

## Ex-Pierce County judge accused of violating rules of conduct



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A former Pierce County Superior Court judge now working as a local attorney has been charged with violating professional rules of conduct for allegedly failing to show up at several of his clients' court proceedings.

The Washington State Bar Association also contends Sergio Armijo failed to protect another client's interests by declining to provide records and other help to the man after he moved out of state.

"Respondent's conduct caused actual injury to his clients when he caused delay of their proceedings and added stress to the clients and their families," the bar's disciplinary counsel, Erica Temple, wrote in the complaint.

Armijo has been summoned to a hearing in June. He faces discipline ranging from reprimand to possible disbarment if found guilty of committing the violations.

Attempts on Wednesday to reach Armijo and his attorney, Anne Seidel, were unsuccessful. In a written answer to the formal complaint, Armijo admitted missing some court dates but contended he had valid excuses.

He said he was ill in one case. He contends that in others he knew he'd miss the date but had lined up another lawyer to substitute for him.

"Respondent was absent from his office for a period of time when he was acting as a pro-tem judge and reasonably relied on assurances by other lawyers in his firm that they would attend hearings on his behalf during that time period," his written answer states. "Respondent should not be disciplined for other lawyers' conduct."

Armijo's answer did not list which lawyers failed to substitute for him.

The formal complaint was brought against Armijo last month after nine people filed grievances with the bar.

Eight accused Armijo of missing their hearings in Immigration Court in Tacoma. The violations allegedly occurred from September 2011 to March 2012. Those hearings had to be rescheduled.

Armijo had been formally notified he needed to appear on those dates but "acted knowingly when he failed to make court appearances for his immigration clients," Temple wrote in her complaint.

"Respondent's conduct also injured the Immigration Court and the Department of Homeland Security because of the additional government expense related to the delays," Temple wrote.

The ninth man had hired Armijo to represent him at a bond hearing in Immigration Court.

The man subsequently was released and moved to California, where he hoped to have his case transferred.

Last year, he and his new lawyer asked Armijo to send them his client file, but Armijo did not respond, Temple wrote in her complaint.

Armijo countered that he asked the man's new attorney to send him what's called "a notice of substitution and withdrawal." When she did not, he withdrew from the case.

"Respondent's only goal was to make clear who was representing client," his answer states.

Armijo served as a Superior Court judge for 15 years before being defeated in the 2008 primary election by local attorney Michael Hecht.

Hecht subsequently lost his job in 2009 after being convicted of felony harassment and patronizing a prostitute, allegations originally made public by Armijo's supporters, including his son Morgan Armijo, a local private investigator.

Hecht, who maintained the Armijo family set him up as a political vendetta, is appealing his convictions.