

# News Release



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## **Office of Attorney Ethics Releases 2022 Annual Report**

The Office of Attorney Ethics (OAE) of the New Jersey Supreme Court today released its annual Attorney Disciplinary System Report, announced OAE Director Johanna Barba Jones.

[The report](#), which is submitted annually to the Supreme Court, showed new investigations and formal charges increased in 2022, as did the number of attorneys who were disciplined by the office.

The OAE, which was created by the Supreme Court in 1983, investigates allegations of serious attorney misconduct and files formal complaints when warranted. In addition to its investigative and prosecutorial responsibilities, the OAE oversees 18 volunteer district ethics committees, 17 district fee arbitration committees, the random audit program, and the collection and analysis of attorney registration statement data. The annual report contains detailed information and statistics on each of these areas.

### **OAE Report Highlights**

#### **Investigations and Public Discipline**

In 2022, a total of 815 new investigations were initiated, representing a 6.25 percent increase from the 768 investigations added the previous year. New formal charges increased slightly, from 166 formal charges in 2021 to 169 formal charges in 2022.

The Supreme Court sanctioned 139 attorneys in 2022, a 12 percent increase from the 124 attorneys sanctioned in 2021. Those final sanctions included 23 disbarments and 53 suspensions. The Court also issued 12 temporary license suspensions for emergent cases and reinstated eight attorneys in 2022.

### **District Fee Arbitration Committees**

In 2022, District Fee Arbitration Committees handled 756 cases involving more than \$5.7 million in legal fees. The fee arbitration program provides a neutral, confidential forum in which clients and attorneys can resolve legal fee disputes.

### **Random Audit Compliance Program**

The OAE's Random Audit Compliance Program conducted 753 audits of law firms in 2022, an increase of 487 from 2021. The audits ensure that client funds are handled in compliance with the Supreme Court's financial recordkeeping rule. The audits found 96.7 percent of firms handled funds satisfactorily, while the remaining 3.3 percent were referred to the Investigations Unit for further evaluation.

The Supreme Court imposed disciplinary measures against 11 attorneys, including four attorneys who were disbarred for knowingly misappropriating funds, based on referrals from this program in 2022.

### **Trust Account Overdraft Notification Program**

Banks authorized by the Supreme Court to hold attorney trust funds are required to report to the OAE any overdraft or item presented against sufficient funds in an attorney trust account. In 2022, 132 attorney trust account overdrafts were reported, and seven lawyers were disciplined (including one disbarment) based on information produced by this program.

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