

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
STEPHANIE A. CARAFA : ORDER OF SUSPENSION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 1819-162

At its meeting of September 19, 2019, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office and the Office of Student Protection, as well as Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) regarding Stephanie A. Carafa (Carafa). On or about October 27, 2018, Carafa was charged with Aggravated Criminal Sexual Contact (3<sup>rd</sup> degree) and Endangering the Welfare of a Child (2<sup>nd</sup> degree). Carafa allegedly had sexual contact with a minor student in her classroom and sent illicit photos and videos of herself through a social media application. Carafa would be disqualified from public employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.*, if she is convicted. Additionally, after investigating the allegations, on April 30, 2019, the IAIU substantiated Sexual Abuse – Sexual Molestation regarding to Carafa's interactions with the minor student.

Carafa currently holds a Teacher of Elementary School Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Elementary School with Subject Matter Specialization: Social Students in Grades 5-8 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Elementary Grades K-6 Certificate, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate, Teacher of Elementary School with Subject Matter Specialization: Social Students in Grades 5-8, and Supervisor Certificate. Upon review of the above information, at its meeting of November 1, 2019, the Board voted to issue Carafa an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be suspended pending the resolution of the criminal proceedings against her.

The Board sent Carafa the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on November 7, 2019. The Order provided that Carafa must file an Answer within 30 days. Carafa filed a response on January 3, 2020. In that response, counsel indicated that due to the pending criminal matter, Carafa could not give any statement or answer any questions about the allegations against her. The response requested that the Board not hold it against Carafa as she is asserting her constitutional rights.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on January 27, 2020, the Board sent Carafa a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Carafa was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause constituted conduct unbecoming a certificate holder, as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board found just cause to take action against her certificates. It also explained that upon review of the charges against her and the legal arguments tendered in her defense, the Board would determine if her offense warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Carafa was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Carafa did not file a response.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter, therefore, is whether there is just cause to take action against Carafa's certificates. At its meeting of June 26, 2020, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and Carafa's response. The Board determined that no material facts related to Carafa's offense were in dispute since she did not deny that she was charged with the criminal offenses. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(h)*.

The Board must now determine whether Carafa's conduct and charges, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represent just cause to act against her certificates pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. The Board finds that they do.

The Board may revoke or suspend the certification of any certificate holder on the basis of demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher or other just cause. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.4*. In enacting the Criminal History Review statute, *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* in 1986, the Legislature sought to protect public school pupils from contact with individuals whom it deemed to be dangerous. Individuals convicted of crimes such as aggravated criminal sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child fall squarely within this category. This strong legislative policy statement is in accord with the Commissioner's long-held belief that teachers must serve as role models for students. "Teachers... are professional employees to whom the people have entrusted the care and custody of ... school children. This heavy duty requires a degree of self-restraint and controlled behavior rarely requisite to other types of employment." *Tenure of Sammons*, 1972 *S.L.D.* 302, 321.

Moreover, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident, if sufficiently flagrant. *Redcay v. State Bd. of Educ.*, 130 *N.J.L.* 369, 371 (Sup. Ct. 1943), *aff'd*, 131 *N.J.L.* 326 (E & A 1944). In this case, Carafa has been charged with Aggravated Criminal Sexual Contact and Endangering the Welfare of a Child. The Board therefore finds that Carafa's potential disqualification from service in the public schools of this State because of her charges for such serious offenses provide just cause to take action against her certificates.

Accordingly, on June 26, 2020, the Board voted to suspend Carafa's teaching certificates pending resolution of the criminal proceedings against her. On this 30<sup>th</sup> day of July 2020, the Board formally adopted its written decision to suspend and it is therefore ORDERED that

Stephanie A. Carafa's Teacher of Elementary School Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Elementary School with Subject Matter Specialization: Social Students in Grades 5-8 Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing, Teacher of Elementary Grades K-6 Certificate, Teacher of Students with Disabilities Certificate, Teacher of Elementary School with Subject Matter Specialization: Social Students in Grades 5-8, and Supervisor Certificate be suspended, effective immediately. If the charges are resolved in her favor, she shall notify the Board for appropriate action regarding the suspension order. It is further ORDERED that Carafa return her certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, PO Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

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Rani Singh, Secretary  
State Board of Examiners

**Date of Mailing:**  
**via certified and regular mail**

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.