

METRO ATLANTA

# Lin Wood fined \$105K for social media posts about former colleagues

Sanction follows \$4.5M defamation verdict against Wood over separate posts



Retired Atlanta defamation lawyer L. Lin Wood has been ordered to pay three of his former colleagues \$105,000 for weeks after an Atlanta jury found Wood liable for defamation, awarding his former colleagues \$4.5 million.

**By Rosie Manins**

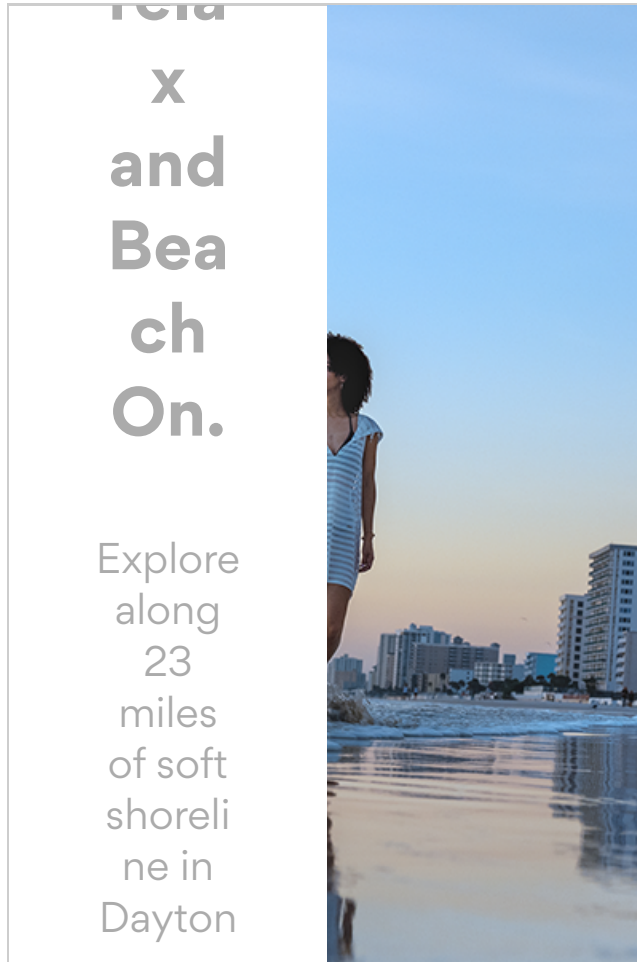
Sept 10, 2024



Less than a month after being hit with a [\\$4.5 million defamation verdict](#) for public social media posts about three of his former colleagues, [retired Atlanta defamation attorney L. Lin Wood](#) has been fined \$105,000 for other disparaging posts about them.

The sanction was handed down Monday by Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee, who found that Wood violated a nondisparagement order on seven occasions between June 2023 and July 2024. Wood's social media posts about his former colleagues – [attorneys Nicole Wade, Jonathan Grunberg and Taylor Wilson](#) – suggested in part that they were “thieves,” “liars,” “backstabbers” and “children of the devil.”

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McAfee rejected as “strikingly inaccurate” Wood’s argument that the statements did not disparage Wade, Grunberg and Wilson, with whom Wood has been in a yearslong battle over client fees since they left his Atlanta law firm in February 2020. McAfee said Wood conceded that he published the statements with full knowledge of the 2020 nondisparagement order and a [June 2023 order finding him in contempt of court](#) for violating the earlier ruling.

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“Just to highlight one of these instances, referring to someone as a ‘backstabber’ and ‘child of the devil’ is disparaging under any rational standard,” McAfee said. “To the extent these

posts required a consideration of any surrounding context, the lines needed to connect the dots are rather short and obvious. And after making these connections, the picture is plain.”

McAfee said Wood was not credible when testifying at a recent hearing in Atlanta that he did not mean to hurt anybody or disparage his former colleagues through his posts, published on his Telegram account to hundreds of thousands of followers.

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McAfee kept his June 1, 2023 promise that he would fine Wood \$15,000 for any future violation of the nondisparagement order, imposing that sanction for each of the seven posts made about Wade, Grunberg and Wilson since then. The first of the seven posts came on June 2, 2023, just hours after McAfee had [held Wood in contempt and fined him \\$5,000](#) for previous disparaging posts.

In 2023, McAfee also made Wood pay his former colleagues more than \$42,000 in attorney fees in relation to the contempt finding.

On Monday, McAfee said he would further sanction Wood if the \$105,000 fine was not paid to Wade, Grunberg and Wilson within 14 days. He warned Wood that any future violation of the nondisparagement order would elicit a \$25,000 fine and could see Wood stripped of his defenses in the ongoing client fee dispute.

Wood told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that he disagrees with McAfee’s order, but cannot financially afford to immediately appeal it.

“After the hearing last week, I imposed a ‘gag’ order on myself and I do not plan to ever again mention (Wade, Wilson and Grunberg) on social media,” Wood said Monday.

Attorneys [Drew Beal and Milinda Brown](#), who represent Wade, Wilson and Grunberg in their fight against Wood, said they're pleased with McAfee's ruling.

"Although we also identified some other posts that the judge did not include in his order, we feel that the judge's thorough and complete response to (Wood's) posts will go a long way toward preventing this type of conduct in the future," Beal said.

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Some of Wood's posts included photographs of Wilson and Wade, while others contained photographs of Grunberg's children. Wood said in a Sept. 6, 2023 post that the three attorneys' case against him was "a multitude of false accusations intended to destroy me



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The lawyers first sued Wood and his firm in August 2020, alleging he breached a separation agreement by refusing to pay them their share of client fees. They claimed they left Wood's firm because of his erratic and threatening behavior toward them.

In February 2022, the Georgia Court of Appeals upheld the nondisparagement order against Wood, rejecting his free speech arguments. The following month, Wade, Grunberg and Wilson filed a federal defamation lawsuit against Wood in response to Telegram posts he published about them in 2021.

Wood had referred to his former colleagues as criminal extortionists, citing their offer to settle the client fee dispute for \$1.25 million. He urged his social media followers to file complaints against Wade, Grunberg and Wilson with the State Bar of Georgia, which at that time was [investigating complaints against Wood](#).

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In March 2024, the judge in the federal defamation case ruled that [Wood's comments were false and defamatory](#), setting up a trial about whether Wood was liable for damages.

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Wood testified at the trial that he felt compelled to speak out publicly against Wade, Grunberg and Wilson in 2021 when he was vying for election as chair of South Carolina's Republican Party. He said he was getting "skewered" in the election and blamed that on the "salacious" allegations by his former colleagues that he refused to pay them their share of client fees, among other things.

A [jury determined in August](#) that Wood's 2021 posts were at least negligent, awarding Wade, Grunberg and Wilson \$3.75 million in compensation and \$750,000 in attorney fees.

## About the Author



**Rosie Manins**

Journalist Rosie Manins is a legal affairs reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

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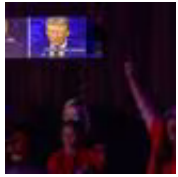
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