

Crime

Man ordered to stop portraying himself as attorney

Posted: Dec 27, 2013, 4:17 pm

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By Kay Fate
The Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

PRESTON — A Lanesboro man has been convicted of a misdemeanor after authorities say he was practicing law without a valid Minnesota license.

David Welford Williams Jr., 71, was sentenced Dec. 17 in Fillmore County District Court to 90 days in jail, which were stayed. He was placed on probation for a year and also ordered not to use the words "Attorney at Law" in practice, letterhead or correspondence, according to court documents.

Williams was charged in May with unauthorized practice of law.

The case began in August 2010, when the planning director in Lake of the Woods County received a letter concerning the construction of a cabin by a Preston couple.

The letterhead indicated the correspondence was from "Williams Consultancy," with David Williams listed as a lawyer, according to the criminal complaint. Also included were his address, phone number, cell phone number and email address.

In the letter, Williams indicated the couple would like to schedule a hearing with the county to request a modification of a land variance in order to complete the cabin construction.

In an October 2010 email from Williams, the heading was again listed as "Williams Consultancy," with Williams listed as lawyer, the complaint says. In this correspondence, Williams discussed an issue presented by the building permit issued by Lake of the Woods County.

The Lake of the Woods employee eventually contacted the Fillmore County Attorney's Office, which in turn contacted the Fillmore County Sheriff's Office.

During an interview with Williams in June 2011, Williams allegedly told an investigator he doesn't practice law and stopped legal work a decade ago.

Williams said he'd moved to Lanesboro 12 years ago from Minneapolis, built a farm and does a lot of nonprofit organizational work, the report says.

He also claimed to have two law degrees: one from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and one from Stanford University. Williams told officials he was a licensed, practicing attorney in New York and California, and though he's never been licensed in Minnesota, he "has the educational and practical background to be referred to as a lawyer."

A check of Williams' history confirms he was admitted to the State Bar of California in 1968 but lists his 1983 status as "resigned with charges pending." He's no longer allowed to practice law in California, according to the state's website.

In 1981, actor Redd Foxx had Williams arrested, claiming Williams had forged \$10,000 in checks, according to a Baltimore newspaper.

The entertainer had been paying Williams \$1,000 a week "trying to rehabilitate him," the story said, following alleged similar dealings with actors Mickey Rooney and Lou Gossett.

Williams is the son of David W. Williams, the first black federal judge west of the Mississippi, a founder of the first black lawyers association in Los Angeles and a crusader in abolishing restrictive housing covenants.

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