

Ex-lawyer jailed in Florida for viewing child porn close to practising law in Ontario

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A Canadian-born man who was jailed in Florida for viewing child pornography has moved one step closer to practising law in Ontario.

The tribunal of the Law Society of Upper Canada ruled in a written decision last week that Ronald Ori Davidovic was of "good character," allowing his licensing application to proceed.

The document says Davidovic, who was born in Montreal and moved to Miami with his family as a child, was working as general counsel for a telecommunications company in Florida when he was arrested in early 2004 following a police search of his home.

The decision says investigators seized his computers, where they found images and videos of children and teenagers as well as regular pornography.

Davidovic pleaded guilty to one count of receiving images containing a visual depiction of minors engaging in sexually explicit conduct and was sentenced to five years in prison, which was later reduced to three years. He is also registered as a sex offender in Florida.

He resigned from the Florida bar, but would have been allowed to reapply in 2010. Instead, the tribunal's decision says, he applied to practise in Ontario, saying he planned to move to Toronto, where he has family.

Two members of the three-person tribunal panel ruled that Davidovic had passed the "good character" requirement of the licensing process, saying he has taken responsibility and expressed remorse for his actions, and has not reoffended since his arrest.

"We therefore find that the applicant is of good character and grant his application for licensing as a lawyer in Ontario," wrote Raj Anand and Jan Richardson.

A spokesperson for the law society said Friday that the tribunal only ruled on Davidovic's "good character" — a requirement for licensing — but the man's application was still ongoing. She acknowledged, however, that the language of the decision had caused some confusion over whether Davidovic had been granted permission to practise law.

Davidovic, who is in his 40s, has completed more than 300 hours of mandated therapy and more than 500 hours of additional therapy, and started volunteering with an organization that educates media, legislators and the public about issues relating to sex offenders, Anand and Richardson said.

"It has been over 13 years since the commission of the offences, and nine years since the applicant completed his sentence. He has tried to reinvent himself, with a significant measure of success thus far, to make a new life," they wrote.

"The applicant's conduct in the years preceding 2004 was reprehensible, but it is not an automatic or permanent bar to his admission, given the evidence and positions of the parties, and in light of the applicant's determination to be an ethical and productive lawyer."

One panel member opposed the decision, arguing Davidovic had failed to clear all doubts about his good character and his credibility.

While Davidovic provided reports by a social worker and a forensic psychologist, among others, that indicated his chance of relapse was very low, those were written several years ago, Paul M. Cooper wrote.

"There is insufficient evidence that the applicant is rehabilitated. The misconduct was sexually motivated and he possessed a magnetic attraction. He has been diagnosed with nonspecified paraphilia and this diagnosis remains unresolved," Cooper said.

"I do not believe the evidence shows on a balance of probabilities that he is rehabilitated nor that he fully comprehends victim empathy or remorse."

Davidovic acknowledged at his hearing that the public "would have a valid concern that his actions affected his integrity" and that he had been "selfish and arrogant," the tribunal decision said.

But he stressed that he had "gained greater empathy for vulnerable individuals, and an understanding of victimization, as a result of going through the criminal justice system" and had shifted his priorities from material success to helping others and maintaining support systems.

Davidovic started looking at child pornography in 1998 and, while the frequency may have waned somewhat after his marriage that year, he continued to do so until late 2003, the document said.

The panel says he intends to practise criminal law and "believes that his experience will enable him to assist others." Davidovic has also said he is willing to restrict his practice to adults only but the panel did not say whether it would require him to do so.

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