JUDICIAL INTEGRITY BOARD, COMPLAINANT, VS. ATTY. ADORACION A. ARCEO, CLERK OF COURT VI, OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF COURT, METROPOLITAN TRIAL COURT, MAKATI CITY, RESPONDENT.

A.M. No. P-25-255 (Formerly JIB FPI No. 23-306-P) and A.M. No. P-25-256 (Formerly JIB FPI No. 23-332-P). November 18, 2025

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PER CURIAM:

These are authority and administrative cases against Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo (Atty. Arceo), then Clerk of Court VI, Office of the Clerk of Court, Metropolitan Trial Court (MeTC), Makati City for gross misconduct, grave abuse of authority, and conduct prejudicial that gravely besmirches or taints the reputation of service in relation to her alleged acts of assisting litigants and lawyers in cases pending before the MeTCs of Makati City, in violation of Rule 140, as amended, and the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability (CPRA).[1]

Antecedents

A.M. No. P-25-255 stemmed from the 1st Indorsement[2] dated October 6, 2023 of Assistant Court Administrator Maria Regina Adoracion Filomena M. Ignacio (ACA Ignacio), Office of the Court Administrator (OCA), referring to the Judicial Integrity Board (JIB) the letter[3] dated September 28, 2023 of Presiding Judge Ma. Concepcion A. Billones (Judge Billones) of Branch 62, MeTC, Makati City, and letter[4] dated September 29, 2023 of Executive Judge Jackie Crisologo-Saguisag (Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag), 1st Vice Executive Judge Niño Delvin E. Embuscado (Judge Embuscado), and 2nd Vice Executive Judge Ma. Lourdes V. Barrios-Saplo (Judge Barrios-Saplo) all from the MeTC, Makati City, containing allegations of irregularities against Atty. Arceo.[5]

According to Judge Billones, on September 12, 2023, she received reports from her staff that several lawyers would always mention Atty. Arceo as a friend or relative when following up their cases. Even those posting bail dropped her name to her staff.[6] She immediately phoned Atty. Arceo, informing her about these reports as she emphasized that her involvement in the cases was unethical and may affect the court's impartiality.[7] Judge Billones alluded to the case docketed as M-MKT-23-04255-CR, titled "People v. Oscar G. Tan-Abing, Jr. and Andrea Louise G. Tetangco" (Tan-Abing case) where Atty. Arceo allegedly assisted the respondents' counsel in posting bail for them.[8] Atty. Arceo, however, shrugged off the matter and instead, discussed another case pending in the sala of Judge Billones docketed as M-MKT-23-1870-CR titled "People v. Florentino M. Herrera III" (Herrera case). Atty. Arceo mentioned to her that someone from the side of the accused wanted to talk regarding the case, and if she would be able to resolve the case in favor of the accused, the latter's counsel, Atty. Felipe Mart Closa (Atty. Closa),[9] would help Judge Billones with her application for promotion to the second level court.[10]

Alarmed by the line of conversation being pursued by Atty. Arceo, Judge Billones asked her staff whether Atty. Arceo had been making follow-ups on cases pending before her sala. Roxanne N. De Las Verlas (De Las Verlas),

her legal researcher, confirmed that Atty. Arceo had been making several follow-ups regarding the Herrera case. In a phone call, De Las Verlas advised Atty. Arceo to ask the handling lawyer instead.[11] De Las Verlas likewise confirmed that Atty. Arceo asked her regarding the status of the promotion of Judge Billones.[12]

Thereafter, Judge Billones decided to inhibit from the Herrera case per Order[13] dated September 27, 2023 to avoid any suspicion of bias and impartiality.[14] Judge Billones emphasized that Atty. Arceo's actions were improper and inappropriate considering her sensitive position as clerk of court.[15]

On the other hand, the letter[16] dated September 29, 2023 of Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag, Judge Embuscado, and Judge Barrios-Saplo underscored that the Office of the Executive Judge, MeTC, Makati City, received verbal reports from various staffers of the MeTC, Makati City, that Atty. Arceo was approaching court staffers to follow-up the status of several cases. Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag mentioned that there was a specific incident involving Atty. Arceo where she attempted to hand over gifts, in cash and in kind, to Judge Xavier Paolo R. Del Castillo (Judge Del Castillo) in connection with election cases filed before Branch 61, MeTC.[17] Judge Del Castillo allegedly rebuffed the attempt and reprimanded Atty. Arceo accordingly.[18]

Apart from Judge Del Castillo, Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag also identified Judge Billones, Judge Augusto Jose Y. Arreza [Ret.] (Judge Arezza), and De Las Verlas as among the court personnel who had related incidents with Atty. Arceo.[19]

In his affidavit, Judge Arreza recalled that during the 1st quarter of 2022, his court, Branch 147, MeTC, Makati City received a call inquiring about the status of the bail application in a certain criminal case. Unfortunately, he could no longer recall the specific docket or title of the case. He learned that the caller was from MeTC Office of the Clerk of Court. He took the call and told the caller that it was not proper to inquire about the status of a bail application. After a few minutes, two women came to his office, one of whom was Atty. Arceo who explained that she was just doing a favor for her friend. Judge Arreza then reiterated that only immediate relatives and/or counsel of detainees were allowed to have access to case records or to follow up with applications for bail.[20]

Judge Del Castillo, to date, did not submit an affidavit or sworn statement in relation to the allegation of Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag that Atty. Arceo attempted to bribe him regarding election cases pending before his sala.[21]

As for A.M. No. P-25-256, the same stemmed from the letter[22] dated December 4, 2023 of Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag addressed to the Court through Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo, reiterating the serious concerns against Atty. Arceo in relation to the cases she was following up. By Resolution[23] dated January 23, 2024, the Court En Banc resolved to merely note the letter, as it was a mere reiteration.[24]

The Court, through the JIB, required Atty. Arceo to submit a consolidated comment and to show cause why she should not be sanctioned as a member of the Philippine Bar for violation of Canon II, Section 2[25] of the of the CPRA.[26]

In compliance with the directive of the Court, Atty. Arceo submitted her Consolidated Comment.[27] She denied the allegations made by Judge Billones, De Las Verlas, and Judge Arreza.[28]

On the allegations of Judge Billones, Atty. Arceo maintained that she had no knowledge about the parties and counsels in both the Tan-Abing and Herrera cases.[29] She admitted though that for Tan-Abing, she recalled that she talked to a male person who identified himself as a lawyer. The alleged lawyer then inquired about the process on how the accused may get an authority to travel abroad. She merely advised the caller to inquire before the court where the case was pending,[30] and added that a motion is required when asking for a relief.[31]

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On the Herrera case, she emphasized that it was preposterous for her to discuss this case with Judge Billones considering that the latter had already directed her over the phone to desist from assisting any court litigant.[32] It was also not true that she talked to De Las Verlas about the case. She admitted though that she called the court of Judge Billones, where this case was pending to ask whether an accused afflicted with COVID was allowed to post bail without appearance. It was De Las Verlas who answered the phone and told her that a motion or request should be submitted to the court. She then relayed the information to a certain man, and after that, she did not know what happened to the case.[33]

Atty. Arceo pointed out that if indeed it was true that lawyers were mentioning her name when following up cases, this was already beyond her control.[34]

Finally, with respect to the allegations of Judge Arreza, she only assisted a friend, Ms. Ma. Lormelita Cometa, who asked for the location of Branch 233, Regional Trial Court, Makati City. She was shocked when Judge Arreza berated her even though she explained that she was merely calling the court to inquire about its exact location in the Hall of Justice, and nothing more.[35]

Atty. Arceo emphasized that she had been an employee of the judiciary for over 30 years, and it was the first time that she had been administratively charged. She prayed for the dismissal of her administrative cases.[36] Further, she maintained that it was "[her] moral obligation to give court users the proper and correct information as a public servant. [She] could not simply dismiss the queries of court users especially those related to bail bonds[] because bail bonds are checked and recorded in [the] Office of the Clerk of Court."[37]

On October 2, 2023, Atty. Arceo tendered her resignation effective November 30, 2023 due to personal reasons.[38]

Report and Recommendation of the JIB

By its Report and Recommendation[39] dated February 17, 2025, the JIB recommended that A.M. No. P-25-255 and A.M. No. P-25-256 be consolidated as both cases involved the same parties and issues.[40]

The JIB found Atty. Arceo guilty of simple misconduct. It gave credence to the sworn statements of the five judges of the MeTC, Makati City, and a court employee as opposed to Atty. Arceo's bare denials.[41] She used her position and influence as the clerk of court to gather confidential information from different courts and would assist party-litigants.[42] The JIB pointed out though that no other evidence was proffered to show that Atty. Arceo extorted money, gift, or favor from any litigant or counsel in exchange for her special assistance.[43]

Since it was the first administrative offense of Atty. Arceo, the JIB appreciated this as a mitigating circumstance. It then imposed the penalty of fine in the amount of PHP 18,000.00 for the offense of simple misconduct under Rule 140, as amended, and a separate fine of PHP 35,000.00 for violation under Section 37(b) of Canon VI of the CPRA, thus:

> IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, it is respectfully submitted for the consideration of the Honorable Board that the instant matter be RE-DOCKETED and the following be recommended to the Supreme Court:
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> 1)
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> that JIB FPI No. 23-306-P (JIB v. Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo) and JIB FPI No. 23-332-P (Re: Serious Concerns Involving Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo, Clerk of Court of the Metropolitan Trial Court of Makati City) be CONSOLIDATED for involving the same issues and parties;

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2)

respondent Atty. ADORACION A. ARCEO, former Clerk of Court, Metropolitan Trial Court, Makati City, be found GUILTY of simple misconduct under Rule 140 of the Rules of Court, as further amended, and be FINED in the amount of Eighteen Thousand Pesos (PHP 18,000.00), payable within three (3) months from the time the decision or resolution of the Supreme Court is promulgated; and

3)

the instant matter be docketed as a separate complaint for violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability; and

4)

respondent Atty. Arceo be found GUILTY of simple misconduct under Rule 140 of Section 37 (b) (sic) of Canon IV of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability and be FINED in the amount of Thirty-Five Thousand Pesos (PHP 35,000.00) payable within three (3) months from the time the decision or resolution of the Supreme Court is promulgated.[44] (Emphasis in the original)

Our Ruling

At the outset, Atty. Arceo's administrative liability subsists notwithstanding her resignation pending investigation of the report against her. In Office of the Court Administrator v. Juan,[45] We held that a court personnel's resignation does not render the case moot. Resignation is not a way out to evade administrative liability when a court personnel member is facing an administrative sanction. We reiterated this principle in a case[46] where a public officer filed her resignation prior to the date she was set to appear for a formal investigation, thus:

> . . . we view respondent's act of filing her resignation before the investigation as indicative of her guilt. Indeed, an employee's act of tendering her resignation immediately after the discovery of the anomalous transaction is indicative of her guilt as flight in criminal cases. And, resignation is not a way out to evade administrative liability when a court employee is facing administrative sanction.[47]

Certainly, Atty. Arceo's voluntary severance from government service does not preclude the filing of an administrative case against her.

Since the Court En Banc, in its Resolution[48] dated January 23, 2024, already resolved to merely note the letter[49] dated December 4, 2023 of Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag subject of A.M. No. P-25-256 (Re: Serious Concerns Involving Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo, Clerk of Court of the Metropolitan Trial Court of Makati City)—a simple reiteration of the allegations against Atty. Arceo-the Court will now proceed to resolve on the merits A.M. No. P-25-255 (JIB v. Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo) which stemmed from the 1st Indorsement dated October 6, 2023 of ACA Ignacio involving the letter dated September 28, 2023 of Judge Billones of Branch 62, MeTC, Makati City, and letter dated September 29, 2023 of Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag, Judge Embuscado, and Judge Barrios-Saplo of MeTC, Makati City,[50] containing allegations of irregularities against Atty. Arceo, specifically, her incessant follow-ups of cases pending before MeTC, Makati City.[51]

Clerks of court occupy a sensitive position in the judicial system. They are required to safeguard the integrity of the court and its proceedings, to earn and preserve respect therefor, to maintain loyalty thereto and to the judge as superior officer, to maintain the authenticity and correctness of court records, and to uphold the confidence of the public in the administration of justice. Clerks of court play a key role in the complement of the court and, thus,

cannot be permitted to slacken on their jobs under one pretext or another.[52]

Further, clerks of court are expected to maintain strict impartiality and must not intervene, directly or indirectly, in any case, especially those not assigned to their court. Any act of following up, intervening, or exerting influence in another court's case constitutes a breach of duty.

Here, substantial evidence on record shows that Atty. Arceo had been following up cases pending before the MeTCs of Makati City per reports and statements attested to by not just one, but five judges, and a court personnel (legal researcher).

As attested by Judge Billones of Branch 62, MeTC, Makati City, she received reports from her staff that several lawyers would always mention Atty. Arceo as a friend or relative when following up their cases including those parties posting bail.[53] When the Tan-Abing case was mentioned, Atty. Arceo admitted that she did talk to a male person who identified himself as a lawyer,[54] who inquired about the process on how the accused may get an authority to travel abroad. She allegedly just advised the caller to inquire before the court where the case was pending,[55] albeit she also advised that a motion is required when asking for relief.[56]

Despite being called out by Judge Billones not to provide any special assistance to a party litigant or counsel, Atty. Arceo remained unbothered and even discussed the Herrera case with Judge Billones, another case pending before her sala. Atty. Arceo even had the temerity to mention to Judge Billones that should the case be resolved in favor of the accused, the latter, through his counsel, one Atty. Closa,[57] would help Judge Billones with her application for promotion.[58] Atty. Arceo's special interest in the Herrera case was further bolstered by the testimony of De Las Verlas, Judge Billones's legal researcher, who confirmed that Atty. Arceo had been making several follow-ups especially on the Herrera case. De Las Verlas likewise confirmed that Atty. Arceo asked her regarding the status of Judge Billones's promotion. This prompted Judge Billones to recuse from the Herrera case per Order[59] dated September 27, 2023, to avoid any suspicion of bias and impartiality.[60]

Judge Arreza on the other hand, confirmed in his affidavit that during the 1st quarter of 2022, his court received a call inquiring the status of the bail application in a certain criminal case. Unfortunately, he could no longer recall the specific docket or title of the case. He learned that the caller was from the MeTC Office of the Clerk of Court. He told the caller that it was not proper to inquire about the status of a bail application. After a few minutes, two women came to his office, and one of them was Atty. Arceo who explained that she was just doing a favor for a friend. Judge Arreza then reiterated to her that only immediate relatives and/or counsel of detainees were allowed to have access to case records or to follow up applications for bail.[61]

Meanwhile, Executive Judge Crisologo-Saguisag, Judge Embuscado, and Judge Barrios-Saplo highlighted that the Office of the Executive Judge received oral reports from various staffers of the MeTC, Makati City, that Atty. Arceo was approaching court staff and would follow up the status of several cases pending before the MeTC, Makati City.

Atty. Arceo, on the other hand, simply dismissed these accusations and shielded herself by saying it was her "moral obligation to give court users the proper and correct information as a public servant. [She] could not simply dismiss the queries of court users[] especially those related to bail bonds because[] bail bonds are checked and recorded in [the] Office of the Clerk of Court."[62]

The Court is not persuaded.

Canon I, Sections 1 and 3 of Fidelity to Duty under the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel state that the court personnel should not use their official function to secure favors for themselves or others, and that they shall not discriminate by dispensing special favors to anyone, viz.:

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CANON I
FIDELITY TO DUTY

> SECTION 1. Court personnel shall not use their official position to secure unwarranted benefits, privileges or exemptions for themselves or for others.
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> . . . .
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> SECTION 3. Court personnel shall not discriminate by dispensing special favors to anyone. They shall not allow kinship, rank, position or favors from any party to influence their official acts or duties.

Meanwhile, Canon II, Sections 2 and 5 under the CPRA directs a lawyer to observe dignified conduct towards the courts, tribunals, and other government agencies, their official and employees, as well as the principle of fairness in every personal and professional engagement; while Section 15 under the same Canon and Code states that a lawyer shall not make claims of power, influence, or relationship with any officer of a court, tribunal, or other government agency:

CANON II
PROPRIETY

> SECTION 2. Dignified conduct. - A lawyer shall respect the law, the courts, tribunals, and other government agencies, their officials, employees, and processes, and act with courtesy, civility, fairness, and candor towards fellow members of the bar.
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> A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on one's fitness to practice law, nor behave in a scandalous manner, whether in public or private life, to the discredit of the legal profession.
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> . . . .
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> SECTION 5. Observance of fairness and obedience. - A lawyer shall, in every personal and professional engagement, insist on the observance of the principles of fairness and obedience to the law.
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> . . . .
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> SECTION 15. Improper claim of influence or familiarity. - A lawyer shall observe propriety in all dealings with officers and personnel of any court, tribunal, or other government agency, whether personal or professional. Familiarity with such officers and personnel that will give rise to an appearance of impropriety, influence, or favor shall be avoided.
>
> A lawyer shall not make claims of power, influence, or relationship with any officer of a court, tribunal, or other government agency.

While the Court recognizes the clerk of court's administrative role including the duty to transmit records and facilitate the progress of cases, this function should always be within the bounds of impartiality and propriety.

In this case, Atty. Arceo as clerk of court from the Office of the Clerk of Court repeatedly followed up on cases pending before various branches of the MeTC, Makati City. This was not an isolated incident, but a pattern attested to by five judges and a legal researcher. She was also reported to have: (i) assisted parties and their counsel in bail applications; (ii) provided advice on procedural matters to parties with pending cases; (iii) referenced her employment in the Office of the Clerk of Court which may appear for influence outcomes; and (iv) suggested to a judge that a favorable decision to the accused would mean assistance for the former to ensure her promotion.

While it is within the administrative function of the Office of the Clerk of Court to process and record bail bonds

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and to provide general information to court users, the imputed conduct of Atty. Arceo went beyond mere administrative follow-up. She directly inquired about the status of specific cases and bail applications in other courts, not as a party or counsel, but as a court employee. She repeatedly followed up on behalf of parties/counsels, referencing personal relationships, and worse, implying or suggesting specifically to Judge Billones a quid pro quo arrangement, i.e., help with the judge's promotion in exchange for a favorable decision in the Herrera case. This kind of meddling crossed the line from administrative assistance to improper intervention and influence, a strictly prohibited conduct both under the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel and the CPRA. Specifically, Canon I, Sections 1 and 3 on Fidelity to Duty under the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel prohibit court personnel from using their official positions to secure favors that compromise judicial fairness and integrity. Meanwhile, Canon II, Sections 2, 5, and 15 of the CPRA impress upon lawyers to observe dignified conduct by respecting the courts, tribunals, and their officials and employees; due adherence to the principle of fairness both in their personal and professional dealings; and mandate propriety in interactions with officers and personnel of any court, tribunal, or other government agency. In sum, these provisions collectively and unequivocally prohibit lawyers from using their position, influence, or relationships in a manner that could create the appearance of impropriety, as such acts are fundamentally incompatible with the standards of moral fitness and integrity required of members of the bar, more so, administrators of justice.

Time and again, the Court has reminded every employee, personnel, and Member of the Judiciary to be "exemplar[s] of integrity, uprightness, and honesty, considering that the sacrosanct image of a Court dispensing justice is minored in its very own personnel."[63] In Office of the Court Administrator v. Capistrano,[64] the Court echoed this clarion call to all those in the Judiciary:

> [N]o other office in the government service exacts a greater demand for moral righteousness and uprightness from an employee than in the Judiciary. [The Court has] repeatedly emphasized that the conduct of court personnel, from the presiding judge to the lowliest clerk, must always be beyond reproach and must be circumscribed with the heavy burden of responsibility as to let them be free from any suspicion that may taint the judiciary. The Court condemns and would never countenance any conduct, act or omission on the part of all those involved in the administration of justice, which would violate the norm of public accountability and diminish or even just tend to diminish the faith of the people in the Judiciary.[65]

Unfortunately, Atty. Arceo fell short in this respect. Thus, considering that there appears to be a nexus between her acts of following up the status of bail bonds and provision of general information to court users, on the one hand, and her official functions and duties as clerk of court of the Office of the Clerk of Court, on the other, the Court finds Atty. Arceo administratively liable for three counts of simple misconduct as a court employee under Section 15 of Rule 140, as amended, and also three counts of simple misconduct under Canon VI, Section 34(a) of the CPRA as a member of the Philippine Bar on account of: (1) assisting the accused's counsel in the Tan-Abing case on posting bail; (2) following up the Herrera case as a court employee in favor of a party-litigant; and (3) following up the status of the bail application docketed in Judge Arreza's sala in Branch 147, MeTC, Makati City, as a court employee in favor of a party-litigant.

In addition, she is liable for one count of gross misconduct under Section 14 of Rule 140, as amended, being a court employee; and also one count of gross misconduct under Section 33(a) of the CPRA as a member of the legal profession for attempting to corrupt Judge Billones with assistance for her promotion in exchange for a favorable decision for the accused in the Herrera case.[66]

Having established Atty. Arceo's administrative liability, the Court now determines the imposable penalty.

Under Rule 140, as amended by A.M. No. 21-08-09-SC,[67] gross misconduct which is a serious charge, and simple misconduct which is a less serious charge warrant the following sanctions:

SECTION 17. Sanctions -

(1) If the respondent is guilty of a serious charge, any of the following sanctions shall be imposed:

(a) Dismissal from service, forfeiture of all or part of the benefits as the Supreme Court may determine, and disqualification from reinstatement or appointment to any public office, including government-owned or -controlled corporations. Provided, however, that the forfeiture of benefits shall in no case include accrued leave credits;

(b) Suspension from office without salary and other benefits for more than six (6) months but not exceeding one (1) year; or

(c) A fine of more than [PHP] 100,000.00 but not exceeding [PHP] 200,000.00.

(2) If the respondent is guilty of a less serious charge, any of the following sanctions shall be imposed:

(a) Suspension from office without salary and other benefits for not less than one (1) month nor more than six (6) months; or

(b) A fine of more than [PHP] 35,000.00 but not exceeding [PHP] 100,000.00. (Emphasis supplied)

More, Rule 140, as amended, considers first offense and length of service of at least 10 years with no previous disciplinary record as mitigating circumstances which may be appreciated by the Court subject to its discretion.

Meanwhile, Canon VI, Sections 34 to 40 of the CPRA outline the sanctions on simple misconduct and gross misconduct, the manner of imposition in case of multiple offenses, and appreciation of a mitigating circumstance, thus:

SECTION 37. Sanctions. –

(a) If the respondent is found guilty of a serious offense, any of the following sanctions, or a combination thereof, shall be imposed:

(1) Disbarment;

(2) Suspension from the practice of law for a period exceeding six (6) months;

(3) Revocation of notarial commission and disqualification as notary public for not less than two (2) years; or

(4) A fine exceeding [PHP] 100,000.00.

(b) If the respondent is found guilty of a less serious offense, any of the following sanctions, or a combination thereof, shall be imposed:

(1) Suspension from the practice of law for a period within the range of one (1) month to six (6) months, or revocation of notarial commission and disqualification as notary public for less than two (2) years;

(2) A fine within the range of [PHP] 35,000.00 to [PHP] 100,000.00.

. . . .

SECTION 38. Modifying circumstances. - In determining the appropriate penalty to be imposed, the Court may, in its discretion, appreciate the following mitigating and aggravating circumstances:

(a) Mitigating circumstances:

(1) First offense, except in charges of gross misconduct, bribery or corruption, grossly immoral conduct, misappropriating a client's funds or properties, sexual abuse, and sale, distribution, possession and/or use of

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illegal drugs or substances;

. . . .

SECTION 39. Manner of imposition. - If one (1) or more aggravating circumstances and no mitigating circumstances are present, the Supreme Court may impose the penalties of suspension or fine for a period or amount not exceeding double of the maximum prescribed under this Rule. The Supreme Court may, in its discretion, impose the penalty of disbarment depending on the number and gravity of the aggravating circumstances.

If one (1) or more mitigating circumstances and no aggravating circumstances are present, the Supreme Court may impose the penalties of suspension or fine for a period or amount not less than half of the minimum prescribed under the CPRA.

If there are both aggravating and mitigating circumstances present, the Supreme Court may offset each other.

SECTION 40. Penalty for multiple offenses. - If the respondent is found liable for more than one (1) offense arising from separate acts or omissions in a single administrative proceeding, the Court shall impose separate penalties for each offense. Should the aggregate of the imposed penalties exceed five (5) years of suspension from the practice of law or [PHP] 1,000,000.00 in fines, the respondent may, in the discretion of the Supreme Court, be meted with the penalty of disbarment.

If a single act or omission gives rise to more than one (1) offense, the respondent shall still be found liable for all such offenses, but shall, nonetheless, only be meted with the appropriate penalty for the most serious offense. (Emphasis supplied)

Undeniably, this is the first time that Atty. Arceo was charged with infractions under the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel and the CPRA. She, too, had served the judiciary for about 30 years. Even then, the charge involves no less than one serious infraction and three simple infractions. The Court further notes Atty. Arceo's evident lack of remorse. Rather than heeding the admonition of Judge Billones, she dismissed it with indifference and, worse, proceeded to pursue another case involving an offer to be assisted for promotion in the judiciary. Moreover, she merely denied the accusations and resorted to fabricating half-truths in an apparent attempt to conceal her misconduct. Her actions demonstrate not candor, but deliberate evasion and lack of integrity. These facts on record negate the application of any mitigating circumstance in favor of Atty. Arceo.

Thus, in light of the evidence presented and multiple violations of both the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel and the CPRA, Atty. Arceo should be dismissed from service under Rule 140, as amended, on one hand, and be disbarred under the CPRA, on the other. Moreover, since Atty. Arceo already resigned, forfeiture of benefits and disqualification from reinstatement or appointment to any public office under Section 18 of A.M. No. 21-08-09-SC should apply:

> SECTION 18. Penalty in Lieu of Dismissal on Account of Supervening Resignation, Retirement, or other Modes of Separation of Service. - If the respondent is found liable for an offense which merits the imposition of the penalty of dismissal from service but the same can no longer be imposed due to the respondent's supervening resignation, retirement, or other modes of separation from service except for death, he or she may be meted with the following penalties in lieu of dismissal:
>
> (a)
>
> Forfeiture of all or part of the benefits as the Supreme Court may determine, and disqualification from reinstatement or appointment to any public office, including government-owned or -controlled corporations. Provided, however, that the forfeiture of benefits shall in no case include accrued leave credits; and/ or

(b)

Fine as stated in Section 17(1)(c) of this Rule. (Emphasis supplied)

In closing, the Court underscores anew that the image of a court of justice is necessarily mirrored in the conduct, official or otherwise, of the men and women who work thereat, from the judge to the least and lowest of its personnel. Thus, it becomes the sacred duty of each and every one in the court to maintain its good name and stand as a true temple of justice. As front liners in the administration of justice, court personnel should live up to the strictest standards of honesty and integrity in the public service, and in this light, are always expected to act in a manner free from reproach. Any conduct, act, or omission that may diminish the people's faith in the Judiciary will never be tolerated.

ACCORDINGLY, the Court in A.M. No. P-25-255 finds Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo administratively LIABLE in her capacity both as a former employee of the judiciary, and as a member of the Philippine Bar.

For violation of Canon I, Sections l and 3 of the Code of Conduct of Court Personnel in relation to Rule 140, as amended, Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo is found GUILTY of three counts of simple misconduct and one count of gross misconduct. She is meted with the penalty of FORFEITURE of benefits, except accrued leave credits, with prejudice to re-employment in any branch or instrumentality of the government, including government-owned or controlled corporations.

For violation Canon II, Sections 2, 5, and 15 of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability, Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo is further found GUILTY of three counts of simple misconduct and one count of gross misconduct. She is DISBARRED from the practice of law, and her name is ORDERED STRICKEN from the Roll of Attorneys.

Let a copy of this Decision be furnished the Office of the Bar Confidant to be appended to Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo's personal record as an attorney, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines for its information and guidance, and the Office of the Court Administrator for circulation to all the courts.

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines is directed to furnish a copy of this Decision to the chapter which the Atty. Adoracion A. Arceo belongs.

SO ORDERED.

Gesmundo, C.J., Leonen, SAJ., Caguioa, Lazaro-Javier, Inting, Zalameda, Gaerlan, Rosario, J. Lopez, Dimaampao, Marquez, Kho, Jr., Singh, and Villanueva, JJ., concur.
Hernando,[*] J., on official business.

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[*] On official business.

[1] Rollo, (A.M. No. P-25-255), p. 24.

[2] Id. at 16-17.

[3] Id. at 18-19.

[4] Id. at 24.

[5] Id.

[6] Id. at 41.

[7] Id.

[8] Id.

[9] Id. at 6.

[10] Id. at 41.

[11] Id. at 48.

[12] Id.

[13] Id. at 23.

[14] Id. at 8.

[15] Id. at 6.

[16] Id. at 24.

[17] Id.

[18] Id.

[19] Id. at 23, 52, 121.

[20] Id. at 52.

[21] Id. at 122.

[22] Rollo (A.M. No. P-25-256), pp. 1-2.

[23] Id. at 17-18.

[24] Id.

[25] Canon II, sec. 2. Dignified conduct. - A lawyer shall respect the law, the courts, tribunals, and other government agencies, their officials, employees, and processes, and act with courtesy, civility, fairness, and candor towards follow members of the bar. A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on one's fitness to practice law, nor behave in a scandalous manner, whether in public or private life, to the discredit of the legal profession.

[26] Rollo (A.M. No. P-25-255), p. 98.

[27] Id. at 78-85.

[28] Id.

[29] Id.

[30] Id.

[31] Id. at 77.

[32] Id.

[33] Id. at 78.

[34] Id. at 81.

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[35] Id. at 83-84.

[36] Id. at 84-85.

[37] Id. at 80.

[38] Id. at 68, 91.

[39] Id. at 118-128.

[40] Id. at 127.

[41] Id. at 124-125.

[42] Id.

[43] Id. at 125-126.

[44] Id. at 127-128.

[45] 478 Phil. 823 (2004) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[46] Re: (1) Lost Checks Issued to the Late Melliza, Former Clerk II, MCTC Zaragga, Iloilo; and (2) Dropping from the Rolls of Ms. Andres, 537 Phil. 634, 649-650 (2006) [Per Curiam, En Banc].

[47] Id.

[48] Rollo (A.M. No. P-25-256), p. 17-18.

[49] Id. at 1-2.

[50] Rollo (A.M. No. P-25-255), p. 24.

[51] Id.

[52] Development Bank of the Philippines v. Joaquino, 666 Phil. 252, 260 (2011) [Per J. Nachura, Second Division].

[53] Rollo (A.M. No. P-25-255), p. 41.

[54] Id. at 77.

[55] Id.

[56] Id.

[57] Id. at 6.

[58] Id. at 41.

[59] Id. at 8.

[60] Id.

[61] Id. at 52.

[62] Id. at 80.

[63] Ong-Thomas v. Judge Kalimpo, 949 Phil. 427, 440 (2023) [Per J. Kho, Jr., En Banc].

[64] 738 Phil. 1 (2014) [Per J. Perlas-Bernabe, Second Division].

[65] Id. at 6.

[66] Espina v. Gicole, 935 Phil. 179 (2023) [Per J. Caguioa, Third Division].

[67] Further Amendments to Rule 140 of the Rules of Court.

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