



NEWS

Denise Rider-Bell struck off Queensland legal roll for overcharging client Ralph Binks \$30,000

Kay Dibben, CourierMail

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A LAWYER "preyed upon" an elderly prison inmate, overcharging him more than \$30,000 for dozens of visits to jail she never made, a tribunal has found.

Denise Rider-Bell has been struck off the Queensland legal roll after being found guilty of professional misconduct involving dishonest misappropriation of a client's money, after a disciplinary hearing.

Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal president Justice Alan Wilson said Ms Rider-Bell attempted to "batten upon the misfortune of an incarcerated person through a grossly exaggerated claim".

The Legal Services Commissioner brought five charges against Ms Rider-Bell, arising out of incorrect or overcharging of Ralph Binks in 2005-06, when he was in Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre.

The tribunal heard that a Law Society investigator found that Ms Rider-Bell only visited Mr Binks eight times, while she charged him for 41 visits to the prison.

She had been representing Mr Binks on his criminal and matrimonial matters, the tribunal heard.

The tribunal president found there had been a deliberate, extended and serious course of conduct involving dishonestly overcharging Mr Binks, while he had the disadvantage of being a prison inmate.

Justice Wilson said the overcharging was close to "opportunistic preying" upon Mr Binks, who was elderly and unwell.



falsely claimed had been paid to two other prisoners.

Ms Rider-Bell, who did not appear at the tribunal hearing, sent documents denying any wrongdoing and said all the claimed visits actually occurred.

She claimed her records of the prison visits had vanished or been damaged and blamed an unnamed person for errors in disbursement of funds held for Mr Binks.

Ms Rider-Bell also claimed all copies of original invoices to Mr Binks had been destroyed when a car drove into her home.

On April 16, Justice Wilson, who heard the case with disciplinary panel members Matthew Woods and Kathleen Keating, ordered Ms Rider-Bell to pay Mr Binks \$7500 compensation within 90 days.

The tribunal heard that when she first overcharged Mr Binks \$1866, Ms Rider-Bell was working as a consultant for a firm of solicitors, and Justice Wilson said he could apply for compensation from that firm.

During the period when most of the overcharging occurred she was running a legal practice on her own.

Ms Rider-Bell also was ordered to pay the Legal Services Commissioner's investigation costs of \$8000.

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