

SUPREME COURT OF OKLAHOMA

State of Oklahoma ex rel. Oklahoma Bar Association v. Kelly John Barlean

2026 OK 30 · No. SCBD-7652 · Decided April 28, 2026

SUMMARY

The Oklahoma Supreme Court disbarred Kelly John Barlean in a consolidated attorney-discipline proceeding based on domestic-violence convictions, threatening and harassing conduct, communications concerning a judge and opposing counsel, and failures to respond to an Oklahoma Bar Association grievance. The Court independently found clear and convincing evidence that Barlean was unfit to practice law and ordered him to pay disciplinary costs within ninety days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of Oklahoma
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kuehn, V.C.J.; All justices
JURISDICTION	Supreme Court of Oklahoma
DECIDED	April 28, 2026
DOCKET	SCBD-7652
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Original attorney-discipline proceeding before the Supreme Court of Oklahoma for imposition of final discipline under combined Rules 6 and 7.2 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review. The Supreme Court independently determines whether the OBA proved misconduct by clear and convincing evidence, considering but not being bound by the Professional Responsibility Tribunal's report and recommendations.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion, subject to the opinion's notice that it had not yet been released for publication and could be revised or withdrawn.
PARTIES	State of Oklahoma ex rel. Oklahoma Bar Association v. Kelly John Barlean

TOPICS

administrative law

agency adjudication

appellate jurisdiction

standard of review

appellate procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

attorney discipline

professional responsibility

administrative law

appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Oklahoma Bar Association proved by clear and convincing evidence that Barlean committed professional misconduct under the Rules of Professional Conduct and Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings.
2. Whether Barlean's criminal convictions and deferred-sentence pleas established a sufficient basis for discipline under Rule 7.
3. What discipline was appropriate in light of Barlean's domestic violence convictions, threats, harassment, failure to respond to the grievance, and other misconduct.
4. Whether the Oklahoma Bar Association was entitled to recover its disciplinary proceeding costs.

HOLDINGS

1. The Supreme Court exercises exclusive original jurisdiction over attorney-discipline proceedings and independently determines de novo whether the Oklahoma Bar Association proved misconduct by clear and convincing evidence; the Professional Responsibility Tribunal's report is considered but is not binding.
2. A lawyer convicted of, or who tenders a guilty or nolo contendere plea pursuant to a deferred-sentence agreement for, a crime demonstrating unfitness to practice law is subject to discipline regardless of whether an appeal is pending; certified conviction records are conclusive evidence of commission of the crime and provide a sufficient basis for discipline, although not every conviction necessarily results in discipline.
3. Barlean's domestic violence, threats, harassment, threatening communications, false statements concerning a judge, ex parte communications intended to influence a judge, failure to respond to the grievance, and communications discrediting the legal profession violated the cited Rules of Professional Conduct and Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings and demonstrated that he was unfit to practice law.
4. Disbarment was warranted by Barlean's persistent misconduct involving violence and threats, the resulting harm and fear, his poor judgment, and the absence of sufficient mitigation.
5. The Oklahoma Bar Association was entitled to recover \$2,352.10 in costs, payable by Barlean within ninety days of the opinion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This Court has exclusive original jurisdiction over bar disciplinary proceedings.” (§15)

“de novo, to independently determine whether the OBA has shown clear and convincing evidence of misconduct; we consider the PRT report but are not bound by its conclusions and recommendations.” (§15)

“Fitness to practice law entails more than the ability to handle cases but involves the continuing qualification of good moral character and respect for the law.” (¶26)

“This Court’s goal in disciplinary proceedings is to protect the public and preserve the integrity of the judicial system.” (¶31)

“Respondent’s conduct reveals a consistent pattern of violence and poor judgment compelling our conclusion that Respondent is unfit to practice law.” (¶35)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Barlean, an Oklahoma-licensed lawyer, pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor domestic-assault-and-battery charges and later pleaded no contest to motions to accelerate his deferred sentences after failing to complete probation requirements. He engaged in threatening and harassing conduct toward his former wife and son, an Illinois family and their attorney, a judge who issued protective orders, and Oklahoma Bar Association personnel. The conduct included threatening communications, sexually explicit and harassing messages, threats to damage careers and families, and statements concerning violence. Barlean did not appear at the disciplinary hearing or file a brief.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Oklahoma Bar Association initiated Rule 7 proceedings after Barlean’s convictions for two domestic-assault-and-battery offenses and obtained an order of immediate interim suspension. The matter was referred to the Professional Responsibility Tribunal, later consolidated with a Rule 6 grievance proceeding, and proceeded to a joint hearing. Barlean had notice of the hearing but did not appear; the trial panel recommended a suspension of two years and one day. The Supreme Court independently reviewed the record and imposed disbarment, also granting the OBA’s application for costs.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Lance, 2023 OK 98, 540 P.3d 458
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Conrady, 2025 OK 74, 578 P.3d 174
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Silvernail, 2022 OK 68, 522 P.3d 464
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Dyer, 2024 OK 72, 558 P.3d 22
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Armstrong, 1990 OK 9, 791 P.2d 815
- State ex rel. Oklahoma Bar Ass’n v. Lockard, 2023 OK 110, 538 P.3d 871
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Zannotti, 2014 OK 25
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Littlefield, 2023 OK 53, 529 P.3d 185
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Faulk, 2021 OK 46, 496 P.3d 612
- State ex rel. Okla. Bar Ass’n v. Givens, 2014 OK 103

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