IN THE MATTER OF PART 3 OF THE
***LEGAL PROFESSION ACT*, RSA 2000, c. L-8**

AND
IN THE MATTER OF A HEARING REGARDING
THE CONDUCT OF MANRAJ TIWANA
A STUDENT-AT-LAW OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF ALBERTA

Citation: **Law Society of Alberta v. Tiwana, 2026 ABLS 7**
Hearing date: **February 20, 2026**
Decision date: **March 12, 2026**

Appeal to the Benchers Panel

Scott Matheson – Chair and Bencher
John Evans, KC – Bencher
Levonne Louie – Lay Bencher
Kelsey Meyer – Bencher
Afshan Naveed – Bencher
Ali Rakka – Lay Bencher
Erin Runnalls, KC – Bencher

Appearances

Shanna Hunka – Counsel for the Law Society of Alberta
Manraj Tiwana – Self-represented

Hearing Date

February 20, 2026

Hearing Location

Virtual Hearing

APPEAL PANEL DECISION

Overview

1. In early 2022, the Law Society of Alberta (LSA) received complaints alleging that a student-at-law, Manraj Tiwana, was taking off-the-books files from clients without his principal's knowledge or supervision, accepting payment from them personally, and not telling them that his principal was being kept in the dark. This arrangement would obviously also breach certain LSA trust accounting rules, since Mr. Tiwana had no trust account. The LSA investigated, but that process was prolonged because Mr. Tiwana repeatedly misled the investigators.

2. On March 3, 2025, while represented by able counsel, Mr. Tiwana executed a thorough 102-paragraph Agreed Statement of Facts and Admission of Guilt. On April 1, 2025, a three-person Hearing Committee convened and was advised the parties had reached a joint submission on both merits and sanction, including a 20-month suspension. In a

written decision dated June 11, 2025 (*Law Society of Alberta v. Tiwana*, 2025 ABLS 17), the Hearing Committee found that the joint submission would not bring the administration of justice into disrepute and so accepted it, levying the suspension, with costs to the LSA in an agreed-upon amount.

3. Mr. Tiwana, now self-represented, appealed the Hearing Committee's decision to an appeal panel under section 75 of the *Legal Profession Act* (*Act*). The appeal is unusual since it is from an accepted joint submission. Mr. Tiwana's primary argument is that the sanction was too high, disproportionate to the gravity of his offences, and a shorter suspension would have adequately served the public interest. He also argues that the proceedings below were unduly delayed. In support of the appeal, he seeks to admit new evidence.

4. For the reasons below, the application to admit new evidence is denied, the appeal is dismissed, and costs of the appeal are awarded to the LSA in the amount sought.

Preliminary Matters

5. There were no objections made to the constitution of the Appeal Panel or its jurisdiction, and a private hearing was not requested, so a public hearing proceeded in public, by Zoom. Mr. Tiwana had, in his Notice of Appeal, attached a number of exhibits not in the record below. He then, when filing his appeal submissions, again annexed several exhibits not contained in the record, some, but not all, of which were included in the Notice.

6. Appeals are conducted on the record. Attaching new documents to a notice or a brief does not automatically put them into the evidentiary record on appeal. An application to adduce new evidence is required. When Mr. Tiwana was asked at this hearing what he was applying to introduce, he identified the material attached to his brief, but not the documents in his Notice to Appeal. No application having been made about those, they are not admitted.

7. As to the attachments to the brief, they do not meet the test in *Palmer v The Queen*, [1980] 1 SCR 759 (*Palmer*) for admission. Mr. Tiwana forthrightly admitted all but two were available to him prior to the Hearing Committee proceeding. Even those two, a Facebook screenshot and a letter of reference, could have been adduced below "through the exercise of reasonable diligence", which is the standard under *Palmer*. The attachments also appeared to be relevant mainly to the merits (with the possible exception of reference letters) and so are not material to this sanction-only appeal. As to the credibility of the evidence, we are not well-positioned to determine that, but these are mainly documents authored by other people who did not give testimony either below or here. None of the new evidence would conceivably have impacted the decision below, given that the Hearing Committee was applying the high bar for rejecting a joint submission found in *R v Anthony-Cook*, 2016 SCC 43 (*Anthony-Cook*). Applying these factors, we decline to admit the new evidence on appeal.

Analysis

Appealing an Accepted Joint Submission

8. In the criminal context, when a joint submission on sentence is accepted, appeals are very rare. If the accused doesn't like the deal, why did he accept it? But the courts have explained why it is important for appellate review to nonetheless be available on limited grounds.

9. In *R v Naslund*, 2022 ABCA 6 (*Naslund*), for example, the accused had pleaded guilty to killing her husband after decades of abuse. The Court of King's Bench accepted a joint submission on sentence. Years later, she appealed. The panel majority cited prior Ontario and Saskatchewan appellate authority for the proposition that joint submissions are "not immune from review… appellate courts will continue to consider whether such a sentence should nevertheless be set aside because it brings the administration of justice into disrepute." The majority observed that, "all sentences must be in the public interest and appellate review ensures that no sentence accepted as part of a joint submission is so far outside the appropriate range of sentence as to run afoul of this dictate."

10. Since *Naslund*, a majority of a panel of the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal in *R v Littlewolfe* has reaffirmed that principle: para. 187. So has the Prince Edward Island Court of Appeal, in *R v Joel Lawrence Clow*, 2024 PECA 10 (*Clow*). Accordingly, at least in Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, joint submissions in the criminal context are susceptible to appellate review. But normal appeal principles still apply: appellate intervention is only warranted if the sentencing judge made an error of principle that impacted the sentence, or the sentence was otherwise demonstrably unfit. "Absent an error of law, the threshold is even higher for an appellate court that is asked to review a decision by a sentencing judge who has accepted a joint submission": *Clow*, para. 27.

11. Neither party provided us with any decisions from professional regulators, or courts reviewing them, considering whether an appeal can be taken from an accepted joint submission on sanction. We are mindful there are important differences between criminal and disciplinary proceedings, however some of the same reasoning which animated the courts cited above would apply in discipline cases:

    1) All sanctions must ultimately be in the public interest, and appellate review may be necessary to ensure that is so;

    2) Appellate review helps establish uniformity and parity of sanction, and that exercise can include even the review of accepted joint submissions;

3) Appeal bodies cannot countenance an illegal sentence or one which would bring the administration of justice into disrepute, and so must maintain appellate authority to intervene when necessary.

12. One can synthesize the reasoning in the case law to set out some principles which are applicable to discipline proceedings as well as criminal ones.

13. Accepted joint submissions are appealable. Known grounds of appeal may include that the proceeding below was unfair, including due to a defect in procedure, delay, or ineffective assistance of counsel. The appellant could also seek to resile from the plea on the normal contractual rationales, e.g. that it was not voluntary or was procured by duress.

14. Likewise the appellant can argue the sanction was unlawful, that is, not permitted by statute, the common law, or the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.* That could be, for example, if it exceeded a statutory maximum. Alternatively, new evidence admissible on appeal could have significant impact on the propriety of the sentence such that it must, as a matter of fairness, be revisited.

15. Even without a defect below, or any new evidence on appeal, the appellant may argue that the decision below was unreasonable in accepting the joint submission. That is, that the Hearing Committee was not just wrong, but *unreasonably* wrong, in determining that accepting the joint submission would not bring the administration of justice into disrepute. However, the bar for rejecting a joint submission under *R v Anthony-Cook* is high, and we agree with the Prince Edward Island Court of Appeal that the test on appeal to disturb the acceptance of a joint submission must be even higher. In other words, there is significant deference to the Hearing Committee; the appeal is not a second kick at the can to argue the sentence was disproportionate, unfit, or a lesser range would have still protected the public.

Decision

16. Mr. Tiwana's appeal of his sanction focusses on what he says is its disproportion to the offences—he argues a lesser sentence would have adequately protected the public.

17. But that was not the test for the Hearing Committee. Applying *Anthony-Cook*, the Hearing Committee was bound to accept the joint submission unless it would bring the administration of justice into disrepute or was otherwise contrary to the public interest. The Hearing Committee "found Mr. Tiwana's conduct to be very serious". He "committed unauthorized practice of law and handled payments from his clients in a wrongful manner, including violating trust accounting rules. Most importantly, he was dishonest with clients, his principal and the LSA. He also continued to be dishonest with the LSA through the investigation stage."

18. The Hearing Committee heard extensive submissions from Mr. Tiwana's then-counsel regarding the pressure he had been under and other mitigating factors: see pgs. 130-140 of the Hearing Record, containing pgs. 26-35 of the transcript below. The Hearing Committee recognized Mr. Tiwana had taken responsibility for his actions. The Hearing Committee concluded, "Given that a 20-month suspension is as lengthy as it gets short of disbarment, the sanction is at the high-end and just short of a disbarment, and the Committee finds it to be appropriate."

19. On appeal, Mr. Tiwana has not explained why the Hearing Committee was unreasonable in accepting the joint submission. Put another way, he has not shown why the 20-month sentence is so unhinged from the circumstances of the offences that the Hearing Committee was bound to reject it and substitute a lower sentence. The parity cases considered, though not perfect, were useful benchmarks. The circumstances of the offences here were serious, including abject dishonesty with a principal, clients, and the LSA, and what could fairly be described as a long-running attempt to deceive the investigator.

20. To the extent Mr. Tiwana raises other arguments about the process below, they are unavailing. For example, he seems to suggest he was not aware, at the time of his plea, that when the 20 months was served he would have to apply for admission or reinstatement, and the result of that application was uncertain. He also suggests he was not aware that, in that process, his credentials may have by then expired. But these submissions, when made by a party represented before the Hearing Committee by experienced defence counsel, are difficult to accept when there is no allegation or evidence that his counsel was ineffective or failed to advise him. In any event, these are not unknown "collateral" consequences of a sanction, but the foreseeable result of having to potentially take steps, at the end of the sentence, to become an active member in good standing.

21. Mr. Tiwana also takes issue with the costs awarded below. Although the costs deal he struck in mid-2025 may not have been what one would have agreed to after *Charkhandeh v College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta*, 2025 ABCA 258 (*Charkhandeh*), that is not necessarily a reason to revisit the bargain made: see generally *Law Society of Alberta v Goldsworthy*, 2025 ABLS 22, where *Charkhandeh* came out while the decision was still under reserve. Further, as we alluded to, an important reason why costs were high was that the investigation was long, primarily due to Mr. Tiwana's conduct.

22. Finally, Mr. Tiwana alleges the proceeding below was delayed. However, Mr. Tiwana has not met the burden required in *Law Society of Saskatchewan v. Abrametz*, 2022 SCC 29, and the LSA rightly points out that much of the "delay" was the result of Mr. Tiwana's lack of forthrightness with the investigators. Further, LSA counsel raised delay before the Hearing Committee as a mitigating factor in relation to the joint submission on sanction. In any event, the delay argument was waived: Mr. Tiwana did not raise it at the

Hearing Committee, and absent unusual circumstances, it should not be entertained for the first time on appeal.

Concluding Matters

23. The appeal is dismissed.

24. The LSA proffered an Estimated Statement of Costs on appeal. Following *Charkhandeh*, we would observe that the LSA was fully successful on every issue, and that this is a case in which costs ought to be awarded in full against the member. In terms of quantum, where the LSA's estimate included a full day appeal, we trust they will reduce the amount to accord for the fact the hearing did not take all day. But in considering what level of indemnity is required, and what costs burden would be fair, we find the most important factor in this case is Mr. Tiwana's conduct of the appeal, including his haphazard approach to attempting to adduce new evidence, and, more troubling, his conduct in briefing and arguing the appeal.

25. In particular, Mr. Tiwana admitted to using artificial intelligence (AI) to draft his appeal submissions, which led to a hallucinated case being cited, which LSA counsel had to run down. LSA counsel contacted Mr. Tiwana in advance of the hearing of the appeal because she could not find the case cited in Mr. Tiwana's appeal submissions. In response, Mr. Tiwana advised her that there was no such case, calling the cited case a "placeholder". In addition to that hallucination in the brief, Mr. Tiwana in oral argument repeatedly referred to a Law Society of BC case which had no relevance at all to this matter and did not support any of the propositions for which Mr. Tiwana proffered it. When asked to provide the style of cause and citation for the said case, Mr. Tiwana struggled to understand what that meant. While we appreciate that Mr. Tiwana was candid in admitting his use of AI, he did not seem to grasp the gravity of misusing it in this way, particularly in this setting, where he is arguing that his discipline was too harsh and his prospect for recovery is good. The misuse of AI to write his submissions, and in particular his reliance on a hallucinated case in his submissions, suggests otherwise, causes the Appeal Panel concern, and is grounds for concluding the LSA's estimate ought to be approved in full, subject to the minor reduction for hearing time to which we referred.

26. The exhibits, other hearing materials, and this report will be available for public inspection, including the provision of copies of exhibits for a reasonable copy fee, except that identifying information in relation to persons other than Mr. Tiwana will be redacted and further redactions will be made to preserve client confidentiality and solicitor-client privilege (Rule 101(3)).

Dated March 12, 2026.

Scott Matheson – Chair

John Evans, KC

Levonne Louie

Kelsey Meyer

Afshan Naveed

Ali Rakka

Erin Runnalls, KC