

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES COMMISSION**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
Petitioner,**

v.

**MATTHEW J. RICKETTS,
Respondent.**

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DOCKET NO. DI-20-112

ORDER GRANTING MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

This matter is before the Professional Standards and Practices Commission (“Commission”) on a Notice of Charges and Motion for Summary Judgment filed by the Department of Education (“Department”). After consideration of the record in this matter and the applicable law, the Commission finds that summary judgment in favor of the Department is appropriate and enters this Order as follows:

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Matthew J. Ricketts (“Respondent”) holds an Instructional I certificate in the area of Art PK-12. The Department initiated disciplinary proceedings against Respondent with the filing of a Notice of Charges on December 10, 2020. The Notice of Charges alleges that Respondent was convicted of Indecent Assault. Certified copies of the pertinent court documents are attached to the Notice of Charges. The Notice of Charges also alleges that Respondent is guilty of Sexual Abuse or Exploitation. Simultaneous with the filing of the Notice of Charges, the Department filed a Motion for Summary Judgment requesting that the Commission enter summary judgment in its favor and revoke Respondent’s certificate and employment eligibility based upon his conviction.

As required, the Department mailed copies of the Notice of Charges and Motion for Summary Judgment to Respondent at his last-known address. Respondent did not file an answer to either pleading.¹

The Commission heard oral argument at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 15, 2021. Respondent was not present.

SUMMARY JUDGMENT STANDARD

Summary Judgment is appropriate only when, after examining the whole record in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, there is no genuine issue of material fact and the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Snyder v. Department of Environmental Resources, 588 A.2d 1001 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1991).

MATERIAL FACTS

The material facts are not in dispute.² On August 26, 2020, Respondent was convicted in the Court of Common Pleas of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania of Indecent Assault, 18 Pa.C.S. § 3126(a)(7). The facts underlying Respondent's conviction are that he had sexual contact with his 12-year-old daughter on multiple occasions.

DISCUSSION

The Department seeks the revocation of Respondent's certificate and employment eligibility pursuant to section 9b(a)(2) of the Educator Discipline Act ("Act"). 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(2). That section mandates, in relevant part, that the Commission shall direct the Department to revoke the certificate and employment eligibility of an

1. On April 14, 2021, the Commission received a letter from Respondent stating, "I voluntarily relinquish my teaching certificate, and understand my ineligibility for ANY jobs involving minors."

2. Since Respondent did not file a responsive pleading, the only facts considered by the Commission are those alleged in the Department's Notice of Charges, which are deemed admitted and incorporated herein by reference. See 22 Pa. Code § 233.115(c)(1); 1 Pa. Code § 35.37; See also Kinniry v. Professional Standards and Practices Commission, 678 A.2d 1230 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1996).

educator convicted of a crime set forth in section 111(e)(1) through (3) of the Public School Code of 1949 or a crime involving moral turpitude upon the filing of a certified copy of the verdict, judgment or sentence of the court with the Commission. Id.

Here, the Department has presented the Commission with certified court records of Respondent's conviction for Indecent Assault, which is a crime set forth in section 111(e)(1) of the Public School Code of 1949 and a crime involving moral turpitude *per se*. 24 P.S. § 1-111(e)(1); 22 Pa. Code § 237.9(c)(1). Therefore, the Commission must direct the Department to revoke Respondent's certificate and employment eligibility.³ 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(2); *See also* Bowalick, 840 A.2d at 522 (revocation of a teaching certificate on summary judgment is appropriate upon proof of a conviction of a crime of moral turpitude); *citing* Kinniry v. Professional Stds. & Practices Comm'n, 678 A.2d 1230, 1234 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1996).

The Department also requests that the Commission enter a finding that Respondent is guilty of sexual abuse or exploitation. The import of a finding of sexual abuse or exploitation is that the Commission is permanently barred from reinstating the educator's certificate and employment eligibility. 24 P.S. § 2070.16. Pursuant to section 1b of the Act, sexual abuse or exploitation shall have the meaning given to the term by 23 Pa.C.S. Ch. 63 (relating to child protective services), which includes the following:

- (1) The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in or assist another individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct, which includes, but is not limited to, the following:

3. An appeal shall not operate as a stay if the grounds for discipline include sexual misconduct or sexual abuse or exploitation or if the discipline is imposed under section 9b. 24 P.S. § 2070.15. Therefore, the revocation of Respondent's certificate and employment eligibility will be effective immediately.

...

(iii) Actual or simulated sexual activity or nudity for the purpose of sexual stimulation or gratification of any individual.

(2) Any of the following crimes committed against a child:

...

(vii) Indecent Assault as defined in 18 Pa.C.S. § 3126 (relating to indecent assault).

24 P.S. § 2070.1b; 23 Pa.C.S. § 6303. Respondent touched the vagina, breasts, and buttocks of his 12-year-old daughter and had her touch his penis. Such conduct falls squarely within the above definition. Moreover, Indecent Assault *per se* involves sexual abuse or exploitation when committed against a child. The Commission, therefore, finds that Respondent is guilty of sexual abuse or exploitation and permanently barred from serving as an educator in Pennsylvania.

ORDER

AND NOW, this 16th day of April 2021, upon consideration of the Department of Education's Motion for Summary Judgment and the lack of response thereto, it is hereby ORDERED:

1. The Motion is granted.
2. Pursuant to 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(2), the Department is directed to revoke Respondent's certificate and eligibility to be employed as a charter or cyber charter school staff member or a contracted educational provider staff member effective on the date of this Order.
3. Respondent is not eligible to be employed in a school entity in a position

requiring certification or as a charter or cyber charter school staff member or contracted educational provider staff member, or eligible for any certificate.

4. Respondent is guilty of Sexual Abuse or Exploitation under 24 P.S. § 2070.1b and 23 Pa. C.S. § 6303.
5. Pursuant to 24 P.S. § 2070.16(b)(1), the Commission shall not reinstate Respondent's certificate and employment eligibility.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND
PRACTICES COMMISSION

By: 

Myron Yoder
Chairperson Pro Tempore



Attest: _____
Shane F. Crosby
Executive Director

Date Mailed: April 16, 2021