confirmed that Estey was “rolled up” in a criminal investigation involving the textbook recycling initiative. N.T. 40.
21. After meeting with the government in April 2012, Estey agreed to cooperate with the government in its ongoing investigation. N.T. 40-41.
22. Estey agreed to cooperate for two reasons: he did not think at the time that he had engaged in any misconduct and believed he could clear up whatever concerns the government had about his conduct; and that based on the extent of the UCC operation, he believed that the government was engaged in a wide-ranging investigation of possible political corruption and wanted to be helpful. N.T. 41-43.
23. Estey signed a confidentiality agreement with the government concerning his cooperation. N.T. 43.

24. When Estey decided to cooperate, he also decided he could no longer represent any clients as an attorney. Estey resigned from Ballard Spahr on June 30, 2012, and ceased practicing law. N.T. 44.
25. Estey took a non-legal position as Executive Vice President at the Hershey Trust Company on July 1, 2012. While employed at Hershey, Estey served as Interim President of the Milton Hershey School from 2013 to 2014. N.T. 26-27.
26. Estey cooperated with the government from April 2012 until May 2016. N.T. 43.
27. Estey pled guilty on May 10, 2016, to one felony count of wire fraud in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343. JS 12.
28. On January 26, 2017, Estey resigned from the practice of law pursuant to Pa.R.D.E. 215. JS 13; Pet. Ex. 6.
29. On February 23, 2017, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania accepted Estey's resignation and ordered that he be disbarred on consent from the bar of the Commonwealth. JS 14; Pet. Ex. 4.
30. Pursuant to Pa.R.D.E. 217, by letter dated March 24, 2017, Estey submitted to the Board a Statement of Compliance which affirmed that at the time of disbarment, Estey had no clients or others that he needed to notify under the Enforcement Rules. JS 15; Pet. Ex. 11.

31. Estey was sentenced on April 13, 2017, by the Honorable John E. Jones, United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania.
32. At the sentencing hearing, Estey accepted responsibility for his offense and expressed remorse for his conduct: "I have no excuse to offer the court today. What I did was wrong when I did it, and I knew it was wrong... I do want to apologize to my family, to my friends, my colleagues, to the people I worked with in public service, to all the public boards I served on, the private boards I served on." JS 16; Pet. Ex 8 at 11-13.
33. Judge Jones made the following statements regarding Estey:
- To say that the defendant has taken responsibility for his actions would be an understatement under the circumstances. You certainly have, and to say that you've been cooperative is also obviously an understatement under the circumstances...
- It is a trite phrase, you know, that good people, and very good people in this case, can sometimes do bad things. It happens. You've never tried to excuse your behavior. I think that there's an explanation. Mor[al] relativism might be a good phrase that applies in this case, and there isn't a person in this room that isn't guilty at times I would say of moral relativism...
- As I said, I think there is redemption. So this is both a sentencing and a pep talk, because I think you can get on with it at this point. It's time to turn the page...
- [Y]ou've been amply punished in every way that I can imagine as a proud, accomplished, upstanding person, and I am convinced that there are better days ahead and you'll have other achievements in your life. I'm quite sure of that, and I think you can earn your license back if you care to, and with the kind of support that you have here today how could you not want to continue?



JS 17; Pet. Ex. 8 at 14, 16-18.

34. Judge Jones sentenced Estey to one year of probation, payment of a fine of \$5,000, and a special assessment of \$100. JS 16, 18. N.T. 61-62.
35. Judge Jones later issued an amended order that included restitution payment of \$13,000. N.T. 62.
36. Estey paid the fine and special assessment in full on April 13, 2017, and paid the \$13,000 restitution in full on April 20, 2017. JS 19; N.T. 62-63; Pet. Ex. 9.
37. Estey completed the one year probation on April 12, 2018. JS 20; Pet. Ex. 10.

#### Post-Disbarment Rehabilitation

38. Since his guilty plea, Estey has not been involved with law enforcement nor has he been the subject of any disciplinary complaints. JS 21, 22; N.T. 37, 82-83. Estey has not been a plaintiff or a defendant in a lawsuit. N.T. 61-63.
39. From 2016 to 2021, Estey worked in a non-legal position as Executive Vice-President to a small software start-up company located in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Estey became involved with the company through a childhood friend. N.T. 67-69.

40. In 2021, Estey began doing business consulting work in a non-legal capacity, focusing his engagements on clients in areas that involved improving the public good. N.T. 70.
41. Examples of Estey's consulting work in the public space include working with the Independent Historical Trust to improve the physical infrastructure in and around Independence National Historical Park and working to improve the criminal justice system in Philadelphia. N.T. 70-73.
42. Throughout these consulting engagements, Estey has not engaged in the practice of law and has ensured that all clients have appropriate independent legal representation. N.T. 73-74.
43. Estey has engaged in a range of civic affairs. From 2020 through 2024, Estey served on the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Visitor Center Corporation. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Historic Philadelphia, Inc. He has also provided strategic advice to a number of not-for-profit organizations in the Philadelphia area on a pro bono basis. JS 25; N.T. 77-78.
44. Between September 7, 2023, and September 6, 2024, Estey completed at least 36 hours of CLE credits required for reinstatement. JS 27, N.T. 80. After Estey filed his Petition for Reinstatement on September 7, 2024, and through March 10, 2025, he earned an additional 12.5 CLE credits. N.T. 81; Pet. Ex. 13.

45. For over two years, Estey has subscribed to The Legal Intelligencer, Law.com and The American Lawyer. He receives and reviews daily emails from The Legal Intelligencer and Law.com on legal developments in general and on specific topics of interest to him. Estey also subscribes to newspapers of general circulation. N.T. 80.
46. Estey reviews legal developments, including relevant case law, in connection with his business consulting activities and his service on not-for-profit boards. JS 29.
47. Estey experienced serious health issues during his disbarment period. In July 2017, he was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Currently, Estey is active and otherwise in good health. N.T. 64-66.
48. In January 2023, Estey's wife experienced a serious health issue and he served as her primary caretaker. N.T. 74-76.

The Reinstatement Proceeding at No. 20 DB 2017

49. Estey filed a Petition for Reinstatement and Reinstatement Questionnaire on September 7, 2024. ODC-2; ODC-3.
50. Office of Disciplinary Counsel ("ODC") filed a response on December 3, 2024, and stated that its investigation had revealed no concerns or bases on which to oppose reinstatement. ODC-14.
51. A District II Hearing Committee was appointed and a prehearing conference was held on March 14, 2025.

52. On April 11, 2025, the parties filed Joint Stipulations of Fact.
53. The Committee held a reinstatement hearing on April 29, 2025.
54. Estey testified on his own behalf, presented three character witnesses, and introduced 20 exhibits.
55. ODC introduced 14 exhibits and cross-examined Estey and the three other witnesses. ODC did not present any direct evidence at the hearing.
56. Estey credibly testified on his own behalf.
57. Estey explained that he pled guilty “first and foremost” because he was guilty of converting \$13,000 of the UCC funds provided for political contributions to his own use. N.T. 48.
58. Estey expressed sincere remorse and regret for his misconduct and accepted full responsibility for his actions (“I remain deeply remorseful for what I did ... I’ve tried very hard ... to take stock of myself and understand – I came to the understanding that I really wasn’t the person that I thought I was when all these things happened”). N.T. 92.
59. Estey candidly described the “dark” and “bleak” place he was in at the time of his guilty plea and sentencing and his resolve to rebuild his life and recommit himself to doing good. N.T. 92-95.

60. Estey sincerely apologized to the Committee and all who were involved in his reinstatement hearing for the time they spent dealing with his matter. N.T. 92.
61. If reinstated, Estey intends to continue serving clients who are in the public space. N.T. 83-84.
62. Estey believes that his experiences have made him better able to represent the people that he wants to serve in the future. N.T. 97.
63. Estey presented three witnesses in support of his Petition for Reinstatement.
64. Judge Jones submitted a letter dated July 23, 2024, to the Board and testified in support of Estey's reinstatement. Pet. Ex. 14; N.T. at 113-133.
65. Judge Jones is retired from the bench and is currently the President of Dickinson College. He oversaw Estey's criminal case, took Estey's guilty plea on May 10, 2016, and imposed sentence on Estey on April 13, 2017. N.T. at 115, Pet. Ex. 14. In his letter to the Board, Judge Jones stated in part, "I have no doubt that John possesses the moral qualifications, competency and learning in the law that the Board requires in order to approve the reinstatement of his license to practice law. I am rendering this opinion and endorsement unhesitatingly and without any reservations whatsoever." Pet. Ex. 14 at 2.

66. Judge Jones testified that Estey had “done yeoman’s work in cooperating” with the government and wrote that his cooperation “assisted the FBI in significant investigations that led to successful prosecutions.” N.T. at 117; Pet. Ex. 14 at 1, N.T. at 125-126.
67. Judge Jones testified regarding his assessment of Estey, stating in part: “From the time I first received this case and began to scrutinize all the materials, there was very little question, perhaps no question, that this is an individual who could properly seek redemption [ . . . ] I see zero chance that anything like this would ever happen to Mr. Estey in the future.” N.T. at 125.
68. Judge Jones further testified, “This is a man who is sincerely coming back and seeking to do the right thing in his life [...] he’s walked a path that very few people have to walk, fortunately, and he’s done that with, under the circumstances, great reflection [...] I could not be more sincere in my belief that the privilege of returning to practice is something Mr. Estey has earned.” N.T. at 127-128.
69. Former Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, Edward G. Rendell, submitted a letter dated July 30, 2024, to the Board and testified in support of Estey’s request for reinstatement. Pet. Ex. 15; N.T. at 135- 156.
70. Governor Rendell testified that he has known Estey for “about 30 years” and has maintained regular contact with Estey since Estey’s

guilty plea on May 10, 2016. N.T. at 137-142. Governor Rendell testified that when he was Mayor of the City of Philadelphia, Estey worked for him as Deputy Chief of Staff, and that when he became Governor, Estey worked for him as Chief of Staff. N.T. at 138-139.

71. Governor Rendell testified that he knew Estey as an “extraordinarily fine human being” and as a person committed to public service. N.T. at 139-142. Governor Rendell summarized his opinion in part as follows: “Because although he’s done great work helping pro bono groups, that work could be increased and magnified in his role as a public service lawyer [...] In terms of competency, I think John kept up with changes in the law, case law in the courts, even during his period of disbarment, so he’d be able to pick up his legal acumen almost immediately.” N.T. at 147-148.
72. Governor Rendell explained that he has testified in support of other individuals who sought reinstatement, and stated “None of them were as justified for reinstatement and as valuable to the public as what we’d be getting if the law license is given back to John.” N.T. at 148.
73. In his letter submitted to the Board, Governor Rendell stated in part, “I thought then, and continue to believe today, that [John] is as honest and moral a person as anyone with whom I’ve had the pleasure of working [...] I have absolutely no doubt that John

possesses the moral qualifications, competency and learning in the law that the Board requires to approve the reinstatement of his license to practice law.” Pet. Ex. 15 at 1-2.

74. Peter H. LeVan, Jr., Esquire submitted a letter dated July 26, 2024, to the Board and testified in support of Estey’s request for reinstatement. Pet. Ex. 16; N.T. at 158-179. Mr. LeVan has been a member of the Bar of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania since 1999. N.T. at 159.
75. Mr. LeVan testified that he has known Estey for over 25 years and has worked with Estey in several legal capacities during that period. N.T. at 159-163; Pet. Ex. 16 at 1. Mr. LeVan has been in regular contact with Estey since Estey’s guilty plea on May 10, 2016. N.T. at 163-166.
76. Mr. LeVan summarized his opinion regarding Estey’s character and actions as follows: “I think John [...] took responsibility for what he did, he cooperated with the government, and he continued to grow and learn from that. He did not stop his ongoing community engagement, his work for the people, whether it’s on [...] non-profit boards working with reform efforts, all of that.” N.T. at 170-171.
77. Mr. LeVan further testified regarding Estey’s potential reentry into the Bar: “I think that the Bar [...] would not be disadvantaged by his reentry, I actually think it would be enhanced. I think John is a



unique person with a unique background and unique perspective who has [...] provided benefits to communities to the people around him [...] In terms of honest and trustworthiness, I mean I don't know what else to say besides if I trust him with my kids' health[], that I think kind of says it all. N.T. at 173-174.

78. In his letter to the Board, Mr. Levan stated in part, "I enthusiastically support John's petition for reinstatement. I have no doubt that John possesses the moral qualifications, competency, and learning in the law that the Board requires to approve the reinstatement of his license to practice law. He would be a strong asset to the bar of Pennsylvania..." Pet. Ex. 16 at 2.
79. On June 4, 2025, Estey submitted a post-hearing brief to the Committee in support of his reinstatement.
80. On June 10, 2025, ODC submitted a letter to the Committee and stated it would not be submitting a brief as it found no basis to oppose Estey's reinstatement.
81. By Report filed on August 6, 2025, the Committee concluded that Estey met the *Keller* standard and the Rule 218(c)(3) standard for reinstatement and recommended that the Petition for Reinstatement be granted.
82. The parties did not take exception to the Committee's Report and recommendation.

83. The Board adjudicated this matter at the meeting on October 24, 2025.

## II. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The misconduct for which Estey was disbarred on consent is not so egregious as to preclude consideration of his Petition for Reinstatement. *Office of Disciplinary Counsel v. John Keller*, 506 A.2d 872 (Pa. 1986).
2. Estey met his burden of proof by clear and convincing evidence that he has the moral qualifications, competency and learning in the law required for admission to practice law in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Pa.R.D.E. 218(c)(3).
3. Estey met his burden of proof by clear and convincing evidence that his resumption of the practice of law will be neither detrimental to the integrity and standing of the bar or the administration of justice nor subversive of the public interest. Pa.R.D.E. 218(c)(3).

## III. DISCUSSION

Estey seeks readmission to the practice of law in Pennsylvania following his disbarment on consent by Order of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania on February 23, 2017. For the reasons that follow, we conclude that Estey satisfied the *Keller* threshold standard and met his reinstatement burden under Pa.R.D.E. 218(c)(3) and recommend that the Petition for Reinstatement be granted.

The primary purpose of the lawyer disciplinary system is to protect the public from unfit attorneys and to maintain the integrity of the legal system. *Office of Disciplinary Counsel v. John Rodes Christie*, 639 A.2d 782, 785 (Pa. 1994). When a disbarred attorney seeks reinstatement, the Board must first examine whether the magnitude of the breach of trust committed by the attorney is so egregious that it precludes further consideration of the petition for reinstatement. *Office of Disciplinary Counsel v. John Keller*, 506 A.2d 872 (Pa. 1986).

Estey's breach of trust that triggered his disbarment on consent was his criminal conviction of one felony count of wire fraud in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343. Estey's conviction arose out of his involvement in an FBI undercover operation involving a "corporation" pursuing an initiative to recycle school textbooks. Estey converted to his own use \$13,000 in funds that the "corporation" provided to Estey to pass through to elected officials as political contributions. There is no doubt that Estey's misconduct was serious and adversely impacted the profession and the public. Nevertheless, consistent with the decisional law, we conclude, as did the Committee below, that Estey's misconduct is not so egregious that it should foreclose consideration of his reinstatement request. Estey's misconduct is similar to that of other attorneys who were disbarred for criminal activity and who later met the *Keller* standard. See *In the Matter of Sabrina L. Spetz*, No. 31 DB 2011 (D. Bd. Rpt. 1/3/2020) (S. Ct. Order 2/28/2020) (disbarred on consent for wire and mail fraud conspiracy; the Board concluded that the misconduct was not so egregious to prevent consideration of the reinstatement petition); *In the Matter of Stephen Greg Doherty*, 69 DB 2010 (D. Bd. Rpt. 9/13/2017) (S.

Ct. Order 10/27/2017) (disbarred on consent following conviction of wire fraud, mail fraud, bankruptcy fraud, and money laundering; the Board concluded the misconduct was not so egregious to prevent consideration of the reinstatement petition); *In the Matter of Gerard Emmett Evans*, 10 DB 2001 (D. Bd. Rpt. 10/3/2008) (S. Ct. Order 12/15/2008) (disbarred on consent for conviction of wire fraud and mail fraud; the Board concluded that the misconduct was not so egregious to preclude consideration of the reinstatement petition).

The Board's inquiry does not end with the determination of the *Keller* threshold issue. A reinstatement proceeding is a "searching inquiry into a lawyer's present professional and moral fitness to resume the practice of law. The object of concern is not solely the transgressions which gave rise to the lawyer's suspension or disbarment, but rather, the nature and extent of the rehabilitative efforts he has made since the time the sanction was imposed and the degree of success achieved in the rehabilitative process." *Philadelphia News, Inc. v. Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania*, 363 A.2d 779, 780-781 (Pa. 1976). We therefore consider pursuant to Pa.R.D.E. 218(c)(3), whether Estey has established by clear and convincing evidence that he has the moral qualifications, competency and learning in the law required for admission to practice law in Pennsylvania and that his readmission would not have a detrimental impact on the integrity and standing of the bar, the administration of justice nor be subversive of the public interest. To meet this burden, Estey must demonstrate that a sufficient amount of time has passed since his misconduct, during which he engaged in rehabilitative efforts

such that the detrimental impact of his serious misconduct on the public trust has been dissipated. *Matter of Verlin*, 731 A.2d 600, 602 (Pa. 1999).

Initially, we observe that Estey approached the reinstatement process, starting with the filing of his Petition and Questionnaire and continuing through his direct testimony, cross-examination and answers responsive to questions from the Committee, with the full candor and transparency necessary for the Board to accurately assess his rehabilitative efforts.

More than eight years have passed since Estey's disbarment on consent on February 23, 2017, and more than fourteen years have passed since his underlying misconduct. The record reflects that Estey began assuming responsibility for his actions prior to the Court's disbarment order by cooperating extensively with the government between April 2012 and May 2016, entering a guilty plea in May 2016, and voluntarily resigning from the bar and accepting disbarment in January 2017. We find that while Estey initially agreed to cooperate with the government in part because he believed he had not engaged in any misconduct, he later accepted his guilt and pled guilty because "first and foremost" he had committed a criminal offense by converting \$13,000. Estey reaffirmed his accountability at his sentencing hearing in April 2017, when he accepted his guilt and responsibility, apologized to the sentencing court, and expressed remorse, regret and shame for his misconduct. Estey was sentenced to one year of probation, a fine, and restitution of \$13,000. Estey promptly paid the monetary portion of his sentence in full and completed his probation without incident. We note that Estey has not been

involved with law enforcement since his guilty plea, has never had any disciplinary issues outside of the instant misconduct, and has never been a plaintiff or defendant in a lawsuit.

Estey offered forthright and truthful testimony at his reinstatement hearing to establish that he clearly understood the nature of his wrongdoing and was deeply sorry for it. Estey candidly shared that he found himself in a dark place during the time frame of his guilty plea and sentencing, as he realized he was not the person he thought he had been. He resolved to change his life and recommit himself to helping others. On this record, we find that Estey accomplished these goals. Estey demonstrated significant rehabilitation efforts during his disbarment. He has maintained continuous employment through business consulting work for a software start-up company and for entities in the public space. Estey provides these consulting services in a non-legal capacity, does not engage in the practice of law or hold himself out as eligible to practice, and ensures that his clients have appropriate independent legal representation. Estey also provides pro bono strategic advice to not-for-profit organizations in the Philadelphia area. As well, Estey volunteers his time and skills to civic organizations. From 2020 through 2024, he served on the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Visitor Center. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Historic Philadelphia, Inc. We observe that these meaningful endeavors are a continuation of the types of activities in which Estey was involved prior to his disbarment, when he devoted a major portion of his career and personal interests to public service.

Estey demonstrated his competency and learning in the law by completing the required 36 hours of CLE as well as an additional 12.5 hours between September

2023 and March 2025. He kept apprised of the current law by reading numerous legal publications and newspapers on general legal developments and specific topics of interest. Estey shared his plans for reentering the legal profession if reinstated and intends to continue working with clients who seek to advance the public interest in government and society. The record showed that Estey has a breadth and depth of experience with law firms, companies, and public service that will beneficially inform his future endeavors.

On a personal level, Estey shared his significant health challenges during disbarment and confirmed that he is currently active and in good health. More recently, Estey served as a caretaker for his wife while she faced her own health concerns.

In support of his reinstatement, Estey presented credible character evidence demonstrating strong moral qualifications, competency and fitness to resume the practice of law. Estey's three character witnesses voiced compelling and unreserved support for Estey's character and for his reinstatement. Judge Jones, who sentenced Estey in his criminal matter, acknowledged and validated the work Estey has done to rehabilitate himself, and expressed full confidence that Estey has deeply reflected on his actions and earned his privilege to return to practice. Governor Rendell, who has known Estey for 30 years and worked closely with him while serving as Mayor and Governor, similarly testified that Estey is a person of high moral character and competence who would be an asset to the public if reinstated. Attorney LeVan, who has known Estey for 25 years and who has worked with him in a legal capacity, testified that Estey is

responsible, trustworthy and committed to ongoing personal growth, and his readmission to the bar would enhance the legal community.

While Estey's breach of trust was great, the record evidence demonstrates that he has engaged in significant rehabilitation that has dissipated the impact of his original misconduct on the public trust. Estey demonstrated via his own testimony, the testimony of his character witnesses, and the documentary evidence that he is not predisposed to repeat his misconduct as he has confronted his past wrongdoing and demonstrated a genuine commitment to personal and professional development. We conclude that after eight years of disbarment devoted to rehabilitation from his serious criminal conduct, Estey's reinstatement at this time would not cause harm to the public or adversely affect the public's perception of the legal profession. *In the Matter of Joshua Lawrence Gayl*, No. 79 DB 2016 (D. Bd. Rpt. 9/19/2022) (S. Ct. Order 10/25/2022) (reinstated from disbarment after six years; conviction of conspiracy to obstruct justice); *Matter of Doherty* (D. Bd. Rpt. at p. 16) (reinstated from disbarment after seven years; conviction of mail fraud, wire fraud, bankruptcy fraud, money laundering); *Matter of Evans* (D. Bd. Rpt. at p. 8) (reinstated from disbarment after seven years; conviction of wire fraud and mail fraud).

Upon this record, we conclude Estey is fit to practice law. Estey has met his reinstatement burden by clear and convincing evidence that he is morally qualified, competent and learned in the law, and that his reinstatement will not be detrimental to the integrity and standing of the bar or the administration of justice nor subversive of the public interest. For the above reasons, we recommend Estey's reinstatement.



IV. RECOMMENDATION

The Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania unanimously recommends that Petitioner, John Harper Estey, be reinstated to the practice of law.

The Board further recommends that, pursuant to Rule 218(f), Pa.R.D.E., Petitioner be directed to pay the necessary expenses incurred in the investigation and processing of the Petition for Reinstatement.

Respectfully submitted,

THE DISCIPLINARY BOARD OF THE  
SUPREME COURT OF PENNSYLVANIA

By: /s/ Laura E. Ellsworth  
Laura E. Ellsworth, Member

Date: 12/11/2025

Member Wilson recused.