

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

<b>DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,</b>	:	
<b>Petitioner,</b>	:	
	:	
	:	
v.	:	<b>DOCKET NO. DI-20-115</b>
	:	
<b>JANEEN M. THOMAS,</b>	:	
<b>Respondent.</b>	:	

**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**

Janeen M. Thomas (“Respondent”) holds an Instructional I certificate in the areas of Special Education PK-12 and Elementary K-6. The Department initiated disciplinary proceedings against Respondent with the filing of a Notice of Charges on December 17, 2020. The Notice of Charges alleges that Respondent has been convicted of the crimes of Theft by Unlawful Taking or Disposition, Identity Theft, Access Device Fraud, and Theft of Services, which the Department asserts are crimes involving moral turpitude. Certified copies of the pertinent court documents are attached to the Notice of Charges. 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 her convictions.

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

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.<sup>1</sup> On December 16, 2015, Respondent was convicted in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania of Theft by Unlawful Taking or Disposition, 18 Pa.C.S. § 3921(a), Identity Theft, 18 Pa.C.S. § 4120(a), Access Device Fraud, 18 Pa.C.S. § 4106(a)(1)(ii), and Theft of Services, 18 Pa.C.S. § 3926(a)(1). The facts underlying Respondent's convictions are that she stole cell phones, cash, credit cards, and wine bottles, and left a restaurant without paying for her meal.

### 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").

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1. Since Respondent did not file a responsive pleading, the only facts considered by the Commission are those alleged in the 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).

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 educator convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude or the conspiracy to commit such a crime upon the filing of a certified copy of the verdict, judgment or sentence of the court with the Commission. Id.<sup>2</sup> The Commission's regulations define moral turpitude, in relevant part, as follows:

(a) *Definition.* Moral turpitude includes the following:

(1) That element of personal misconduct in the private and social duties which a person owes to his fellow human beings or to society in general, which characterizes the act done as an act of baseness, vileness or depravity, and contrary to the accepted and customary rule of right and duty between two human beings.

(2) Conduct done knowingly contrary to justice, honesty or good morals.

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22 Pa. Code § 237.9. Similarly, the Commonwealth Court has defined moral turpitude as "anything done knowingly contrary to justice, honesty, or good morals." Gombach v. Department of State, Bureau of Comm'ns, Elections & Legislation, 692 A.2d 1127, 1130 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1997). A crime of moral turpitude requires a reprehensible state of mind or *mens rea*. Bowalick v. Commonwealth, 840 A.2d 519, 523-24 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2004). Crimes in which fraud is an ingredient have always been regarded as involving moral turpitude. Moretti v. State Board of Pharmacy, 277 A.2d 516 (Pa. Cmwlth.1971); *citing* Jordan v. DeGeorge, 341 U.S. 223, 71 S.Ct. 703 (1951) (fraud is the touchstone of moral turpitude).

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2. The term conviction includes a plea of guilty or nolo contendere. 24 P.S. § 2070.9b(a)(2).

Here, the Department has presented the Commission with certified court records of Respondent's convictions for Theft by Unlawful Taking or Disposition, Identity Theft, Access Device Fraud, and Theft of Services. The Department seeks a determination that these crimes involve moral turpitude. The Commission is required to make its assessment "based solely upon the elements of the crime." 22 Pa. Code § 237.9(b); See also Startzel v. Commonwealth, Department of Education, 562 A.2d 1005, 1007 (Pa. Cmwlth.1989). The underlying facts or details of a conviction are not relevant to the issue of moral turpitude.

The Commission has previously examined the elements of Theft by Unlawful Taking or Disposition, Identity Theft, and Access Device Fraud and determined that these crimes constitute crimes of moral turpitude.<sup>3</sup> See Dep't of Education v. Makarevich, PSPC Docket No. DI-05-02; Dep't of Education v. King, PSPC Docket No. DI-18-052; Department of Education v. Slade, PSPC Docket No. DI-15-27. Certainly, these crimes require conduct "contrary to the accepted and customary rule of right and duty," 22 Pa. Code § 237.9(a)(1), and conduct "done knowingly contrary to justice, honesty or good morals," 22 Pa. Code § 237.9(a)(2), and thus a "reprehensible state of mind or *mens rea*." Bowalick, 840 A.2d at 524. Fraud is also an essential ingredient of these crimes. The Commonwealth Court has also recognized that crimes involving theft are crimes of moral turpitude. See Krystal Jeep Eagle, Inc. v. Bureau of Prof'l & Occupational Affairs, 725 A.2d 846 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1999) (theft by deception and theft by failure to make required disposition of funds received); Ancharski v. Bureau of Prof'l & Occupational Affairs, State Bd. of Nursing (Pa. Cmwlth. No. 1765 C.D. 2010, file June

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3. Therefore, we need not determine whether Theft of Services also constitutes a crime of moral turpitude as alleged by the Department.

21, 2011) (theft by unlawful taking or disposition); Spence v. Bureau of Prof'l & Occupational Affairs (Pa. Cmwlth. No. 1692 C.D. 2009, filed March 22, 2010) (theft by unlawful taking or disposition).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Commission finds that Respondent has been convicted of crimes involving moral turpitude.

Because Respondent has been convicted of crimes of moral turpitude, the Commission must direct the Department to revoke Respondent's certificate and employment eligibility. 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).<sup>5</sup>

### **ORDER**

AND NOW, this 16<sup>th</sup> 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 for Summary Judgment 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.

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4. Ancharski and Spence are cited herein for their persuasive value pursuant to 210 Pa. Code § 69.414(a).

5. An appeal shall not operate as a stay 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.

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 until her certificate and employment eligibility are reinstated in accordance with the Act.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND  
PRACTICES COMMISSION

By:



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Myron Yoder  
Chairperson Pro Tempore



Attest:

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Shane F. Crosby  
Executive Director

Date Mailed: April 16, 2021