

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS  
CANDICE O. BLAND : ORDER OF REVOCATION  
\_\_\_\_\_ : DOCKET NO: 2223-149

At its meeting of March 3, 2023, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information provided by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and the Office of Student Protection (OSP) regarding Bland. On or about November 9, 2021, Bland was indicted on charges of Official Misconduct (2<sup>nd</sup> degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:30-2(a); Theft by Failure to Make Required Disposition (3<sup>rd</sup> degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:20-9; Deceptive Business Practices (4<sup>th</sup> degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:21-7(h); and Misconduct by Corporate Official (3<sup>rd</sup> degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:21-9(c). It was alleged that Bland used her company, Spanish Study Abroad in Andalucia, LLC, to collect money from students and parents for a summer 2020 study abroad trip and did not properly return the funds when the trip was cancelled. She collected the funds while in the capacity of a teacher and world language supervisor.

On January 31, 2023, Bland pled guilty to Official Misconduct (2<sup>nd</sup> degree), N.J.S.A. 2C:30-2(a), received an Order of Postponement and was entered into a Pre-Trial Intervention program for a period of 36 months. She was also ordered to make restitution payments totaling \$14,400 over a 36-month period, perform community service, and forfeit her public employment, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2C:51-2.

Bland currently holds a Teacher of Spanish Certificate of Eligibility, a Teacher of Spanish certificate, a Supervisor certificate, and a Teacher of English as a Second Language Certificate of Eligibility. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting

of April 13, 2023 to issue Bland an Order to Show Cause as to why her certificates should not be revoked.

The Board sent Bland the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on April 17, 2023. The Order provided that Bland must file an Answer within 30 days pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(b). The certified mail was returned as “Unclaimed” and the regular mail was not returned. Bland did not respond. The Board sent Bland a second notice with the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on June 6, 2023, providing Bland an additional 15 days to respond pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(c). The certified mail was received, the return card signed, and the regular mail was not returned. Bland submitted an Answer on July 28, 2023 in which she admitted every paragraph of the Order to Show Cause.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(e), on October 13, 2023, the Board sent Bland a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Bland 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 Bland’s offense warranted action against her certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Bland was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. The certified mail card was returned with signature and the regular mail was not returned. Bland filed a response on November 5, 2023 and requested to appear before the Board. On March 1, 2024, Bland appeared before the Board to offer testimony on the sanction issue.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Bland’s conduct constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. At its meeting of April 11, 2024, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause, Bland’s Answer, Bland’s written statement to the Board on the sanction issue, and Bland’s testimony before the Board. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Bland’s offense were in dispute since she did not deny that she engaged in the alleged conduct. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(h)*. After reviewing the allegations, the Board found that Bland engaged in unbecoming conduct. Bland’s actions, in taking money from students and/or parents for a study abroad trip and not returning the money when the trip was canceled, and pleading guilty to official misconduct, were inappropriate and criminal, and conduct we do not expect of an educator.

The Board must now determine whether Bland’s conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represents just cause to act against her certificates pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.5*. A “violation of the implicit standard of good behavior which devolves upon one who stands in the public eye as an upholder of that which is morally and legally correct” may provide the basis for a finding of unbecoming conduct. *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228 N.J. 4, 14 (2017) (quoting *Karins v. City of Atlantic City*, 152 N.J. 532, 555 (1998)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The “elastic” concept of “conduct unbecoming” includes “conduct which adversely affects the morale or efficiency” of the public entity or “which has a tendency to destroy public respect for . . . [public] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services.” *In re Emmons*, 63 N.J. Super. 136, 140 (App. Div. 1960) (internal quotations and citations omitted); *see also Bound Brook Bd. of Educ.*, 228 N.J. at 13. 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 (1943), *aff'd*, 131 N.J.L. 326 (E & A 1944).

In this instance, the Board finds that Bland's conduct provides just cause to take action against her certificates. The record established that Bland pled guilty to Official Misconduct (2nd degree) as a result of her actions regarding the money for the study abroad trip. Bland's conduct falls far short of that expected of a role model.

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*. The Board's long-standing belief is that teachers must serve as role models for their 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.

Here, the Board believes that the only appropriate response to Bland's breach is the revocation of her certificates. Students and their parents should be able to trust that a teacher will take appropriate actions with money presented for the purposes of a school trip. Moreover, Bland agreed to forfeit public employment as part of her plea and entry into the Pre-Trial Intervention program. As a result of her forfeiture of public employment, Bland is forever disqualified from holding any office or position of honor, trust, or profit under this State or any of its administrative or political subdivisions.

Accordingly, on April 11, 2024, the Board voted to revoke Candice O. Bland's Teacher of Spanish Certificate of Eligibility, Teacher of Spanish certificate, Supervisor certificate, and Teacher of English as a Second Language Certificate of Eligibility. On this 23<sup>rd</sup> day May 2024,

the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that Bland's certificates be revoked, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Bland return her certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, P.O. 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.