

Legal Ethics

Unwitting lawyer is suspended for arranging client loans to secure Nigerian inheritance

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An Iowa lawyer who believed his client was due to inherit \$18.8 million from a long-lost Nigerian cousin has been suspended for tapping clients for loans in a failed effort to reap the windfall.

The Iowa Supreme Court suspended lawyer Robert Allan Wright Jr. for a year, according to the [Legal Profession Blog](#), the [Business Record](#) and [KCCI.com](#). According to the [opinion](#) (PDF) issued Friday, Wright believed his lucky client had to pay \$177,660 in Nigerian inheritance taxes and additional cash for an “anti-terrorism certificate” before receiving the money.

Wright charged a 10 percent contingency, which would amount to \$1.8 million if successful, to help his client obtain the Nigerian inheritance.

Wright had solicited more than \$200,000 in loans from five current and former clients, promising them they would receive as much as quadruple their investment when the inheritance was obtained, according to the opinion. One provided \$7,000, and three others provided \$20,000 to \$25,000. It's unclear how much the fifth client provided, though he was asked for a loan of \$160,000.

Wright apparently transferred all of the loan proceeds to the scammers, but his client's inheritance was not forthcoming. During the course of his work, Wright spoke with people he believed to be lawyers, bankers and even the president of Nigeria. His client traveled to Spain in hopes of securing the inheritance (for an additional fee), said to be stashed in two suitcases in Madrid.

The Iowa Supreme Court Attorney Disciplinary Board had concluded that Wright “appears to have honestly believed—and continues to believe—that one day a trunk full of ... one hundred dollar bills is going to appear upon his office doorstep,” according to the Iowa Supreme Court decision.

The Iowa Supreme Court said Wright should have investigated further. A “ cursory Internet search” of the words “anti-terrorism certificate” would have revealed the likely scam, the court said. He also failed to verify the identity of the people he spoke with, and failed to confirm the authenticity of the documents he received, including a will and death certificate.

The court also said Wright's interest in obtaining the contingency was adverse to the interests of the clients who made the loans.

The court said Wright is not the first lawyer in the state to become entangled in Nigerian schemes. It also cited as mitigating factors the lawyer's long history of pro bono and dedication to client service.

Wright was represented in the ethics case by Alfredo Parrish, who did not return a call for comment on Friday afternoon.

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