

IMPUTATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: GENERAL RULE

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (e) and in Rule 1.7(c) with respect to a lawyer who is a public officer or employee of a government entity, while lawyers are associated in a firm, none of them shall knowingly represent a client when any one of them practicing alone would be prohibited from doing so by Rules 1.7 or 1.9, unless the prohibition is based on a personal interest of the disqualified lawyer and does not present a significant risk of materially limiting the representation of the client by the remaining lawyers in the firm.

(b) When a lawyer has terminated an association with a firm, the firm is not prohibited from thereafter representing a person with interests materially adverse to those of a client represented by the formerly associated lawyer and not currently represented by the firm, unless:

(1) the matter is the same or substantially related to that in which the formerly associated lawyer represented the client; and

(2) any lawyer remaining in the firm has information protected by Rules 1.6 and 1.9(c) that is material to the matter.

(c) A disqualification prescribed by this rule may be waived by the affected client under the conditions stated in Rule 1.7.

(d) The disqualification of lawyers associated in a firm with former or current government lawyers is governed by Rule 1.11. However, lawyers appointed or assigned to represent indigent members of the public (public defenders) are subject to this rule regardless of whether they are government employees.

(e) When the prohibition on representation under paragraph (a) is based on Rule 1.9(a) or (b), and arises out of the disqualified lawyer's association with a prior firm, no other lawyer in the firm shall knowingly represent a person in a matter in which that lawyer is disqualified unless:

(1) the personally disqualified lawyer is screened by effective means from participation in the matter and is apportioned no part of the fee therefrom;

(2) the former client of the personally disqualified lawyer receives notice of the conflict and the screening mechanism used to prohibit dissemination of information relating to the former representation;

(3) the firm is able to demonstrate by convincing evidence that no material information relating to the former representation was transmitted by the personally disqualified lawyer before implementation of the screening mechanism and notice to the former client.

Any presumption that information protected by Rules 1.6 and 1.9(c) has been or will be transmitted may be rebutted if the personally disqualified lawyer serves on their former law firm and former client an affidavit attesting that the personally disqualified lawyer will not participate in the matter and will not discuss the matter or the representation with any other lawyer or employee of their current law firm, and attesting that during the period of the lawyer's personal disqualification those lawyers or employees who do participate in the matter will be apprised that the personally disqualified lawyer is screened from participating in or discussing the matter. Such affidavit shall describe the procedures being used effectively to screen the personally disqualified lawyer. Upon request of the former client, such affidavit shall be updated periodically to show actual compliance with the screening procedures. The law firm, the personally disqualified lawyer, or the former client may seek judicial review in a court of general jurisdiction of the screening mechanism used, or may seek court supervision to ensure that

implementation of the screening procedures has occurred and that effective actual compliance has been achieved.

(f) When LLLTs and lawyers are associated in a firm, an LLLT's conflict of interest under LLLT RPC 1.7 or LLLT RPC 1.9 is imputed to lawyers in the firm in the same way as conflicts are imputed to lawyers under this rule. Each of the other provisions of this Rule also applies in the same way when LLLT conflicts are imputed to lawyers in the firm.

[Adopted effective September 1, 1985 Amended effective September 1, 1992; September 1, 2006; September 1, 2011; April 14, 2015; September 1, 2025.]

Comments

Definition of "Firm"

[1] **[Washington revision]** For purposes of the Rules of Professional Conduct, the term "firm" denotes lawyers, LLLTs, or any combination thereof in a law partnership, professional corporation, sole proprietorship or other association authorized to practice law; or lawyers or LLLTs employed in a legal services organization or the legal department of a corporation or other organization. See Rule 1.0A(c). Whether two or more lawyers constitute a firm within this definition can depend on the specific facts. See Rule 1.0A, Comments [2] - [4].

[Comment 1 amended effective April 14, 2015.]

Principles of Imputed Disqualification

[2] **[Washington revision]** The rule of imputed disqualification stated in paragraph (a) gives effect to the principle of loyalty to the client as it applies to lawyers who practice in a law firm. Such situations can be considered from the premise that a firm of lawyers is essentially one lawyer for purposes of the rules governing loyalty to the client, or from the premise that each lawyer is vicariously bound by the obligation of loyalty owed by each lawyer with whom the lawyer is associated. Paragraph (a) operates only among the lawyers currently associated in a firm. When a lawyer moves from one firm to another, the situation is governed by Rules 1.9(b) and 1.10(b) and (e).

[3] The rule in paragraph (a) does not prohibit representation where neither questions of client loyalty nor protection of confidential information are presented. Where one lawyer in a firm could not effectively represent a given client because of strong political beliefs, for example, but that lawyer will do no work on the case and the personal beliefs of the lawyer will not materially limit the representation by others in the firm, the firm should not be disqualified. On the other hand, if an opposing party in a case were owned by a lawyer in the law firm, and others in the firm would be materially limited in pursuing the matter because of loyalty to that lawyer, the personal disqualification of the lawyer would be imputed to all others in the firm.

[4] **[Reserved.** See Washington Comment [11].]

[5] Rule 1.10(b) operates to permit a law firm, under certain circumstances, to represent a person with interests directly adverse to those of a client represented by a lawyer who formerly was associated with the firm. The Rule applies regardless of when the formerly associated lawyer represented the client. However, the law firm may not represent a person with interests adverse to those of a present client of the firm, which would violate Rule 1.7. Moreover, the firm may not represent the person where the matter is the same or substantially related to that in which the formerly associated lawyer represented the client and any other lawyer currently in the firm has material information protected by Rules 1.6 and 1.9(c).

[6] **[Washington revision]** Rule 1.10(c) removes imputation with the informed consent of the

affected client or former client under the conditions stated in Rule 1.7. The conditions stated in Rule 1.7 require the lawyer to determine that the representation is not prohibited by Rule 1.7(b) and that each affected client or former client has given informed consent to the representation, confirmed in writing. In some cases, the risk may be so severe that the conflict may not be cured by client consent. For a definition of informed consent, see Rule 1.0A(e).

[Comment 6 amended effective April 14, 2015.]

[7] Where a lawyer has joined a private firm after having represented the government, imputation is governed by Rule 1.11(b) and (c), not this Rule. Under Rule 1.11(d), where a lawyer represents the government after having served clients in private practice, nongovernmental employment or in another government agency, former-client conflicts are not imputed to government lawyers associated with the individually disqualified lawyer.

[8] Where a lawyer is prohibited from engaging in certain transactions under Rule 1.8, paragraph (k) of that Rule, and not this Rule, determines whether that prohibition also applies to other lawyers associated in a firm with the personally prohibited lawyer.

Additional Washington Comments (9 - 15)

Principles of Imputed Disqualification

[9] The screening provisions in Washington RPC 1.10 differ from those in the Model Rule. Washington's adoption of a nonconsensual screening provision in 1993 preceded the ABA's 2009 adoption of a similar approach in the Model Rules. Washington's rule was amended and the screening provision recodified as paragraph (e) in 2006, and paragraphs (a) and (e) were further amended in 2011 to conform more closely to the Model Rules version. None of the amendments to this Rule, however, represents a change in Washington law. The Rule preserves Washington practice established in 1993 with respect to screening by allowing a lawyer personally disqualified from representing a client based on the lawyer's prior association with a firm to be screened from a representation to be undertaken by other members of the lawyer's new firm under the circumstances set forth in paragraph (e). See Washington Comment [10].

[10] Washington's RPC 1.10 was amended in 1993 to permit representation with screening under certain circumstances. Rule 1.10(e) retains the screening mechanism adopted as Washington RPC 1.10(b) in 1993, thus allowing a firm to represent a client with whom a lawyer in the firm has a conflict based on their association with a prior firm if the lawyer is effectively screened from participation in the representation, is apportioned no part of the fee earned from the representation and the client of the former firm receives notice of the conflict and the screening mechanism. However, prior to undertaking the representation, non-disqualified firm members must evaluate the firm's ability to provide competent representation even if the disqualified member can be screened in accordance with this Rule. While Rule 1.10 does not specify the screening mechanism to be used, the law firm must be able to demonstrate that it is adequate to prevent the personally disqualified lawyer from receiving or transmitting any confidential information or from participating in the representation in any way. The screening mechanism must be in place over the life of the representation at issue and is subject to judicial review at the request of any of the affected clients, law firms, or lawyers. However, a lawyer or law firm may rebut the presumption that information relating to the representation has been transmitted by serving an affidavit describing the screening mechanism and affirming that the requirements of the Rule have been met.

[11] Under Rule 5.3, this Rule also applies to nonlawyer assistants and lawyers who previously worked as nonlawyers at a law firm. See *Daines v. Alcatel*, 194 F.R.D. 678 (E.D. Wash. 2000); *Richards v. Jain*, 168 F. Supp. 2d 1195 (W.D. Wash. 2001). For the definition of nonlawyer for the purposes of Rule 5.3, see Washington Comment [5] to Rule 5.3.

[Comment 11 amended effective April 14, 2015; September 1, 2016.]

[12] In serving an affidavit permitted by paragraph (e), a lawyer may serve the affidavit on the former law firm alone (without simultaneously serving the former client directly) if the former law firm continues to represent the former client and the lawyer contemporaneously requests in writing that the former law firm provide a copy of the affidavit to the former client. If the former client is no longer represented by the former law firm or if the lawyer has reason to believe the former law firm will not promptly provide the former client with a copy of the affidavit, then the affidavit must be served directly on the former client also. Serving the affidavit on a represented former client does not violate Rule 4.2 because the communication with the former client is not about the “subject of the representation” and the notice is “authorized by law,” i.e., the Rules of Professional Conduct.

[13] Rule 1.8(l) conflicts are not imputed to other members of a firm under paragraph (a) of this Rule unless the relationship creates a conflict of interest for the individual lawyer under Rule 1.7 and also presents a significant risk of materially limiting the representation of the client by the remaining lawyers in the firm.

[14] For the parallel provision imputing lawyer conflicts to an LLLT when an LLLT has associated with a lawyer, see LLLT RPC 1.10(f).

[15] Public defenders represent individuals, not the government. For this reason, imputed conflicts in public defender firms are determined under this rule rather than RPC 1.11.

[Comment 15 adopted effective September 1, 2018.]

[Comments adopted effective September 1, 2006.]