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

DATE: March 12, 2026

TIME: 1:00 P.M.

LOCATION: DoubleTree by Hilton New Bern
100 Middle Street, New Bern, North Carolina, 28560

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, March 12, 2026. Chair Norman welcomed everyone to Craven County. Sheriff Chip Hughes also spoke and welcomed everyone. Chair Norman requested a roll call from Commission members. Robin Pendergraft recorded the following:

MEMBERS PRESENT		MEMBERS ABSENT
Sheriff Jack Smith	Sheriff Ed McMahon (Probable Cause)	Sheriff Van Shaw
Sheriff Chip Hughes	Sheriff Mike Roberson (Probable Cause)	Sheriff Terry Johnson
Sheriff Banks Hinceman	Sheriff Don Brown (Probable Cause)	
Sheriff Alan Norman	Sheriff Shelton White (Probable Cause)	
Sheriff James McVicker	Sheriff Jeff Crisco (Probable Casuse)	
Sheriff Lowell Griffin	Mr. Wayne Branch	
Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr.	Mr. Jamie Markham	
Ms. Jennifer Fisher		

STAFF

Joy Strickland	North Carolina Department of Justice
Steven Wilson	North Carolina Department of Justice

Ian Courts	North Carolina Department of Justice
William Mitchell	North Carolina Sheriffs' Standards Division
Robin Pendergraft	North Carolina Criminal Justice Division

Robin Pendergraft 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

Michael Hoffman	Iredell County Emergency Communications
Starlene Wolfe	Iredell County Emergency Communications
Laz Ramos	Pender County Sheriff's Office
Willie Murray	Pender County Sheriff's Office
Eric Lowe	Pender County Sheriff's Office
Barry K. Henline	Law Offices of Barry K Henline, PLLC
Eddie Caldwell	North Carolina Sheriff's Association
Scottie Dial	Scottland County Sheriffs Office
Scott Thomas	Law Office of Greene, Wilson, Styron & Thomas

II. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 2025 FAD MINUTES — Sheriff Alan Norman

Chair Norman requested a motion to approve minutes for the December 4, 2026, Final Agency Decisions.

> A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to approve the minutes from the December 4, 2025, Final Agency Decision meeting; seconded by Sheriff Banks Hinceman. **MOTION CARRIED**

Joy Strickland stated to the Commission that Earnest Brown's cases had been postponed.

III. FINAL AGENCY DECISION — Joy Strickland / Ian Courts

***Eric Robert Lowe**

Mr. Lowe was present for the proceedings. Ms. Joy Strickland presented oral arguments regarding the case against Eric Robert Lowe.

The In 2023, the petitioner applied for justice officer certification through the Pender County Sheriff's Office and disclosed prior use of several drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, mushrooms, morphine, Suboxone, Percocet, Adderall, and cyclobenzaprine. However, the Commission found that he had previously made material misrepresentations on earlier certification applications.

Specifically, in a 2021 application to the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, he failed to disclose prior use of cocaine, mushrooms, morphine, Suboxone, and Percocet on Form F3. Additionally, in a 2020 application with the Department of Adult Correction, he answered "No" to a question asking whether he had ever used illegal drugs, despite prior drug use.

The Commission's Probable Cause Committee determined these discrepancies were knowing and material misrepresentations and recommended denying his justice officer certification for at least five years.

At the administrative hearing, the petitioner admitted he failed to disclose his drug history on the earlier forms. He explained that he believed the applications referred only to recent drug use and feared he would not be hired if he answered truthfully. He expressed remorse, apologized, and accepted responsibility for his actions.

A lieutenant from Pender County Sheriff's Office testified in support of the petitioner, describing him as honest, eager to learn, and committed to serving as an officer. The lieutenant stated that the petitioner deserved a second chance and could become a good officer with proper guidance and supervision.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law and in accordance with Respondent's Proposed Final Decision, the Commission suspends its proposed denial of Petitioner's certification and Petitioner be placed on probation for a period of two years on the condition that Petitioner not further violate any federal law, any law of the State of North Carolina, or any of the Commission's Administrative Rules during that period and his certification be granted.

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 James McVicker. **MOTION CARRIED**

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Banks Hinceman to enter open session; seconded by Sheriff Jack Smith. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Chip Hughes in the matter of Eric Robert Lowe; Amend the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **GRANT PROBATIONARY CERTIFICATION FOR FIVE YEARS**; seconded by Sheriff James McVicker. **MOTION CARRIED**

***Jalynn Murphy**

Ms. Murphy was not present for the proceedings. Mr. Ian Courts presented oral arguments regarding the case against Jalynn Murphy.

The petitioner applied for law enforcement certification while seeking employment with both the North Carolina Department of Adult Corrections (DAC) and the Nash County Sheriff's Office in late 2024. She had prior law enforcement-related experience in Maryland and moved to North Carolina in 2023. Because both hiring processes occurred simultaneously, she planned to accept whichever job became available first.

As part of DAC's hiring process, the petitioner underwent three urine drug tests after the first two produced inconclusive results. The third test, conducted on October 10, 2024, allegedly showed traces of marijuana. However, the petitioner was never provided copies of the inconclusive results, and no medical review officer testified to authenticate or explain the positive test. The petitioner consistently denied ever using marijuana or any illegal drugs.

The day after DAC's positive test result was reported, the Nash County Sheriff's Office required the petitioner to complete another drug test through the Nash County Health Department, which came back negative for all illegal substances. Despite this, DAC withdrew its conditional employment offer, and CJ Standards later declared the petitioner ineligible for corrections or criminal justice certification in North Carolina for at least three years based on the October 10 test. Importantly, CJ Standards failed to notify her of any appeal rights.

The Nash County Sheriff's Office nevertheless hired the petitioner as a detention officer in December 2024 after further review, including a polygraph examination that supported her claims of innocence. Her supervisors and the sheriff expressed confidence in her credibility and wanted to retain her employment.

Respondent later issued a Notice of Probable Cause to deny her justice officer certification based on two grounds: (1) CJ Standards' denial of her corrections certification, and (2) the positive October 10 drug test. During the hearing, Respondent's counsel acknowledged that because CJ Standards failed to provide appeal rights, Respondent could not lawfully rely on the CJ Standards denial itself as grounds for denying certification. As a result, the only remaining basis for denial was the disputed positive drug test.

Throughout the proceedings, the petitioner gave consistent statements regarding the testing process and her denial of drug use. The Tribunal and Commission found both the petitioner and Respondent's witness, Ms. Sirena Jones, to be credible witnesses.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, by a preponderance of the evidence, the Commission hereby orders Petitioner's certification be granted and Petitioner's be placed on probation for a period of one year due to the extenuating circumstances brought out at the administrative hearing.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter closed session; seconded by Commissioner Wayne Branch. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Banks Hinceman to enter open session; seconded by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker in the matter of Jalynn Murphy; Adopt the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **GRANT CERTIFICATION**; seconded by Sheriff Jack Smith. **MOTION CARRIED**

***Leonard Alexander**

Mr. Alexander was not present for the proceedings. Mr. Ian Courts presented oral arguments regarding the case against Leonard Alexander.

Petitioner was an applicant with the Albemarle District Jail. The Petitioner received the denial letter by certified mail regarding a positive drug test result on August 27, 2025, and both parties were subsequently served with a Notice of Contested Case and an Order requiring prehearing statements within thirty days. While Respondent timely filed its prehearing statement on October 7, 2025, the Petitioner failed to submit any filing by the deadline. The Tribunal then issued a second order on November 5, 2025, directing the Petitioner to file and serve a prehearing statement by November 18, 2025, and expressly warned that failure to comply could result in dismissal of the contested case. Despite this warning, the Petitioner failed to file any pleading or document as required by the Tribunal's orders. The matter was scheduled for hearing during the week of January 19, 2026, in Ayden, North Carolina, but the Petitioner's repeated failures to comply with procedural requirements hindered the orderly preparation and management of the case.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the tribunal proposes the respondent dismiss this case without prejudice.

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 Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Banks Hinceman to enter open session; seconded by Commissioner Wayne Branch. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Alan Norman in the matter of Leonard Alexander; Amend the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **DENY CERTIFICATION**; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION CARRIED**

***Michael Hoffman**

Mr. Hoffman was present for the proceedings. Mr. Ian Courts presented oral arguments regarding the case against Michael Hoffman.

The Petitioner received a probationary appointment as a telecommunicator with the Iredell County Emergency Communications in April 2023 and, in his December 2022 application, disclosed prior felony and misdemeanor charges from New York dating back to 2003. In May 2025, the Petitioner was properly notified of and given the opportunity to appear before the Commission's Probable Cause Committee, which determined there was probable cause to deny certification based on alleged felony commission. The Petitioner appealed the decision, and a hearing on the merits was held in November 2025. At the hearing, Respondent's investigator testified that the charges involved allegations of abuse against a former girlfriend, although the alleged victim did not appear. The Petitioner credibly testified that the original felony sexual abuse charge had been reduced to a misdemeanor, and that the misdemeanor charge was ultimately dismissed after two unsuccessful prosecutions, including one mistrial caused by improper evidence introduced by the prosecution. The Petitioner was never retried and later received a certificate of relief from disabilities in New York that removed employment barriers stemming from a contempt conviction. Respondent ultimately conceded that there was insufficient evidence to reasonably conclude that the Petitioner committed the alleged felony, and the Tribunal found that the greater weight of credible evidence established that the Petitioner did not commit the felony offense underlying the Commission's proposed denial of certification.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, petitioners certification should be granted.

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 Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Banks Hinceman to enter open session; seconded by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. in the matter of Michael Hoffman; Adopt the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **GRANT CERTIFICATION**; seconded by Sheriff Chip Hughes. **MOTION CARRIED**

***Scottie Dial**

Mr. Dial was present for the proceedings. Mr. Dial had his attorney represent him for the hearing Mr. Scott Thomas Mr. Ian Courts presented oral arguments regarding the case against Scottie Dial.

The petitioner, applicant for detention officer certification with the Scotland County Sheriff's Office, has been married for more than 25 years and endured significant personal hardship after his wife suffered severe mental health breakdowns that resulted in repeated hospitalization and financial devastation for the family. In 2004, during this period of extreme stress, he pled guilty to four misdemeanor counts of misrepresentation to obtain employment security benefits and one misdemeanor worthless check charge, paying all restitution. More than twenty years later, while applying for certification, he disclosed the ESC offenses on his personal history statement but unintentionally omitted the worthless check charge, later explaining credibly that he had forgotten about it because he never appeared in court on that matter. In 2025, the respondent agency-initiated proceedings to deny his certification under regulations allowing denial for individuals with four or more Class A or B misdemeanors. Although the petitioner missed the Probable Cause Committee hearing due to his wife's renewed mental health crisis and the significant travel distance, testimony from supervisors at the sheriff's office strongly supported his character, work ethic, and effectiveness as an officer. Chief Deputy Bryan Knight described him as exceptionally motivated, physically dedicated, dependable during inmate altercations, and among the most hardworking trainees he had encountered in over two decades, emphasizing that he rarely appears at hearings

to support officers and did so because of the petitioner's outstanding character. The evidence further showed that the petitioner had committed no additional misconduct in the two decades since the offenses, despite ongoing family challenges, demonstrating rehabilitation, maturity, and a sustained commitment to serving his community honorably.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, by a preponderance of the evidence, the Commission hereby orders that Petitioners certification be granted and Petitioner be placed on probationary period for two years due to the extenuating circumstances brought out at the administrative hearing.

Chair Norman asked the Commission if there were any questions.

A **MOTION** was made by Commissioner Wayne Branch to enter closed session; seconded by Sheriff Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter open session; seconded by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff Jack Smith in the matter of Scottie Dial; Adopt the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **GRANT PROBATIONARY CERTIFICATION FOR TWO YEARS**; seconded by Sheriff Banks Hinceman. **MOTION CARRIED**

***Willie Murray IV**

Mr. Murray was present for the proceedings. Ian Courts presented oral arguments regarding the case against Willie Murray.

The Tribunal found that both parties were properly before the Administrative Law Judge and the Commission, with proper jurisdiction, venue, and notice, regarding the Petitioner's application for deputy sheriff certification with the Pender County Sheriff's Office. The Commission, acting under its authority to certify and discipline justice officers, sought to deny certification based on an allegation that the Petitioner had committed a felony by possessing a weapon on educational property in 2012 while he was a student at Pender High School. The Petitioner had disclosed the prior charge on his application, noting that it was later dismissed. Evidence presented at the hearing showed that the Petitioner had previously gone hunting with a shotgun that

malfunctioned, after which he disassembled the firearm and placed it in a locked toolbox in his truck with the intent to have it examined by a gunsmith. Several days later, after using a different shotgun for hunting before school, the Petitioner removed the operational firearm from his truck but forgot about the disassembled shotgun still stored in the toolbox. School officials later observed hunting-related items in the truck bed, prompting the school resource officer to search the vehicle. The Petitioner immediately informed the officer about the disassembled firearm, cooperated fully, and the officer confirmed the shotgun was inoperable. Although the Petitioner was charged with possession of a weapon on educational property, the charge was ultimately dismissed. At the administrative hearing, the Petitioner credibly testified that he did not knowingly possess or carry the firearm onto school property, explaining that he had forgotten the disassembled shotgun remained in the toolbox. The Tribunal found his testimony truthful, credible, and consistent with the documentary evidence, including the arresting officer's report indicating the firearm had been placed in the toolbox several days earlier. The Tribunal concluded that Respondent failed to prove the Petitioner knowingly possessed or carried a firearm onto school property and found that the dismissed criminal charge alone was insufficient evidence that he committed the alleged felony offense.

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the Commission orders that Petitioner's application for certification be granted.

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 Banks Hinceman. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Sheriff James McVicker to enter open session; seconded by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. **MOTION CARRIED**
A **MOTION** was made by Retired Sheriff BJ Barnes Jr. in the matter of Willie Murray; Adopt the proposed final agency decision by Counsel to **GRANT CERTIFICATION**; seconded by Commissioner Wayne Branch. **MOTION CARRIED**

IV. LEGAL COUNSEL'S REPORT — Ian Courts

Mr. Ian Courts summarized the Legal Counsel's Report, and reviewed the various stages of litigation for the administrative cases as follows:

- 32 active cases.
- 1 case closed since the December 4, 2025, meeting.
- 1 case pending judicial review
- 10 new cases have been opened since the last meeting

V. RECESS

A **MOTION** by Sheriff James McVicker to recess the March 2026 Sheriff's Final Agency Decision meeting: Seconded by Sheriff Lowell Griffin. **MOTION CARRIED**