

***THE NORTH CAROLINA SHERIFFS'  
EDUCATION AND TRAINING STANDARDS COMMISSION  
FINAL AGENCY DECISION MINUTES***

**DATE:** June 12, 2025

**TIME:** 1:00 P.M.

**LOCATION:** Embassy Suites by Hilton Charlotte Concord  
5400 John Q. Hammons Dr. NW Concord North Carolina 28027

**SUBMITTED BY:** Willliam Mitchell, Director

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**Sheriff Alan Norman**

The North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission's Final Agency Decision meeting was called to order by Sheriff Alan Norman on Thursday, June 12, 2025. Chair Norman welcomed everyone to Cabarrus County. Chair Norman requested a roll call of Commission members. Alex Radford recorded the following:

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Sheriff Chip Hughes	Sheriff Ed McMahon (Probable Cause)
Sheriff Van Shaw	Sheriff Mike Roberson (Probable Cause)
Sheriff Alan Norman	Sheriff Don Brown (Probable Cause)
Sheriff Terry Johnson	Sheriff Jeff Crisco (Probable Cause)
Sheriff James McVicker	Sheriff Lowell Griffin
Mr. Jamie Markham	Ms. Jennifer Fisher

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Sheriff Jack Smith
Sheriff Banks Hinceman
Sheriff Shelton White
Mr. George Dunlap
Mr. Marc Nichols

**STAFF**

Joy Strickland	North Carolina Department of Justice
Steven Wilson	North Carolina Department of Justice
Robin Pendergraft	North Carolina Sheriffs' Standards Division
Alex Radford	North Carolina Sheriffs' Standards Division

Alex Radford announced that a quorum was present.

Chair Norman noted that Mr. Steven Wilson, Assistant Attorney General, would serve as the Commission Legal Counsel. Mr. Wilson read the ethics statement to the Commission members and reminded everyone that both the Petitioner and the Respondent would be limited to 30 minutes of oral argument.

Chair Norman welcomed everyone to the North Carolina Sheriffs’ Training and Standards Commission meeting and asked the visitors to stand and introduce themselves.

### **VISITORS**

Eddie Caldwell	North Carolina Sheriffs’ Association
Lauren Earnhardt	North Carolina Sheriffs' Association
Teena McMahon	Sheriff McMahon’s wife
Trenton Taylor	Davidson County Sheriff’s Office
William Buck	New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office
Mikael Gross	Attorney
Craig Andrew Poteat	Davie County Sheriff’s Office
William L. Hill	Attorney
Michael E. Lashley	Bladen County Sheriff’s Office
Thomas Morgan Johnson II	Bladen County Sheriff’s Office
Jeff Tyler	Bladen County Sheriff’s Office
Alexandra McCaskill	Jackson County Sheriff’s Office

### **II. OATHS**

**Sheriff Alan Norman**

Chair Norman asked Alex Radford to administer oaths for re-appointed members, Sheriff Terry Johnson and Sheriff Ed McMahon.

### **III. APPROVAL OF MARCH FAD MINUTES**

**Sheriff Alan Norman**

Chair Norman requested a motion to approve minutes for the March 20, 2025, Final Agency Decisions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Terry Johnson to approve the minutes from the March 20, 2025, Final Agency Decision meeting; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION CARRIED**

**IV. FINAL AGENCY DECISION**

**Joy Strickland**

**\*Trenton Allen Taylor**

Mr. Taylor was present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Trenton Taylor. The Petitioner was certified with the Ashe County Sheriff’s Office on August 18, 2020, and terminated on March 15, 2021, following an on-duty incident involving a woman (referred to as the AV). He was later hired by the Davidson County Sheriff’s Office on November 8, 2021, and is now a Canine Handler.

On February 28, 2021, while on duty, Petitioner had a late-night encounter with the AV, a woman in her early 50s known for prior suspicious complaints. The AV came to the station around 3:00 AM, claiming she felt unsafe at home. She soon left. Around 3:30 AM, Petitioner saw her sleeping in her car at a gas station and offered to follow her home. After checking the house, the AV invited him in, and they engaged in consensual “making out” while Petitioner was in uniform and on duty. Petitioner admitted to the encounter, described it as consensual, and was later terminated after internal questioning.

Melissa Bowman, a Commission Investigator, reviewed Petitioner’s separation report, which raised concerns about moral character due to an alleged assault on a female. Petitioner, AV, and Detective Jennifer DeSpain were interviewed. AV failed to appear at the hearing and had no clear memory of the event; she denied trauma. Bowman noted the AV was “matter of fact” during the interview. Petitioners consistently stated the interaction was consensual. Petitioner was 22 years old at the time; AV was significantly older. A motion to dismiss the assault allegation was granted due to insufficient evidence and hearsay.

Sheriff Richard Simmons Jr., Lieutenant Jeff Barber, and Deputy Corey Edwards from Davidson County Sheriff’s Office testified in strong support of Petitioner’s moral character and work ethics. The petitioner also received a commendation for apprehending a felon and was promoted. He is now married, and his wife and co-workers showed courtroom support during his testimony. Mr. Taylor acknowledged poor judgment but emphasized the consensual nature of the encounter.

The allegation of assault was dismissed for lack of competent evidence. The case largely involved questions of on-duty conduct and moral character rather than criminal behavior. The Petitioner retained support from his current department and presented strong character evidence in his favor.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby ordered that Petitioner’s conduct in this case constitutes lack of good moral character, but no action is being taken to revoke his certification as he has regained his good character. It is highly recommended to any employing Sheriff that Petitioner’s conduct be closely monitored.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin in the matter of Trenton Allen Taylor; Adopt the proposed final agency decision that Petitioner’s Justice officer certification is not **REVOKED**; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**\*Craig Andrew Poteat**

Mr. Poteat was present for the proceedings and Attorney Mikael Gross was representing Mr. Poteat. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Mr. Poteat.

Petitioner was sworn in as an inactive reserve deputy with the Davie County Sheriff’s Office on December 6, 2022. In this role, he retained his certification but did not perform active law enforcement duties or carry a firearm. An investigation into his qualifications to serve as a certified Justice Officer was initiated. The assigned investigator, Melissa Bowman, did not conduct an independent investigation but relied solely on a prior report by Judy Kelley, from the NC Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission. Investigator Bowman did not contact the Petitioner or any relevant witnesses during her review, nor did she attempt to verify the moral character of Petitioner at the time of her investigation.

Petitioner worked at the Iredell County Sheriff’s Office for over 24 years, rising to Chief Deputy Sheriff. He resigned on November 1, 2021, following an internal investigation into an extramarital affair with a subordinate deputy, Amy Dyson. The relationship was consensual and lasted from 2018 to 2020. There was no written policy prohibiting the relationship or their conduct. One allegation involved misuse of travel reimbursements for staying in the same hotel room on work trips; however, this was not backed by a clear policy violation. The District Attorney declined to issue a Giglio letter, determining that the Petitioner would not be disqualified from testifying in court.

Petitioner was hired as Chief of Police in Cooleemee in July 2022. During his application, he fully disclosed the prior affair and resignation. The North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission investigated and found him to have the requisite moral character, issuing his certification. After the Cooleemee Police Department was disbanded, he joined Davie County in a non-active role. No new allegations of misconduct arose following his resignation from Iredell.

After receiving Petitioner’s F-4 (appointment report), Respondent reviewed his F-5 (separation report), which reflected no substantiated rule violations or untruthfulness. Despite this, Respondent initiated a review based only on the earlier report by Judy Kelley and later determined probable cause existed to revoke Petitioner’s certification due to lack of good moral character. This decision came after the Petitioner had already been re-certified by the state’s standards commission.

On March 21, 2024, a Probable Cause Committee found grounds for disqualification. Mr. Poteat received a notice of revocation in May 2024 and requested a hearing. He submitted character reference letters from Chief Deputy Bert Connelly and former Mayor Jessica Almond, both attesting to his honesty, trustworthiness, and leadership. There is no evidence that Petitioner was untruthful at any point, and he was consistently honest and forthcoming about his actions.

Respondent provided no new factual basis for Petitioner’s disqualification beyond conduct that had already been evaluated by another certifying authority, which had found him qualified. Mr. Poteat accepted responsibility, remained honest, and demonstrated rehabilitation and moral integrity since the events that led to his resignation in 2021.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby proposed that Petitioner’s justice officer certification is Revoked indefinitely for lacking the good moral character required of a justice officer.

The petitioner’s attorney, Mikael Gross presented oral arguments regarding the case.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes in the matter of Craig Poteat; to **ADOPT** the proposed final agency decision and that Petitioner’s certification be **REVOKED** indefinitely; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**\*Michael Eugene Lashley**

Mr. Lashley was present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Mr. Lashley. On July 16, 202, Mr. Lashley graduated from Basic Law Enforcement Training. On January 1, 2023, He was appointed as a Detention Officer by the Bladen County Sheriff’s Office, who submitted a certification request to the NC Sheriffs’ Education and Training Standards Commission. The petitioner’s application triggered an investigation due to a 1999 felony insurance fraud conviction, which had been expunged.

In 2021, Mr. Lashley applied for law enforcement certification via the Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission for employment with the Rowland Police Department. That application was denied due to the felony conviction but later reversed after a contested case hearing before Judge Lassiter, who granted probationary certification in May 2023.

The 2021 case included two written statements titled “Explanation of Expunction.” The second statement, submitted to CJETS, was allegedly not authored by the Petitioner and improperly notarized. The Tribunal found the second statement to be not legally notarized and assigned it no evidentiary weight, accepting Petitioner’s claim he had never seen or signed it.

The Sheriffs’ Education and Training Standards Commission’s Probable Cause Committee reviewed Petitioner’s history, including the disputed 1999 felony conviction, and issued a notice of intent to deny certification based on the felony under 12 N.C.A.C. 10B .0204(a)(1). The petitioner filed for a Contested Case Hearing, which followed with extensive testimony and review. The petitioner had rented a pressure washer, which was later stolen and resold by his father-in-law. He filed an insurance claim, believing the item was stolen, and was later charged with fraud with felony insurance. Petitioner claimed he accepted a plea deal without legal guidance, fearing for his family’s housing and stability. He also stated he had worked as a confidential informant for law enforcement in exchange for leniency, a deal that was never honored in court. The officer who charged Petitioner, Detective Ricky Britt, was later convicted of federal crimes in the “Operation Tarnished Badge” corruption scandal.

Despite past issues, Petitioner has been promoted twice, from Detention Officer to Courthouse Security to Deputy Sheriff (Patrol). He has received community recognition and awards for distinguished service. He helped free a wrongly detained individual through his own off-duty investigation. Mr. Lashley expressed deep commitment to law enforcement values, a desire to help his community, and emotionally denied wrongdoing, stating he would never tarnish the badge.

The Tribunal found Petitioner credible, particularly in denying authorship of the contested statement and in recounting the circumstances of his 1999 conviction. He has since proven himself as a dedicated and effective officer, with consistent advancement and community praise.

This case reflects issues of justice, rehabilitation, past corruption, and second chances within the law enforcement certification system.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby proposed ordered that Petitioner be issued certification and placed on probation for one year during which petitioner shall not violate any State, federal or local laws or rules of this Commission, the Criminal Justice Commission or the Company or Campus Police Program. This decision is narrowly tailored to address the unique fact of a possible wrongful conviction that was subsequently expunged.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin in the matter of Michael Lashley; **ADOPT** the proposed final agency decision; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

#### **\*Joshua Andrew Phillips**

Mr. Phillips was not present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Mr. Phillips. The Petitioner was certified as a Detention Officer with Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office in September 2018 but went inactive in January 2019. He later worked as a certified EMT in Rutherford County (July 2021–April 2022) but was terminated after a positive drug test. After termination, the Petitioner applied to Cumberland County Sheriff’s Office and Shelby Police Department. He is currently employed again with the Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office, which is aware of the current legal proceedings.

The agency found probable cause that Petitioner lacked the good moral character required for law enforcement certification, due to being untruthful about his termination and the drug test, misleading statements on official paperwork, positive drug test for marijuana, admission to using unprescribed hydrocodone and providing hydrocodone to a relative.

Mr. Phillips gave multiple conflicting reasons for leaving Rutherford County EMS. He claimed resignation to "pursue another opportunity" or "what I really want to do." Officially, he was terminated after a positive drug test failure. The history of drug use also shifted across forms and testimony. Provided varying timeframes, sources of hydrocodone (wife vs. aunt), and reasons for use. Initially, he omitted some drug use details. Admitted to making marijuana edibles for his wife in 2018, using hydrocodone in 2020–2021, and testing positive for marijuana in 2022. Mr. Phillips attempted to downplay the recency of drug use and evaded questions about the hydrocodone source. Ultimately, he acknowledged obtaining the drugs from his aunt, not his wife.

Mitigating Factors Considered by Administrative Law Judge: Honorable U.S. Marine Corps service. Past health problems and the loss of his wife to cancer. Currently there is stable family life and positive employment with Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office. He also had multiple letters of character reference. The Judge’s Conclusion; was a close case, with evidence both supporting and opposing revocation. Found Petitioner tried to minimize and misrepresent his drug history. His explanations for inconsistencies were not credible. Mr. Phillips showed initial reluctance to admit wrongdoing, but the court also deferred somewhat to the Cleveland County Sheriff’s Office support for his continued employment.

The case centers on Petitioner’s drug use, inconsistent statements, and lack of candor in official documents and testimony. While mitigating personal circumstances and current employment stability were acknowledged, substantial credibility concerns remain regarding his truthfulness and judgment, key traits required for law enforcement certification.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby proposed ordered that Petitioner’s justice officer certification is revoked indefinitely for lacking good moral character required of a justice officer.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Terry Johnson to enter closed

session; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION**

**CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin to enter open

session; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION**

**CARRIED**

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes in the matter of Joshua Phillips; **ADOPT** the proposed final agency decision, the certification is **REVOKED** for an indefinite period; seconded by Sheriff Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**

**\*William Lee Buck III**

Mr. Buck was present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Mr. Buck. William Buck has applied for certification as a detention officer through the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office. In the application submitted, he disclosed a prior misdemeanor larceny charge, which stemmed from a 2021 incident where he was accused of taking a package from an individual, Ms. Delores Smith's porch, while working as a Domino's Pizza delivery driver.

Ms. Smith, the victim, testified that she tracked a missing Amazon package via her doorbell camera and saw the Domino's driver—later identified as the Petitioner—take it after delivering a pizza to her neighbor. She confronted Mr. Buck at Domino's location, but he denied taking the package and allegedly called her a liar. A sheriff's deputy later intervened, and Mr. Buck retrieved the package from his car and returned it. Ms. Smith confirmed that its contents were intact. The Petitioner claimed he took the package for safekeeping, intending to return it later. However, he admitted that he did not knock on nearby doors or take the package to the apartment office. He also acknowledged that this was the only time in his three years as a delivery driver he had taken such action. He completed 90–100 hours of community service and was arrested but did not go to court.

The Sheriff's Office investigation supported Ms. Smith's version of events. Based on the findings, the Sheriff's Standards Division found probable cause to deny the Petitioner's certification due to the commission of a class B misdemeanor within five years of application. The Petitioner had already been working at the detention facility since February 2024 and had trained other officers.

Ultimately, while the Petitioner maintained he took the package with good intentions, his actions led to a misdemeanor larceny charge, and the incident was deemed serious enough to justify denial of his certification application.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby proposed that Petitioner's justice officer certification is denied until July 1, 2026, due to the Commission of the Class B misdemeanor, misdemeanor larceny in violation of N.C.G.S. § 14- 72(a), within the five-year period prior to application.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff James McVicker. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Terry Johnson to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Van Shaw. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker in the matter of William Buck III; **ADOPT** the proposed final agency decision, the certification is **DENIED** for a period of **ONE** year; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**\*Alexandria Elise McCaskill**

Ms. McCaskill was present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Ms. McCaskill. The Petitioner initially sought detention officer certification through the Haywood County Sheriff’s Office but separated in May 2021. She later applied for certification again through the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office in January 2024 and separated in October 2024.

Her separation from Haywood County was marked by a report citing involvement in a criminal investigation and a substantiated allegation of untruthfulness. Specifically, in October 2020, while enrolled in a mandatory detention officer course at Haywood Community College, Petitioner cheated on a contraband test by altering her answers after receiving her graded test back. This act was later admitted by the Petitioner after initially denying it when questioned by a supervisor, Lt. Chris Shell. As a result, she was removed from the course in November 2020 but was still allowed to continue working in a limited capacity for the remainder of her certification window.

After leaving law enforcement, she briefly worked as a tattoo artist before returning to the field via the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office. Her employment there ended due to a supervisory communication issue, not misconduct.

The Respondent’s Probable Cause Committee found probable cause to deny her certification application due to her prior cheating and dishonesty, which were considered violations involving fraud and misrepresentation. Petitioner acknowledged her past misconduct, expressed regret, and stated a desire to continue working in a detention facility and eventually become a deputy sheriff.

She provided five letters of reference, including one from Jackson County Sheriff Doug Farmer, in support of her request for an administrative hearing.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is hereby ordered that Petitioner’s justice officer certification should be denied for a period of five years but that the period of denial should be suspended, and if Petitioner is hired by a Sheriff’s Office in North Carolina, that she be placed on a one year period of probation during which time she successfully complete the required detention officer certification course.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff Van Shaw. **MOTION CARRIED**

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Van Shaw to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION CARRIED**

**A MOTION** was made by Sheriff Lowell Griffin in the matter of Alexandra McCaskill; **ADOPT** the proposed final agency decision, the certification is **DENIED** for a period of **FIVE** years; seconded by Sheriff Terry Johnson. **MOTION CARRIED**

**V. LEGAL COUNSEL’S REPORT**

**Joy Strickland**

Ms. Joy Strickland summarized the Legal Counsel’s Report, and reviewed the various stages of litigation for the administrative cases as follows:

- 34 active cases.
- 4 cases closed since the March 20, 2025, meeting.
- 6 cases pending judicial review

**VI. RECESS**

A **MOTION** by Sheriff James McVicker to recess the June 2025 Sheriff’s Final Agency Decision meeting: Seconded by Sheriff Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**