

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

David C. Traub, Richard O. Cabel, William R. Sotka, Ern Andrew Gregorio, Gloria Giselda N. Arroyo, Winelda C. Ycoy, Simon U. Cabel, and Christopher R. Asis v. Stardust389, Inc.; Airlock3839, Inc.; Christopher H. Cooper, and Patricia Ann Bellasalma

Traub · No. Civil Action No. 22-1582-SRF · Decided March 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The court grants in part and denies without prejudice in part motions by attorneys to withdraw from representing defendants in post-judgment proceedings. Withdrawal is granted as to Christopher H. Cooper, while counsel must continue representing the corporate defendants through post-judgment deposition discovery. The order sets deadlines for Cooper to obtain counsel or proceed pro se and establishes requirements for any renewed withdrawal motions.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Delaware
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sherry R. Fallon
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Delaware
DECIDED	March 20, 2026
DOCKET	Civil Action No. 22-1582-SRF
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs moved to enforce a judgment and conduct post-judgment discovery. Defendants' counsel moved for leave to withdraw from representation of the corporate defendants and Christopher H. Cooper.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Abuse of discretion; the decision whether to permit counsel to withdraw is within the district court's discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	David C. Traub, Richard O. Cabel, William R. Sotka, Ern Andrew Gregorio, Gloria Giselda N. Arroyo, Winelda C. Ycoy, Simon U. Cabel, Christopher R. Asis v. Stardust389, Inc., Airlock3839, Inc., Christopher H. Cooper, Patricia Ann Bellasalma

TOPICS

civil procedure discovery dispute default judgment default

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure post-judgment discovery attorney withdrawal employment law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether counsel had established good cause to withdraw from representing the judgment debtors based on nonpayment of fees and lack of communication.
2. Whether withdrawal should be permitted where the clients included corporate defendants that could appear in federal court only through licensed counsel and post-judgment depositions remained pending.
3. Whether counsel could withdraw from representing Christopher H. Cooper while the corporate defendants' withdrawal motions were denied without prejudice.

HOLDINGS

1. A motion to withdraw is committed to the district court's discretion, and counsel may withdraw upon establishing that the representation serves no meaningful purpose; nonpayment of substantial fees and a lack of communication established good cause for withdrawal here.
2. Counsel is not required to remain in the case until a corporate client retains substitute counsel, but withdrawal may be denied temporarily when continued representation serves a meaningful purpose in pending post-judgment discovery.
3. The motions to withdraw were granted as to Christopher H. Cooper and denied without prejudice as to Stardust389, Inc. and Airlock3839, Inc.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“there is no multi-factor test that a district court must apply to decide a motion for attorney withdrawal.” (¶ 6)

“demonstrat[ing] to the satisfaction of the district court that [counsel’s] appearance serves no meaningful purpose.” (¶ 6)

“However, there is no requirement that counsel must not withdraw until a corporate client has retained substitute counsel.” (¶ 7)

“the court finds that Movants’ continued representation would serve a meaningful purpose at this juncture.” (¶ 10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The parties reached a settlement through mediation, and judgment was entered against the judgment debtors on July 2, 2025. Plaintiffs then served post-judgment deposition notices concerning execution of the judgment. Counsel seeking withdrawal asserted that the judgment debtors owed more than \$140,000 in fees and had ceased

communicating with counsel. Because the corporate defendants could not appear at depositions without licensed counsel and the record did not establish that they had been informed of the consequences of withdrawal, the court found that counsel's continued representation of the corporate defendants would temporarily serve a meaningful purpose.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs filed the action in the Northern District of California in December 2021 seeking relief for wrongful termination and unpaid wages under the FLSA and state law. After motion practice and amended pleadings, the case was transferred to the District of Delaware in December 2022. The parties settled through mediation, judgment was entered against the defendants on July 2, 2025, and plaintiffs thereafter initiated judgment-execution discovery, including depositions. The court granted counsel's withdrawal as to Cooper but denied it without prejudice as to the corporate defendants.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Ohntrup v. Makina Ve Kimya Endustrisi Kurumu, 760 F.3d 290, 295 (3d Cir. 2014)
- LabMD Inc. v. Boback, 47 F.4th 164, 190 (3d Cir. 2022)
- Rowland v. Cal. Men's Colony, Unit II Men's Advisory Council, 506 U.S. 194, 217 (1993)
- Simbrow, Inc. v. United States, 367 F.2d 373, 373-74 (3d Cir. 1966)
- Endobotics, LLC v. Medrobotics Corp., C.A. No. 19-381-CFC, 2020 WL 7042892, at *1-2 (D. Del. Dec. 1, 2020)
- Ohntrup v. Firearms Ctr., Inc., 802 F.2d 676, 679-80 (3d Cir. 1986)
- Taylor v. ULS., C.A. No. 12-12-SLR-SRF, 2013 WL 1897839, at *2 (D. Del. May 7, 2013)

OPINION

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE DAVID C. TRAUB, RICHARD O. CABAEL,) WILLIAM R. SOTKA, ERN ANDREW) GREGORIO, GLORIA GISELDA N. ARROYO, _) WINELDA C. YCOY, SIMON U. CABAEL, and_) CHRISTOPHER R. ASIS,)) Plaintiffs,)) v.) Civil Action No. 22-1582-SRF) STARDUST389, INC.; AIRLOCK3839, INC.;) CHRISTOPHER H. COOPER, and PATRICIA) ANN BELLASALMA,)) Defendants.) MEMORANDUM ORDER At Wilmington this 20th day of March, 2026, the court having considered the motions for leave to withdraw as counsel, filed by Antranig N. Garibian (“Garibian”) of the law firm of Garibian Law Offices, P.C.

(D.I. 163),! and James A. Wolff (“Wolff;” together with Garibian, “Movants”), formerly of the law firm of Warshaw Burstein, LLP (D.1. 170),” and having heard argument on the pending motions on March 19, 2026, IT IS ORDERED that the motions for leave to withdraw as counsel to

defendants Stardust389, Inc., Airlock389, Inc., and Christopher H. Cooper (collectively, the “Judgment Debtors”) are GRANTED-IN-PART for the following reasons.

1. Background. Plaintiffs filed this civil action in the Northern District of California on December 16, 2021, seeking relief for wrongful termination and unpaid wages under the ' The filings associated with the pending motion to withdraw as counsel are found at D.I. 171 and D.I. 172. * The filings associated with the pending motion to withdraw as counsel are found at D.I.

173 and D.I. 178. FLSA and state law causes of action. (D.I. 1) After several rounds of motion practice and amended pleadings, the case was transferred to Delaware on December 12, 2022. (D.I. 54; D.I. 55) 2. In January of 2024, Garibian entered an appearance as Delaware counsel for the Judgment Debtors and Wolff was admitted pro hac vice. (D.I. 92; D.I. 93) Movants represented the Judgment Debtors through discovery, motion practice, and mediation proceedings.

(D.I. 163 at 1) The parties reached a settlement agreement through mediation, and judgment was entered against the Judgment Debtors on July 2, 2025. (D.I. 148) 3. Plaintiffs’ counsel then began judgment execution discovery. Plaintiffs served notices of deposition on the Judgment Debtors on December 16, 2025. (D.I. 157) The depositions were scheduled to go forward on January 15 and 16, 2026.

(D.I. 169, Exs. 2-4) 4. Although the record lacks clarity, it seems that Movants have not been in contact with the Judgment Debtors since July of 2025. (D.I. 163 at 2; D.I. 170 at 2) During the hearing on March 19, 2026, Movants disclosed that they had some contact with a “business manager” and an accountant who purported to represent Cooper around the time that judgment was entered in July of 2025.

(3/19/2026 Tr.) 5. Wolff alleges that he sent a letter terminating his representation of the Judgment Debtors on December 23, 2025, one week after Plaintiffs served their notices of deposition but before those depositions were scheduled to go forward. (D.I. 170 at 2) He was unable to confirm whether the Judgment Debtors were informed that a corporate defendant cannot appear at a deposition unrepresented by counsel.

(3/19/2026 Tr.) According to Wolff, the letter terminating the representation was based on the Judgment Debtors’ unpaid fee balance of \$140,000 and their cessation of communication with Wolff. (D.I. 170 at 2) 6. Legal standard.

In the Third Circuit, “there is no multi-factor test that a district court must apply to decide a motion for attorney withdrawal.” Instead, the decision to grant a motion to withdraw is within the court’s discretion. *Ohntrup v. Makina Ve Kimya Endustrisi Kurumu*, 760 F.3d 290, 295 (3d Cir. 2014). Counsel may prevail on a motion to withdraw by “demonstrat[ing] to the satisfaction of the district court that [counsel’s] appearance serves no meaningful purpose.” *LabMD Inc. v. Boback*, 47 F.4th 164, 190 (3d Cir.

2022) (internal citations and quotation marks omitted). A withdrawing firm serves no meaningful purpose when “efforts to communicate with [the client] through the Firm are futile.” Ohntrup, 760 F.3d at 295. “[I]t would be an abuse of discretion to deny [a] motion to withdraw” when the withdrawing firm serves no meaningful purpose. *Jd.* 7.

The law is well-established that a corporate defendant may appear in federal courts only through licensed counsel. See *Rowland v. Cal. Men’s Colony, Unit II Men’s Advisory Council*, 506 U.S. 194, 217 (1993); *Simbrow, Inc. v. United States*, 367 F.2d 373, 373-74 (3d Cir. 1966).

However, there is no requirement that counsel must not withdraw until a corporate client has retained substitute counsel. See Ohntrup, 760 F.3d at 295. The failure of a corporate defendant to retain licensed counsel within the time frame ordered by the court may result in the entry of default in appearance and/or default judgment under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 55.

See *Endobotics, LLC y. Medrobotics Corp.*, C.A. No. 19-381-CFC, 2020 WL 7042892, at *1-2 (D. Del. Dec. 1, 2020). 8. Analysis. In support of their motion to withdraw, Movants cite Model Rules 1.16(b)(5) and 1.16(b)(7) of the American Bar Association’s Model Rules of Professional Conduct, which provide that a lawyer may withdraw from representing a client if “the client fails substantially to fulfill an obligation to the lawyer regarding the lawyer’s services and has been given reasonable warning that the lawyer will withdraw unless the obligation is fulfilled,” and “other good cause for withdrawal exists,” respectively.

(D.I. 163 at 4) Movants have cited the nonpayment of more than \$140,000 in fees,⁹ and they contend they have been unable to communicate with the Judgment Debtors. (D.I. 170-1 at ¶ 4) 9. Model Rule 1.16(c) sets forth an exception to Model Rule 1.16(b), providing that “[a] lawyer must comply with applicable law requiring notice to or permission of a tribunal when terminating a representation.

When ordered to do so by a tribunal, a lawyer shall continue representation notwithstanding good cause for terminating the representation.” Model Rule 1.16(c); see *Taylor v. ULS.*, C.A. No. 12-12-SLR-SRF, 2013 WL 1897839, at *2 (D. Del. May 7, 2013). Local Rule 83.7 also provides that a court order is required when withdrawal will leave a party without “a member of the Bar of this Court appearing as counsel of record for the party.” D. Del.

LR 83.7. 10. The motions to withdraw are DENIED without prejudice as to corporate defendants Stardust³ 89, Inc. and Airlock³89 Inc. and GRANTED as to Cooper.⁴ Movants have established good cause for their withdrawal from the representation due to nonpayment of fees and a lack of communication with the Judgment Debtors.

However, Movants’ continued representation of the corporate entities will serve a meaningful purpose over the course of the next month in accordance with the court’s Memorandum Order issued on this same date ordering the Judgment Debtors to comply with their discovery

obligations. See *Ohntrup v. Firearms Ctr., Inc.*, 802 F.2d 3 On November 20, 2023, the court issued a Memorandum Order granting a motion to withdraw as counsel filed by previous counsel for Stardust389, Inc., Airlock389 Inc., Christopher Cooper, and Patricia Ann Bellasalma.

(D.I. 84) That motion was based in part on the Judgment Debtors' failure to pay legal fees, and it was granted largely based on assurances that Cooper was attempting to obtain substitute counsel for the corporate defendants. (/d. at JJ 4, 6) 4 Plaintiffs do not oppose the withdrawal of counsel for Cooper. (D.I. 171 at 1) 676, 679-80 (3d Cir. 1986) (concluding that continued representation would serve a meaningful purpose where a short period of time elapsed after the entry of judgment and further discovery in aid of execution was contemplated).

It is well-established that the corporate defendants cannot be deposed unless they are represented by counsel. See *Rowland*, 506 U.S. at 217. In this case, Movants were unable to verify whether the Judgment Debtors were informed of the upcoming depositions or the consequences of counsel's efforts to terminate the representation prior to those depositions when counsel's letter terminating the representation was sent on December 23, 2025.

Due to Plaintiffs' ongoing efforts to depose the Judgment Debtors and the lack of evidence establishing that the Judgment Debtors were fully informed of the consequences of Movants' withdrawal from the representation, the court finds that Movants' continued representation would serve a meaningful purpose at this juncture. 11. Movants may renew the motions to withdraw no earlier than April 17, 2026, after the completion of post-judgment deposition discovery of the corporate entities.

Any renewed motions shall comply with the requirement of District of Delaware Local Rule 83.7, which requires the attorney seeking withdrawal to provide notice of the motion "to each party and served on the party client, at least 14 days before the motion is presented [to the court], by registered or certified mail addressed to the client's last known address." Proof of service in accordance with the Local Rules shall be attached as exhibits to any renewed motion or the motion will be stricken and not acted upon by the court.

Movants must also confirm they have informed the Judgment Debtors of the consequences of the proposed withdrawal because a corporate defendant may appear in federal courts only through licensed counsel. See *Rowland*, 506 U.S. at 217.

The renewed motions shall be accompanied by exhibits demonstrating the efforts Movants made to contact the clients since the entry of judgment on July 2, 2025. 12. Conclusion. For the foregoing reasons, IT IS ORDERED that the motions for leave to withdraw as counsel for Defendants (D.I. 163; D.I. 170) are GRANTED-IN-PART pursuant to D. Del. LR 83.7 as follows: (i) The motions to withdraw are GRANTED with respect to Cooper.

Movants, the law firm of Garibian Law Offices, P.C. and pro hac vice counsel James A. Wolff, formerly of the law firm of Warshaw Burstein, LLP, are hereby WITHDRAWN as counsel of record for Cooper and are relieved of all further obligations on behalf of Cooper. (ii) Cooper shall have forty-five (45) days from the date of this Memorandum Order, on or before May 4, 2026, to retain new counsel or notify the court if he intends to proceed as a pro se litigant. (iii) On or before March 26, 2026, Movants shall provide Plaintiffs' counsel with the last known email and mailing addresses for Cooper and any business manager, accountant, and/or other individual purporting to represent Cooper based on the most current information in Movants' possession. (iv) The motions to withdraw are DENIED without prejudice with respect to Stardust389, Inc. and Airlock389 Inc. Movants may renew the motion to withdraw no earlier than April 17, 2026, after the completion of post-judgment deposition discovery of the corporate entities.

Any renewed motions shall comply with D. Del. LR 83.7 and shall be accompanied by the following: (a) proof of service of the motions to withdraw on the Judgment Debtors at least fourteen days prior to the filing of the motions to withdraw, in accordance with D. Del. LR 83.7; and (b) exhibits demonstrating the efforts Movants made to contact the clients since the entry of judgment on July 2, 2025. (v) On or before March 26, 2026, Movants shall serve a copy of this Memorandum Order on the Judgment Debtors via Federal Express and electronic mail and shall docket a certificate of service confirming same.

Along with this Memorandum Order, Movants shall inform Stardust389, Inc. and Airlock389 Inc. that a corporate defendant cannot appear pro se in federal court. di \ 'Sherry R/Fallo = United States Magistrate Judge