

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING COMMISSION**

IN THE MATTER OF
CHRISTOPHER BRUNELLE

)
)

Case No. 2025-012

FINAL DECISION

Pursuant to 555 CMR 1.10(1), a Hearing Officer was assigned to conduct an adjudicatory proceeding regarding this matter on behalf of the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (“Commission”).

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 11(7)-(8) and 555 CMR 1.10(4)(e)2., the Hearing Officer issued an Initial Decision and Order, and Christopher Brunelle (“Respondent”) had thirty (30) days to provide the Commission with written objections. No objections were received.

After careful review and consideration, the Commission voted to affirm and adopt the Initial Decision of the Hearing Officer.

For the above reasons, the Motion for Default and Final Decision filed by the Division of Police Standards is hereby **granted**. See 555 CMR 1.10(4). The Respondent was afforded the opportunity for a full and fair hearing. See M.G.L. c. 30A, § 10 (providing that, “[i]n conducting adjudicatory proceedings,” “agencies shall afford all parties an opportunity for full and fair hearing,” and “[u]nless otherwise provided by any law, agencies may” “place on any party the responsibility of requesting a hearing if the agency notifies [the party] in writing of [the party’s] right to a hearing and of [the party’s] responsibility to request the hearing” and “make informal disposition of any adjudicatory proceeding by” “default”), § 13 (providing that, “[e]xcept as otherwise provided in this section, no agency shall revoke or refuse to renew any license unless it has first afforded the licensee an opportunity for hearing in conformity with [§§ 10, 11, and 12],” but “[t]his section shall not apply” “[w]here the revocation, suspension or refusal to renew is based solely upon failure of the licensee to file timely reports, schedules, or applications . . .”), incorporated by reference in M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(f) and 555 CMR 1.10(4).

The Commission finds, by clear and convincing evidence, that the Respondent is not fit for duty as an officer and is dangerous to the public, has been [REDACTED], has a pattern of unprofessional police conduct that may escalate, and has repeated sustained internal affairs complaints for the same or different offenses. See M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(a)(xvi), [REDACTED] 10(b)(iii), and 10(b)(v). **Thus, the Respondent’s certification is hereby revoked.**

The Executive Director shall take the necessary steps to publish the Respondent’s name in the National Decertification Index. See M.G.L. c. 6E, §§ 10(g), 13(b).

This is the final decision of the Commission. M.G.L. c. 30A, § 11(8); 555 CMR 1.10(4)(e).

By vote of the Commission on June 26, 2025.

In accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 14 and M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(f), the Respondent may commence an appeal to the Superior Court within thirty (30) days to the extent allowed by law.

After initiating proceedings for judicial review in Superior Court, the Respondent, or the Respondent's attorney, is required to serve a copy of the summons and complaint upon the Boston office of the Attorney General of the Commonwealth, with a copy to the Commission, in the time and manner prescribed by Mass. R. Civ. P. 4(d).

Margaret R. Hinkle

Hon. Margaret R. Hinkle (Ret.), Chair

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INITIAL DECISION

I. Introduction

At issue in this matter is whether this proceeding brought by the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (“Commission”) should now terminate with a default decision in the Commission’s favor, pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 30A, § 10(2), 801 CMR 1.01(7)(a), and 555 CMR 1.10(4). Christopher Brunelle (“Respondent”) did not answer, appear, or defend the allegations of misconduct against him in the Order to Show Cause (“OTSC”). Nor did he respond to mailings delivered to him by the Division of Police Standards (“Division”). For the reasons stated below, I recommend that the Commission grant the Division’s Motion for Default and Final Decision (“Motion”), adopt this Initial Decision as its Final Decision, and determine what discipline should be imposed against the Respondent.

II. Procedural History

1. The Division served the Respondent with an OTSC by USPS Priority Mail on March 28, 2025, addressed to the Respondent’s last known home address. Attachments 1 and 2. The record indicates that the OTSC was delivered on April 3, 2025. Attach. 2.

2. The OTSC contained the allegations against the Respondent and notification of the obligation to file an answer or otherwise respond to the allegations within 21 days. Attach. 1. The OTSC stated that, if a responsive and timely answer was not filed, the Commission may act. Attach. 1. In particular, the Respondent was notified that if an answer to the allegations in the OTSC is not filed, the Commission may enter a Final Decision and Order that assumes the truth of the allegations in the OTSC and that the Commission may take action against the

Respondent's certification, including granting, in full, the action contemplated in the OTSC.

Attach. 1.

3. The Motion was mailed by the Division to the Respondent by USPS Priority Mail on April 30, 2025, to the same last known address. Attachs. 3 and 4. I take administrative notice that the OTSC was attached as an exhibit to the Motion.

4. By operation of law, the Commission may presume that the Respondent received both the OTSC and the Motion, as discussed below. The Respondent failed to respond to either the OTSC or the Motion.

III. Allegations Contained in the OTSC

1. On July 1, 2022, the Respondent was certified as a police officer pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 4(f)(3). The Commission suspended his certification on February 13, 2025, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 9(a)(3) and 555 CMR 1.08(2)(b).

2. On August 5, 2023, the Respondent was on duty as a law enforcement officer at Agawam Police Department ("APD"). During his shift, he operated an APD vehicle, was armed with his firearm, and responded to calls for service, including one for a structure fire. After his response to the fire, the Respondent was [REDACTED] due to potential smoke inhalation. [REDACTED]

3. On October 2, 2023, APD sustained multiple charges of misconduct against the Respondent after conducting an internal affairs investigation related to the August 5, 2023, incident. APD found the Respondent to be in violation of APD rules against conduct unbecoming, [REDACTED], and using alcohol while on duty.

4. On October 31, 2023, as a result of the August 5, 2023, incident, the Respondent was

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

5. On June 20, 2024, the Commission directed the Division to open a preliminary inquiry to investigate the allegation that the Respondent had [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. M.G.L. c. 6E, § [REDACTED]; 555 CMR [REDACTED].

6. On July 17, 2024, the Respondent admitted to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

7. [REDACTED] the Respondent admitted that, while he was on duty as a police officer and carrying his service firearm on August 5, 2023, he was intoxicated.

8. The Respondent has additional history of internal affairs complaints related to alcohol use at APD, including:

- a. On June 11, 2015, the Respondent allegedly assaulted [REDACTED] while under the influence of alcohol, and he was later [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. APD investigated this incident and found the Respondent in violation of APD's rule against conduct unbecoming.

- b. On April 27, 2018, the Respondent attended a breathalyzer re-certification training at 8:00 AM, and his BAC at 11:50 AM, while still at the training, was measured at .027%. APD investigated this incident and found the Respondent in violation of the APD's alcohol use rule.

IV. Attachments

In ruling on this matter, I have considered the following attachments:

Attachment 1: OTSC with a certificate of service, dated March 28, 2025.

Attachment 2: OTSC USPS Priority Mail tracking, indicating delivery on April 3, 2025.

Attachment 3: Motion for Default and Final Decision, dated April 30, 2025.

Attachment 4: Motion for Default USPS Priority Mail tracking, indicating delivery on May 5, 2025.

I take administrative notice of all papers filed in this case, as well as chapter 6E and Commission regulations. See M.G.L. c. 30A, § 11(5).

V. Legal Basis for Commission Disciplinary Action

1. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 3(a):

The commission shall have all powers necessary or convenient to carry out and effectuate its purposes, including, but not limited to, the power to:

- (1) act as the primary civil enforcement agency for violations of [chapter 6E]; . . .
- (4) deny an application or limit, condition, restrict, revoke or suspend a certification, or fine a person certified for any cause that the commission deems reasonable; . . .
- (23) restrict, suspend or revoke certifications issued under [chapter 6E];
- (24) conduct adjudicatory proceedings in accordance with chapter 30A; . . .

2. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(a)(xvi), “[t]he commission shall, after a hearing, revoke an officer’s certification if the commission finds by clear and convincing evidence that . . . the officer is not fit for duty as an officer and the officer is dangerous to the public, as determined by the commission.”

3. Pursuant to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

4. Pursuant to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

5. The Respondent, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

6. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(b)(iii), “[t]he commission may, after a hearing, suspend or revoke an officer’s certification if the commission finds by clear and convincing evidence that the officer . . . has a pattern of unprofessional police conduct that [the] commission believes may escalate.”

7. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(b)(v), “[t]he commission may, after a hearing, suspend or revoke an officer’s certification if the commission finds by clear and convincing evidence that the officer . . . has repeated sustained internal affairs complaints, for the same or different offenses.”

8. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(g), the Commission shall publish any revocation order and findings and shall provide all revocation information to the National Decertification Index (“NDI”).

9. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6E, § 10(h), the Commission may institute a disciplinary hearing after an officer’s appointing agency has issued a final disposition on the alleged misconduct.

10. Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 10, “[u]nless otherwise provided by any law, agencies may . . . place on any party the responsibility of requesting a hearing if the agency notifies [the party] in writing of [the party’s] right to a hearing and of [the party’s] responsibility to request the hearing.”

VI. Notice

The Respondent was notified at his last known address by the OTSC that if he did not file an answer or otherwise respond to the allegations in the OTSC in a responsive and timely manner, the Commission could enter a Final Decision and Order that assumes the truth of the allegations in the OTSC. In addition, the notice informed him that the Commission may take particular action against his certification, including granting in full the relief contemplated in the OTSC. These advisories were sufficient to place him on notice of the consequences of any default. See Lawless v. Bd. of Registration in Pharmacy, 466 Mass. 1010, 1010 n.1, 1011 (2013) (concluding that pharmacist had “ample notice,” where he was informed that “failure to appear at any hearing would result in entry of default and that, in the event of default, the board could enter a final decision accepting as true the allegations contained in the show cause order”); see also University Hosp., Inc. v. Massachusetts Comm’n Against Discrimination, 396 Mass. 533, 539 (1986) (holding that default provision did not violate due process, as it “afford[ed] the respondent reasonable procedural safeguards for notice and an opportunity to be heard”). Despite being afforded the opportunity to do so, the Respondent has failed to file an answer, request an adjudicatory hearing, or otherwise respond.

On April 30, 2025, the Division moved for a default judgment and final decision and served the Motion, with the OTSC and OTSC tracking information attached as exhibits, by USPS Priority Mail with tracking information to the Respondent’s last known addresses, as

indicated by a CLEAR search conducted by the Division. Attach. 3 n.1.

The Commission provided sufficient notice by delivering the OTSC and the Motion using USPS Priority Mail. Under Massachusetts case law, there is a presumption that the addressee receives properly deposited mail. See Espinal's Case, 98 Mass. App. Ct. 152, 152-53, 156 (2020) (citing Eveland v. Lawson, 240 Mass. 99, 103 (1921) ("The depositing of a letter in the post office, properly addressed, postage prepaid, to a person at his place of business or residence, is prima facie evidence that it was received in the ordinary course of mails.")). Further, nothing in chapter 6E required the Division to take any additional steps. I may presume that the Respondent received the Motion that was sent through USPS Priority Mail at his last known address.

VII. Discussion

Pursuant to 801 CMR 1.01(7)(a), a party may request through a motion that a Hearing Officer "issue any order or take any action not inconsistent with [the] law or 801 CMR 1.00." One such action is recommending the entry of a final judgment of default where a respondent has failed to appear. Under M.G.L. c. 30A, § 10(2), an agency is specifically authorized to "make informal disposition of any adjudicatory proceeding by . . . default." Lawless, 466 Mass. at 1011-12 (affirming that agency "ha[d] authority, in an appropriate circumstance, to dispose of an adjudicatory proceeding by default," citing M.G.L. c. 30A, § 10, and concluding that agency's decision to do so was not shown to be improper, where the party failed to appear after the first day of hearing). That step is warranted here. The Commission has afforded the Respondent an opportunity for a full and fair hearing as required by M.G.L. c. 30A, §§ 10, 11(1) and 801 CMR 1.01(4)(c).

In University Hosp., 396 Mass. at 538-39, the Supreme Judicial Court rejected the notion

that due process standards were violated by an agency rule that provided sanctions for a party's default upon receiving interrogatories. The court concluded that the provisions of the agency rule "afford . . . reasonable procedural safeguards for notice and an opportunity to be heard," noting that a respondent is given clear notice of the consequences, and has opportunities to object, to obtain an extension of time, to petition for a default to be vacated, and to seek judicial review of the entire proceedings. Id. at 539. In the case before the Commission, the OTSC and the Motion (both sent by USPS with tracking) provided the Respondent with notice of the consequences of a failure to appear or defend in this matter, as well as an opportunity to object. Attachs. 1 and 3. The Respondent could have sought more time to respond under 801 CMR 1.01(4)(e), (7)(a), and (7)(d). Therefore, the entry of a default judgment by the Commission is both legal and proper.


By reason of the Respondent's default, and upon consideration of the Division's Motion, I recommend that the Commission grant the Motion. See Lawless, 466 Mass. at 1010-12 & n.1; University Hosp., 396 Mass. at 538-39; Productora e Importadora de Papel, S.A. de C.V. v. Fleming, 376 Mass. 826, 833-35 (1978) (recognizing that a default establishes the truth of factual allegations). In addition, I recommend that the Commission find that the allegations in the OTSC and the violations of the statutes and regulations stated therein are deemed admitted and established. See Lawless, 466 Mass. at 1010-12 & n.1; University Hosp., 396 Mass. at 534, 538-39; Productora e Importadora de Papel, 376 Mass. at 833-35.

VIII. Conclusion

The Division's Motion should be granted for the reasons stated above. I recommend that the Commission find the allegations to be supported, make this Initial Decision final, and proceed to determine what discipline is appropriate. In accordance with the provisions of 555

CMR 1.10(4)(e)2.b., the officer has 30 days to file written objections to the Initial Decision with the Commission.

SO ORDERED.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Charles J. Hely".

Hon. Charles J. Hely (Ret.)
Hearing Officer

Date: May 16, 2025