THE LAW SOCIETY OF MANITOBA

IN THE MATTER OF:

GISELE RITA CHAMPAGNE

- and -

IN THE MATTER OF:

THE LEGAL PROFESSION ACT

Hearing Date:	August 28, 2026
Panel:	Heather Leonoff, K.C. – Chair
	Kathrine Basarab
	David Rondeau (Public Representative)
Appearances:	Ayli Klein for the Law Society of Manitoba
	Gisele Rita Champagne, Self Represented

DECISION

Introduction and Facts

1. Gisele Rita Champagne is a member of The Law Society of Manitoba (the "Society"), having been called to the bar in 1992. She is charged in four citations with eight counts summarized as follows:

- Failing to perform legal services undertaken on behalf of client W.S.C. to the standard of a competent lawyer, contrary to Rule 3.1-2 of the *Code of Professional Conduct*.

- Failing to perform legal services undertaken on behalf of client G.T. to the standard of a competent lawyer, contrary to Rule 3.1-2 of the *Code of Professional Conduct.*

- Failing to act honourably and with integrity, contrary to Rule 2.1-1 of the *Code of Professional Conduct.*

- Failing to provide service to clients S.N., D.R., D.C., and S.P.C., that was courteous, thorough, prompt, competent, timely, conscientious, diligent, efficient and civil, contrary to Rule 3.2-1 of the *Code of Professional Conduct.*

- Failing to provide service to client C.L. that was courteous, thorough, prompt, competent, timely, conscientious, diligent, efficient and civil, contrary to Rule 3.2-1 of the *Code of Professional Conduct.*

- Issuing post-dated trust cheques, contrary to Rule 5-44(1)(f) of the *Rules of the Law Society of Manitoba.*

- Failing to keep the law firm's general records current, contrary to Law Society Rule 5-48(3).

- Failing to respond promptly and completely to the Law Society of Manitoba regarding two complaints, contrary to Sub-Rules 5-64(3) and (4) of the Rules and to Rule 7.1-1 of the *Code of Professional Conduct.*

2. Ms. Champagne entered a plea of guilty before the panel to the eight offences set out above. She was made aware prior to her plea that the Society would be seeking disbarment. The facts were presented through an agreed statement. Ms. Champagne chose to make no submissions on the facts, or as to penalty.

3. The W.S.C. matter was an estate file. Ms. Champagne repeatedly filed materials on behalf of her client that were confusing and contained errors. She was ordered to pay $6,500 in costs personally by the motions judge, who dismissed one of the multiple motions that she filed. Ms. Champagne also filed an appeal on behalf of her client, but the materials were rejected as deficient on three occasions by court staff, resulting in the time to file an appeal to lapse. A motion was then required to extend the time to appeal, and Ms. Champagne was ordered to pay $1,000 in throw-away costs to the other counsel on the file.

4. The G.T. matter was a family law custody trial. In the written decision, *N.W. v. G.T.*, 2026 MBKB 26, the trial Judge made several comments about Ms. Champagne's representation including:

- That Ms. Champagne failed to file an agreed statement of facts that she had committed to prepare;
- That the draft interim orders that Ms. Champagne prepared were rejected by the court because they contained "blatant errors"; and
- That Ms. Champagne failed to file a written argument on behalf of her client, leaving the judge to have to make assumptions about what the client was seeking.

5. Ms. Champagne has also admitted to a breach of the Rule respecting integrity in relation to her representation of her client S.N. Ms. Champagne received a Legal Aid certificate to represent S.N. but charged the client private fees prior to cancelling the certificate. Ms. Champagne also failed to comply with her obligations to Legal Aid by failing to get written permission from Legal Aid before distributing trust funds. Further, Ms. Champagne failed to keep accurate trust records by identifying two cash payments as

having come from the client, when the funds had actually come from Ms. Champagne personally.

6. Ms. Champagne is also charged in two separate counts with failing to provide quality service to five clients. The facts of these matters are as follows:

- With respect to the client S.N., Ms. Champagne failed to keep her informed about her matter and did not advise her that two of her settlement payments had been paid by Ms. Champagne personally.
- With respect to client D.R., Ms. Champagne failed to keep any records showing the client was provided with the form 74EE, which is required on estate matters and failed to get written consent prior to billing legal fees.
- With respect to the client D.C., Ms. Champagne booked and attended a settlement meeting, despite having received instructions from the client not to set a meeting and advising the client that no meeting would take place.
- With respect to the client S.P.A., Ms. Champagne failed to prepare documents to assist the client despite having advised the Society that she would do so.
- With respect to the client C.L., Ms. Champagne failed to provide services in a timely manner. The client required a home appraisal in order to resolve issues related to her mortgage renewal. Ms. Champagne advised the client that she would get the documents done on time, but she did not do so, and the client missed out on a locked-in rate. Ultimately the client changed lawyers.

7. Ms. Champagne has also pleaded guilty to two counts of violating the accounting rules. Ms. Champagne wrote five post-dated trust cheques on the S.N. matter, to satisfy a settlement agreement, contrary to the Rules. Further, Ms. Champagne failed to keep her

general ledger up to date by not recording payments that had been received from her client E.C. and also that did not reflect a statement of account that had been issued.

8. Finally, Ms. Champagne has also admitted that she failed to meet her obligations to the Society and did not respond in a timely manner to inquiries for information.

Discipline History

9. Ms. Champagne has had five previous disciplinary proceedings before the Society.

- On September 13, 2001, Ms. Champagne entered pleas of guilty to one charge of failing to act with integrity and one charge of failing to serve her client in a diligent and efficient manner. The facts of the first matter involved providing false information on her application for admission as a student in the bar admission program. The second matter involved tendering a witness at a trial knowing that the witness would provide evidence damaging to the client's case. She was fined $1,000 in respect of the first charge and ordered to pay costs of $1,000. She was reprimanded on the second charge and ordered to practise under supervision for one year.

- On April 3, 2012, Ms. Champagne entered a guilty plea to a charge of failing to serve her client in a competent, diligent and efficient manner. The circumstances were that Ms. Champagne, while acting for a youth with cognitive deficits, took her client's instructions to agree to an adult sentence without taking steps to ensure that the client understood the consequences of this decision and that he understood his options. She was reprimanded and ordered to practise under supervision for a period of eighteen months.

- On November 5, 2018, Ms. Champagne entered a guilty plea to one count of professional misconduct for failing to serve her client in a competent, diligent and efficient manner. She entered a guilty plea on behalf of a youth charged with serious criminal offences, on his first appearance. Ms. Champagne knew that the client was a ward of CFS, and she knew that he had very poor verbal comprehension skills and other cognitive deficits, however, she did not consult the guardian. Once the sentencing hearing began, it became clear that there was no agreement between the Crown and Ms. Champagne as to the facts. Once the social worker arrived, she directed Ms. Champagne to withdraw the guilty plea, which the judge permitted. The client then retained new counsel to deal with the matter. Ms. Champagne was fined $1,500 and ordered to pay costs of $2,500. She entered into an undertaking to not do any further youth criminal justice matters.

- On September 11, 2020, Ms. Champagne entered into an undertaking with the Society to discontinue practising in the area of criminal defence work.

- On January 12, 2021, Ms. Champagne pleaded guilty to three charges of professional misconduct for a breach of integrity, charging unfair fees and failing to comply with the trust accounting rules. The breach of integrity related to Ms. Champagne changing a document that had been signed by the Crown Attorney, without advising the Crown or providing a copy. The fees and trust account violations related to insurance payments received on behalf of a client who was incarcerated. The money was not properly accounted for but was returned by Ms. Champagne to the client. Ms. Champagne was ordered to pay a fine of $4,000 and $4,000 in costs.

Analysis and Disposition

10. Ms. Champagne chose not to contest the charges that she was facing. She also understood that the Society would be seeking disbarment and she chose to provide no submissions in rebuttal or mitigation.

11. The Law Society of Manitoba has a fundamental responsibility to protect the public, maintain high professional standards for lawyers, and to preserve public confidence in the legal profession. It is only by meeting these objectives that lawyers can continue to retain their privilege as a self-governing profession.

12. Disbarment is the most severe penalty provided for in *The Legal Profession Act.* It is imposed for the most serious breaches of the *Code* and *Rules.* But equally, disbarment is the appropriate remedy when a lawyer has demonstrated a repeated pattern of conduct that violates professional standards. It is only by addressing the cumulative record that the Law Society can fulfil its mandate to protect the public and preserve public confidence in the legal profession. A lawyer who has been unable to learn from past discipline proceedings his or her obligation to provide ethical and high quality legal services, must at some point lose the privilege of practising law.

13. This is the point that Ms. Champagne has reached. She has had five previous involvements with the discipline panel. She has been ordered to practise under supervision on two occasions. She has provided undertakings not to practise in the areas of youth criminal justice and adult criminal justice. She has been fined multiple times. And yet the problems continue.

14. The two charges of incompetence are particularly concerning to the panel. One involves an estate matter, and the quality of service was so poor that two separate judges ordered costs personally against Ms. Champagne. The second was a family law matter. Ms. Champagne failed to file documents, filed poorly drafted documents that were rejected by the court, and virtually abandoned her client by failing to file a closing argument so that the judge was left to speculate as to what position the client was taking. Ms. Champagne also admitted to being dishonest with several of her clients as discussed above. There are also accounting rule violations that are very reminiscent of the offences in 2021.

15. Ms. Champagne also failed to comply with her obligations under the *Rules* and *Code* to provide timely and complete responses to Law Society inquiries. The so-called "14-day letter" regime is essential to the Society's role as the self-governing regulatory body of the legal profession. As a matter of general deterrence, these offences must be taken seriously so that the profession recognizes that these obligations are essential to maintaining self-governing status.

16. The panel acknowledges that Ms. Champagne has helped many clients, often people in very challenging circumstances. But the current charges involve eight different complainants, two of whom had their cases compromised by incompetent representation and one of whom lost out on a fixed-rate mortgage due to the delay in completing the documentation.

17. Having considered the agreed evidence and the Law Society submission, Ms. Champagne having declined to make a submission, the panel has concluded that disbarment is the appropriate remedy. Ms. Champagne has failed to learn from her past disciplinary matters. The offences to which she has pleaded guilty continue to show that she cannot practise in a manner that meets the Society's standards of competence and professionalism. Disbarment is the only remedy that fulfils the Society's mandate to protect the public, maintain high professional standards for lawyers, and preserve public confidence in the legal profession.

Conclusion

18. This panel finds Ms. Champagne guilty of six counts of professional misconduct and two counts of incompetence. Pursuant to s. 72(1)(a) and s. 72(2)(a) of *The Legal Profession Act* we order that Ms. Champagne be disbarred and that her name be struck from the rolls of the Law Society. The publication of this finding shall be done in accordance with Rule 5-

100(1). Given Ms. Champagne's cooperation in bringing this matter to a conclusion, there will be no order of costs.

Dated this 15th day of September, 2026.

Heather Leonoff, K.C., Chair

Kathrine Basarab

David Rondeau