

Florida Bar files complaint against Pittman



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By [ZACK McDONALD](#)

News Herald Reporter

PANAMA CITY - A local attorney who crusaded to end the debauchery of Spring Break could face disbarment while he is being sued for having an extramarital affair with a client.

The past few weeks have not brought good news for attorney Wes Pittman. On Oct. 18, the Florida Bar First Judicial Circuit Grievance Committee submitted their findings to the Florida Supreme Court, stating they found probable cause to file a complaint against Pittman for violating the Florida Bar's rules against having a sexual relationship with a client.

Pittman's "actions created a conflict of interest between (himself) and his client ... (and) exploited the trust relationship between him and his client," the complaint states. "By reason of the foregoing, (Pittman) has violated" rules regulating conflict of interest and engaging in a sexual relationship with a client.

A judge from the 14th Judicial Circuit now is expected to be appointed by the Supreme Court to gather facts and make a recommendation as to discipline. Who will preside over the case has yet to be revealed, but the Supreme Court will have the last say on what the disciplinary action should consist of. If discipline is levied against Pittman, it could range from admonishment to disbarment, Florida Bar officials said.

Less than two weeks later, the attorney for the client's husband - who Piittman also represented in a 2015 civil case from which the complaint stems - filed a lawsuit, alleging Pittman breached his fiduciary duty and intentionally inflicted emotional distress when he had an affair with the client's spouse while representing the couple in a civil case. The lawsuit was filed Oct. 28 under a condition of anonymity on the part of "John Doe." He has requested a jury trial and claims the damages caused by Pittman exceed \$15,000, the minimum jurisdictional limits for the circuit court, the lawsuit states.

Pittman did not respond to a request for comment on the lawsuit. Neither member of the couple is named in the lawsuit, but the husband's attorney claimed they would be unmistakable to Pittman.

Doe "brings this complaint anonymously to protect his identity because this complaint makes sensitive allegations of a sexual nature involving a breach of fiduciary duty," the lawsuit states. Pittman and his law firm "are aware of the identity of Mr. Doe and the protection of his identifying information will not impact their ability to defend themselves."

The court has accepted terms under which the lawsuit was filed. The attorney for Doe also has reserved the right to seek punitive damages.

The complaint stems from a civil case in which Pittman was representing the couple, who still are pursuing a lawsuit against a local car dealership after they were arrested and detained in Mississippi when their rental car mistakenly was reported stolen, according to court documents.

Pittman began representing the couple in January 2015 and shortly after engaged in an "intimate relationship" with Doe's wife.

"The nature of the intimate relationship included numerous sexual encounters and rendezvous that occurred throughout the state of Florida," the lawsuit states. "The relationship was continuous through the period of February 2015 to July 2015. During this period of time (Pittman) was representing both John Doe and his wife in ongoing litigation, conducting discovery and engaged in confidential, attorney/client privileged meetings with John Doe."

At the same time, the lawsuit claims, Pittman allegedly was objecting to evidence that would harm Doe's wife and also giving her preferential treatment in discussing legal options in the case. Doe also claims Pittman allowed critical evidence to go to waste, which hurt his case.

Toward the end of the relationship with Doe's wife, Pittman allegedly told Doe he could no longer represent him "because of other litigation commitments and (Pittman's) wife's cancer," the

lawsuit states. Pittman later admitted to the Florida Bar that he became involved with Doe's wife while litigating the couple's case.

Lawyers for the couple have said Pittman's affair with Doe's wife was "exploitation of (her) fragile emotional state." According to the lawsuit, the affair left their relationship in disarray and eventually led to a divorce. However, Pittman's attorney, Bill Weiss, argued in Florida Bar documents that the "33-year-old, college-educated professional woman" would not have retained Pittman as her attorney if he were taking advantage of her.

The affair between Pittman and his client unfolded while he led one charge against the debauchery of Spring Break, appearing on Fox News to decry the raucous annual celebration. Although Pittman self-reported the sexual relationship after it ended and alternate legal counsel replaced him in the case, the Grievance Committee found probable cause that Pittman violated ethical standards.

Florida Bar officials could not give a timeline on when their complaint would land on the Supreme Court's docket.