



August 31, 2022

Indiana Supreme Court
Disciplinary Commission
251 N. Illinois Street, Suite 1650
Indianapolis, IN 46204

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL: [REDACTED]

Dear Disciplinary Commission:

The 65 Project is a bipartisan, nonprofit effort to protect democracy from abuse of the legal system by holding accountable lawyers who engage in fraudulent and malicious efforts to overturn legitimate elections.

We write to request that the Disciplinary Commission investigate the actions taken by Richard Coleson relating to his effort to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Mr. Coleson served as part of a coordinated attempt to abuse the judicial system to promote and amplify bogus, unsupported claims of fraud to discredit an election that Mr. Trump lost.

Mr. Coleson worked on two matters: *Langenhorst v. Pecore* in Wisconsin and *Bally v. Whitmer* in Michigan. Both of these actions, in which Mr. Coleson filed nearly identical complaints, lacked any basis in law or fact. Indeed, they were nearly carbon copies of litigation filed in two other states, lawyers sought to create a false narrative about voter fraud that was based on conjecture and conspiracy theories.

A full investigation by the Disciplinary Commission will demonstrate the egregious nature of Mr. Coleson's actions, especially when considered in light of his purposes, the direct and possible consequences of his behavior, and the serious risk that Mr. Coleson will repeat such conduct unless disciplined.

BACKGROUND

Joe Biden received over 81 million votes in November 2020, defeating Mr. Trump by over seven million votes and over four percentage points.¹ Mr. Trump's head of the U.S. Cybersecurity and

¹ See Federal Election Commission, *Official 2020 Presidential General Election Results*, available at <https://www.fec.gov/resources/cms-content/documents/2020presgeresults.pdf>.

Infrastructure Security Agency, Christopher Krebs, [announced](#) that the “November 3rd election was the most secure in American history. . . . There is no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes or changed votes or was in any way compromised.” Mr. Trump [fired him](#). William Barr, Mr. Trump’s own Attorney General, [declared that the Department of Justice](#) has “not seen fraud on a scale that could have effected a different outcome in the election.” Attorney General Barr announced his resignation less than two weeks later, but not before again confirming that the 2020 elections had been free and fair.²

Many of Mr. Trump’s own senior advisors agreed with Attorney General Barr and Mr. Krebs.³ Indeed, Deputy (and later Acting) Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen and Associate (and later Acting) Deputy Attorney General Richard Donoghue regularly refuted the false information and allegations that Mr. Trump and his allies asserted about a fraudulent election.⁴ Mr. Rosen has testified that on December 15, 2020, at a meeting that included Mark Meadows, White House Chief of Staff, he and others told Mr. Trump that the information he was receiving from his political allies was not correct.⁵ And Mr. Donoghue has testified to the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol (Select Committee) that on December 27, 2020, he told Mr. Trump “in very clear terms” that after “dozens of investigations, hundreds of interviews” looking at “Georgia, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Nevada,” the Department of Justice – Mr. Trump’s own Department of Justice – had concluded that “the major allegations are not supported by the evidence developed.”⁶

Despite clear proof that no fraud occurred, and that no one stole the election from him, Mr. Trump and his lawyers sought to overturn the legitimate results by filing 65 baseless lawsuits across the country.⁷ None succeeded and, in fact, courts have imposed sanctions on the lawyers who participated in these suits and referred them for sanctions to their respective state bars.⁸

CONDUCT GIVING RISE TO THE COMPLAINT

Mr. Coleson helped lead the charge on behalf of Mr. Trump in Wisconsin and Michigan.

² M. Balsamo, *Disputing Trump, Barr says no widespread election fraud*, Associated Press (Dec. 1, 2020), <https://perma.cc/4U8N-SMB5>.

³ See Deposition of Jason Miller (Feb. 3, 2022), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2022.03.02%20%28ECF%20160%29%20Opposition%20to%20Plaintiff%27s%20Privilege%20Claims%20%28Redacted%29.pdf>; Interview of Jeffrey Rosen (Aug. 7, 2021), United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 117th Cong. 30, available at <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/rosen-transcript-final>.

⁴ See Interview of Jeffrey Rosen *see also* Interview of Richard Donoghue (Oct. 1, 2021), available at <https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2022.03.02%20%28ECF%20160%29%20Opposition%20to%20Plaintiff%27s%20Privilege%20Claims%20%28Redacted%29.pdf>

⁵ Interview of Jeffrey Rosen.

⁶ Interview with Richard Donoghue.

⁷ W. Cummings, J. Garrison & J. Sargent, *By the numbers: President Donald Trump’s failed efforts to overturn the election*, USA Today (Jan. 6, 2021), available at <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/elections/2021/01/06/trumps-failed-efforts-overturn-election-numbers/4130307001/>.

⁸ See, e.g., *King v. Whitmer*, No. 20-13134 (U.S. Dist. Ct. E. Dist. Mich. Aug. 25, 2021), available at https://www.michigan.gov/documents/ag/172_opinion_order_King_733786_7.pdf.

On November 12, 2020, Mr. Coleson initiated *Langenhorst v. Pecore* in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin and *Bally v. Whitmer* in the Western District of Michigan. The complaint Mr. Coleson filed in these two cases was nearly identical to two others filed by Mr. Coleson's co-counsel in Pennsylvania and Georgia around the same time – despite the case-specific factual assertions of illegal voting.

For example, in *Langenhorst*, the Plaintiffs stated:

In addition to the foregoing evidence, Voters will provide evidence, upon information and belief, that sufficient illegal ballots were included in the results to change or place in doubt the November 3 presidential-election results. This will be in the form of expert reports based on data analysis comparing state mail-in/absentee, provisional, and poll-book records with state voter-registration databases, United States Postal Service (“USPS”) records, Social Security records, criminal-justice records, department-of-motor-vehicle records, and other governmental and commercial sources by using sophisticated and groundbreaking programs to determine the extent of illegal voters and illegal votes, including double votes, votes by ineligible voters, votes by phantom (fictitious) voters, felon votes (where illegal), non-citizen votes, illegal ballot harvesting, and pattern recognition to identify broader underlying subversion of the election results. Plaintiffs have persons with such expertise and data-analysis software already in place who have begun preliminary analysis of available data to which final data, such as the official poll list, will be added and reports generated.

Upon information and belief, the expert report will identify persons who cast votes illegally by casting multiple ballots, were deceased, had moved, or were otherwise not qualified to vote in the November 3 presidential election, along with evidence of illegal ballot stuffing, ballot harvesting, and other illegal voting. This evidence will be shortly forthcoming when the relevant official documents are final and available, for which discovery may be required, and the result of the analysis and expert reports based thereon will show that sufficient illegal ballots were included in the results to change or place in doubt the November 3 presidential-election results.⁹

They repeated those same lines in Pennsylvania¹⁰ and Georgia.¹¹

⁹ *Langenhorst, et al. v. Pecore, et al.*, Case No. 1:20-cv-1701 (E.D. Wis.), Nov. 12, 2020, Am. Compl. ¶¶ 44-45.

¹⁰ *Pirkle v. Wolf*, Case No. 4:20-cv-2088 (M.D. Pa.), Nov. 10, 2020, Compl. ¶¶ 26-27.

¹¹ *Brooks, et al. v. Mahoney, et al.*, Case No. 4:20-cv-00281 (S.D. Ga.), Nov. 11, 2020, Compl. ¶¶ 45-46.

And the “foregoing evidence” referred to in the above paragraph were allegations that:

- Two non-election inspectors gave advice to poll workers at a Brown County counting facility;¹²
- Fourteen people allege to have received absentee ballots without requesting them, with twelve of these examples coming entirely through word of mouth and rumor;
- A volunteer who was knocking on doors for a conservative organization before the election was told by one person that he had received ten ballots from the Wisconsin Elections Commission and so had his neighbor; and
- Three people died after they mailed their completed absentee ballots.

“This evidence,” the Amended Complaint, “suffices to place in doubt the November 3 presidential-election results in identified counties and/or the state as a whole.”

But, of course, that was hardly true. First, the Plaintiffs were not even suing Brown County – probably because that county’s total vote favored President Trump. Second, voters’ statements that they did not recall requesting absentee ballots or that they heard other people say they did not request absentee ballots is not evidence of fraud. Third, relying on the statement from a conservative volunteer who reported that a like-minded voter alleged to have received ten ballots from the Wisconsin Election Commission is an absurd basis for bringing an action seeking to invalidate 3.3 million votes, especially when the Wisconsin Election Commission does not even send out ballots. And finally, the fact that three people requested absentee ballots, completed and returned those ballots, and then later died reveals nothing nefarious and fraudulent.

Including these types of allegations to support any lawsuit would be problematic. More troubling, though, is that Mr. Coleson sought to disqualify *every vote* in Dane and Milwaukee counties so that Mr. Trump would prevail. In addressing the idea of invalidating hundreds of thousands of legally cast votes, Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel said that they wanted the court to throw out, “Every fricking one of them.”¹³

Further, Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel acknowledged that they lacked a proper factual basis for bringing the matter. He said, “There’s sufficient suspicion that [the election’s] been stolen. Our case does not end there. Our case begins there. We want the poll lists so that we can analyze the poll list to see if in fact it was stolen.”¹⁴ In other words, suspicion and conjecture – not facts – underlie their effort.

¹² *Langenhorst, et al. v. Pecore, et al.*, Case No. 1:20-cv-1701 (E.D. Wis.), Nov. 12, 2020, Am. Compl. ¶ 36.

¹³ Tony Cook & Johnny Magdaleno, *Top Indiana Election Attorney Rushes to Defend Trump’s Fraud Claims, Then Quietly Retreats*, Indianapolis Star (Nov. 17, 2020), <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/politics/2020/11/17/top-indiana-election-drops-lawsuits-challenging-trump-loss-4-states/6258104002/>.

¹⁴ Tony Cook & Johnny Magdaleno, *Top Indiana Election Attorney Rushes to Defend Trump’s Fraud Claims, Then Quietly Retreats*, Indianapolis Star (Nov. 17, 2020).

After a flurry of activity on the case – including the court issuing over a dozen requested summonses, a Plaintiffs’ motion for expedited scheduling and discovery, and several motions to intervene – Mr. Coleson voluntarily dismissed the matter four days after filing. Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel dismissed the similar lawsuits brought in other states the same day.

Mr. Coleson’s actions warrant discipline.

**A SUBSTANTIAL BASIS EXISTS FOR THE DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION TO
INVESTIGATE MR. COLESON’S CONDUCT AND TO
IMPOSE APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE**

The Disciplinary Commission should investigate Mr. Coleson’s actions on the following basis:

1. Mr. Coleson Violated Rule 3.1 By Bringing and Defending a Matter He Knew Lacked Merit

Rule 3.1 provides, in part, as follows: “A lawyer shall not bring or defend a proceeding, or assert or controvert an issue therein, unless there is a basis in law and fact for doing so that is not frivolous, which includes a good faith argument for an extension, modification or reversal of existing law.”

Comment 2 states that: “The action is frivolous...if the lawyer is unable either to make a good faith argument on the merits of the action taken or to support the action taken by a good faith argument for an extension, modification or reversal of existing law.”

“Knowledge” under the Rules of Professional Conduct can be “inferred from circumstances.”¹⁵

Ample evidence demonstrates that Mr. Coleson knew of the frivolous nature of the litigation he initiated. In *Langenhorst* and *Bally* the complaints specifically acknowledged that counsel had not had ample opportunity to investigate the matter. Further, no reasonable person would consider the cited evidence a sufficient basis for throwing out nearly a million votes in two counties.

In fact, the pleadings themselves make clear that when filing the claims, Mr. Coleson did not have a proper basis for bringing them because the Plaintiffs did not have even a shred of the evidence they claimed they would produce. As Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel said, there was “suspicion” that the election was stolen and “our case begins there.”¹⁶ The Complaint repeatedly states, “upon information and belief,” but as the Third Circuit said in rejecting a Trump Campaign lawsuit, “‘Upon information and Belief’ is a lawyerly way of saying that the Campaign does not know that something is a fact but just suspects it or has heard it.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Rule 1.0(f).

¹⁶ Tony Cook & Johnny Magdaleno, *Top Indiana Election Attorney Rushes to Defend Trump’s Fraud Claims, Then Quietly Retreats*, Indianapolis Star (Nov. 17, 2020).

¹⁷ *Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.*, 830 F. App’x at 387.

Finally, the fact that Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel filed complaints containing nearly identical allegations in a total of four states that Mr. Biden won helps confirm that the efforts were part of a larger effort to undermine the legitimacy of the entire 2020 presidential election.

Mr. Coleson knew the claims he was advancing in *Langenhorst* and *Bally* lacked any basis in law or fact.

In short, for the many reasons provided above, Mr. Coleson’s conduct violated Rule 3.1.

2. Mr. Coleson Violated Rule 4.4 Command That Lawyers Respect the Rights of Third Parties

Pursuant to Rule 4.4, “In representing a client, a lawyer shall not use means that have no substantial purpose other than to embarrass, delay, or burden a third person.”

Comment 1 to the Rule states, “Responsibility to a client requires a lawyer to subordinate the interests of others to those of the client, but that responsibility does not imply that a lawyer may disregard the rights of third persons.”

In the interests of his clients, Mr. Coleson sought to have millions of voters lose their right to decide the 2020 presidential election. As his co-counsel said, “Every fricking one of them.”¹⁸ Every court addressing the same complaint filed by Mr. Coleson and his co-counsel noted the extraordinary remedy they sought and the effect it would have on millions of Americans.

Mr. Coleson disregarded the potential consequences of his proposed remedy – showing no respect for the rights of millions of third persons whose votes would be invalidated – and his actions warrant discipline.

3. Mr. Coleson Engaged in Misconduct that Violates Rule 8.4

Under Rule 8.4, “It is professional misconduct for a lawyer to...violate or attempt to violate the Rules of Professional Conduct, knowingly assist or induce another to do so, or do so through the acts of another; [or] engage in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation; [or] engage in conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice.”

Mr. Coleson participated in a purposefully dishonest effort to undermine the 2020 election. He brought frivolous claims that the Constitution, prior court decisions, and relevant statutes barred. The bare “factual” bases he relied on were supported by false statements and wild speculation from discredited sources.

Mr. Coleson misrepresented the availability of expert evidence to support the Verified Complaint’s allegations. He knew that expert reports did not exist that validated his “suspicion” about the election’s outcomes. If such expert reports were even partially complete, he would

¹⁸ Tony Cook & Johnny Magdaleno, *Top Indiana Election Attorney Rushes to Defend Trump’s Fraud Claims, Then Quietly Retreats*, Indianapolis Star (Nov. 17, 2020).

have provided some semblance of that work to support his filings. Further, he would not have voluntarily dismissed the complaint just six days after initiating the matter.

Finally, that Mr. Coleson’s co-counsel brought nearly identical claims in four separate states, all challenging the results in counties Mr. Biden won demonstrates a deceitful purpose. It all amounted to a dishonest attempt to undermine the public confidence in the 2020 election. It is easy – indeed, necessary – to also recognize the direct link between the use of the courts to sow these seeds of doubt and confusion and the events of January 6, 2021, when people believing that the 2020 was stolen stormed the Capitol in a violent insurrection.

His actions must be scrutinized and disciplined.

The United States Supreme Court has long recognized in upholding disciplinary actions that “speech by an attorney is subject to greater regulation than speech by others.”¹⁹ As officers of the court an attorney is “an intimate and trusted and essential part of the machinery of justice” and a “crucial source of information and opinion.”²⁰ Although attorneys, of course, maintain First Amendment rights, the actions in question here cross far beyond protected speech. Indeed, disciplinary boards and courts considering the conduct of other lawyers involved in the effort to overturn the 2020 election have rejected assertions that the attorneys enjoyed First Amendment protections for their conduct.

That members of our esteemed profession would engage in such actions – conduct that contributed to substantial harm to American democracy – should cause considerable distress within the entire legal community.

False statements intended to foment a loss of confidence in our elections and resulting loss of confidence in government generally damage the proper functioning of free society. When those false statements are made by an attorney, it also erodes the public’s confidence in the integrity of attorneys admitted to our bar and damages the profession’s role as a crucial source of reliable information.²¹

Mr. Coleson chose to offer his professional license to an assault on our democracy. He pursued litigation that lacked any basis in law or fact. He participated in an organized effort to sow discord and doubt about the 2020 elections. He helped lead the charge in Wisconsin to disenfranchise millions of his fellow citizens because he did not like how they voted.

¹⁹ *Ohralik v. Ohio State Bar Assn.*, 436 U.S. 447, 465 (1978).

²⁰ *Gentile v. State Bar of Nevada*, 501 U.S. 1030, 1056, 1072 (1991).

²¹ *In the Matter of Rudolph W. Giuliani*, Supreme Court of the State of New York Appellate Division, First Judicial Dept., May 3, 2021 at 30-31.

For the reasons set forth above, we respectfully request that the Disciplinary Commission investigate Mr. Coleson's conduct and pursue appropriate discipline.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Tete".

Managing Director

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On behalf of The 65 Project