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State punishes city lawyer for affair with client

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By William Kaempffer, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — The state has sanctioned a city lawyer for engaging in a romantic relationship with a woman he was representing in her divorce from a city firefighter.

Anthony Wallace, who has a practice in Westville, was issued a formal reprimand for his relationship with the woman, which violates the professional code of conduct.

According to documents released this week by the state Judicial Branch, Wallace agreed to the reprimand.

Wallace, who denied any improper relationship when contacted last year by the New Haven Register, did not return several calls to his office and personal phone seeking comment Wednesday.

The Statewide Grievance Committee routinely investigates allegations that are more serious than those brought against Wallace, and the situation might have been disposed of unnoticed were it not for the circumstances surrounding it and an incident on a crowded downtown street last March.

At the time, Wallace was representing Alison Kennedy in her divorce against then-husband Matthew Kennedy, a city firefighter. At about 8 on a Friday night, Kennedy, 42, observed his estranged wife and Wallace walking hand-in-hand in the downtown restaurant district. Kennedy jumped out of a fire ambulance and confronted the couple in front of a large crowd.

Kennedy later was arrested and charged with violating a protective order stemming from a 2007 domestic arrest, among other charges.

From the outset, Kennedy has been adamant that Wallace and his now ex-wife were romantically involved, despite Wallace's public statements to the contrary. Kennedy last year filed a complaint with the state claiming ethics violations.

Wallace, in accepting the reprimand, admitted that there was "clear and convincing evidence" to prove he violated the state rules of professional conduct, which forbids sexual relationships between lawyers and their clients. A grievance panel that reviewed the case said that holds particularly true in a divorce proceeding.

"A divorce is often sufficiently volatile without a spouse being further agitated by his spouse's attorney being romantically involved with his client," wrote Michael Georgetti, the grievance counsel.

Repeated efforts to reach Kennedy Wednesday also were unsuccessful.

He served a six-month suspension from the Fire Department and is back on the job.

The marriage was dissolved last July, with a Milford lawyer representing Alison Kennedy after Wallace bowed out of the case following the downtown confrontation.

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