

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
BOARD OF ETHICS AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**



Office of Government Ethics



IN THE MATTER OF:

A ■ Bell

Respondent

Date: June 6, 2023

CASE No.: 22-0072-P

AMENDED ORDER

Pursuant to the authority conferred by D.C. Official Code § 1-1162.12, the Director of Government Ethics has conducted a preliminary investigation into allegations that the Respondent, A ■ Bell, former Supervisory Social Worker for the Office of Policy, Planning and Program Support Services for Child and Family Services Agency (“CFSA”), violated the District’s Code of Conduct¹ by using government property for other than authorized purposes in violation of District Personnel Manual, Chapter 18 (“DPM”) § 1808.1 and using public office for private gain in violation of DPM § 1800.3(g). The allegations contend that the Respondent used her government email account to send numerous messages regarding personal matters and used her email and official position to request confidential information from a colleague.

Based upon the preliminary investigation and the show cause hearing, the Director of Government Ethics has determined that the allegations are substantiated, and that the Respondent’s actions violated the District’s Code of Conduct. Pursuant to 3 DCMR § 5535.1, Respondent is ordered to pay a fine in the amount of \$2,500.00 no later than June 29, 2023.

Findings of Fact

1. Respondent worked for CFSA for twenty-eight (28) years. At the time in question, Respondent was a Supervisory Social Worker in the Licensing/Pre-Service Training/Fingerprinting Services Division of CFSA.
2. Respondent’s duties included supervising employees who conducted home studies and working with parents to obtain foster and adoption licensure.

¹ See D.C. Official Code § 1-1161.01 (7) (Defining statutes and rules that comprise the Code of Conduct).

3. On April 14, 2022, Respondent sent an email to [REDACTED], an employee in the Subsidies Division of CFSA, requesting a printout of adoption subsidy payments made to a [REDACTED] for adoptive child C.B. from August 9, 2016 to April 14, 2022.
4. Respondent's email also requested information on the process for "what happens if a person is getting a subsidy for a child they are not parenting. Is there a process for filing a fraud case with the District of Columbia or through our OAG office?"
5. Respondent was, at the time, engaged to the father of adoptive child C.B.
6. Respondent's fiancé was married to the mother of the adopted child, [REDACTED], (ex-wife) until August 9, 2016.
7. At the time of the Respondent's request, her fiancé and his ex-wife had reopened legal proceedings regarding custody and financial support of their adoptive child.
8. Adoption subsidy payment information is confidential and only a parent or legal guardian has a right to access that information.
9. Respondent was not a parent or legal guardian of C.B. when she made the request for subsidy payment information and therefore was not authorized to directly access or request access to that confidential payment information of her fiancé's adoptive child.
10. Respondent's fiancé was authorized to request and receive the confidential subsidy payment information for his adoptive child.
11. Respondent's fiancé, on the advice of his attorney in the custody action, requested Respondent gather adoption subsidy payment information for C.B. on his behalf due to his status as adoptive parent of C.B.
12. Respondent had not been authorized by anyone at CFSA to access or request access to the confidential subsidy payment information of her fiancé's adoptive child as a part of her official duties.
13. In the normal course of her work, when Respondent received requests for subsidy payments, she would either refer the requestor to the Subsidies Division or send an email to the Subsidies Division informing them to provide the subsidiary payment information directly to the requestor. Respondent would not request that the information be sent to her.
14. Respondent's request was not related to her official duties and responsibilities.
15. Respondent did not receive the requested subsidy payment information because the request was sent to the adoptive mother who informed CFSA that she did not make the request.

16. Between February to August 2022, on at least 27 occasions, Respondent used her government email account to send emails regarding personal matters, such as wedding plans, personal purchases, home renovations, a rental leasing agreement, and relationship matters.

Conclusions of Law

Based on the evidence of record, I therefore conclude:

1. DPM § 1800.3(g) provides that employees shall not use public office or position for private gain. Respondent violated this rule when used her official position as a Supervisor Social Worker to request confidential subsidy payment information from her CFSA colleague. Respondent was not authorized to receive the subsidy payment information regarding C.B. when she made the request. Respondent's email contained a signature block which included her official title, credentials, division, and contact information. Respondent used her relationship with her subsidy division colleague and her status as a CFSA employee to send the email to her colleague. Respondent used her official position and relationship with her colleague to request confidential information for her personal gain and the personal gain of her fiancé.
2. DPM § 1808.1 provides that an employee has a duty to protect and conserve government property and shall not use such property, or allow its use, for other than authorized purposes. Respondent was authorized to use her email account to further the mission of CFSA by sending emails that related to her assigned duties. Respondent violated this rule when she used her official government email account to request confidential subsidy information that she was not authorized to obtain and that did not relate to her official duties. Respondent also violated this rule by sending at least 27 emails regarding other than authorized purposes such as her wedding plans, personal purchases, home renovations, a rental leasing agreement, and relationship matters.
3. Pursuant to 3 DCMR § 5535.1, a ministerial fine in the amount of \$2,500 is assessed against the Respondent.

WHEREFORE, pursuant to the authority conferred upon me by D.C. Official Code § 1-1162.21(a)(3) and 3 DCMR § 5535.1, it is hereby ORDERED that a ministerial fine in the amount of two thousand five hundred dollars (\$2,500.00) is assessed against the Respondent. Pursuant to 3 DCMR § 5535.4, this fine shall be effective on June 29, 2023. Respondent shall make payment via certified check or money order made out to the D.C. Treasurer on behalf of BEGA or by using the following payment link: <https://dcwebforms.dc.gov/pay/bega1/> and referencing 22-0072-P.



Ashley D. Cooks
Director of Government Ethics
Board of Ethics and Government Accountability

6/6/2023
DATE

SERVICE OF ORDER

This is to certify I have served a true copy of the foregoing Order on A [REDACTED] Bell via email at [REDACTED] on this 6th day of June 2023.



Ashley Cooks

NOTICE

Any party adversely affected by any order of the Director may obtain review of the order by filing, with the Ethics Board, a request for a hearing in accordance with D.C. Official Code § 1-1162.21(a)(3). Pursuant to 3 DCMR § 5530.10, the request for a hearing shall be filed within fifteen (15) days from the Director's issuance of an order. The request must be sent to Lynn Tran, Senior Attorney Advisor, at lynn.tran@dc.gov.