

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
ELLIOT RAMO : ORDER OF SUSPENSION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1213-172

At its meeting of April 12, 2013, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the staff of the Office of Certification and Induction regarding Elliot Ramo. In April 2011, the Virginia Board of Education denied Ramo’s application for a teaching certificate based upon his 1995 federal convictions for Customs Fraud and Tax Fraud. When Ramo applied for New Jersey certification, he failed to disclose his convictions. In response to an inquiry by the Board, Ramo claimed that he filled out his application carelessly in the midst of completing many other applications simultaneously. He also noted that he had been assiduous in alerting all concerned about his “disgraceful behavior dating back over twenty years by now” and that “any error, by omission or commission,” was not deliberate. Ramo currently holds a Teacher of Latin Certificate of Eligibility With Advanced Standing, issued in February 2010, and a Teacher of Latin certificate, issued in July 2011. Upon review of the information, at its May 16, 2013 meeting, the Board voted to issue Ramo an Order to Show Cause.

The Board sent Ramo the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on May 20, 2013. The Order provided that Ramo must file an Answer within 30 days. Ramo responded on June 13, 2013. In that Answer, Ramo admitted to the allegations in the Order to Show Cause regarding his conviction, but reiterated that he did not fail to disclose his felony convictions intentionally. (Answer, ¶¶ 1-5). Ramo further explained that he moved back east in 2007 to care for his elderly mother in the last years of her life. (Answer, ¶ 4). He stated that his life was “on automatic” between running back and forth to class, taking 110 credits in two and one half years, student teaching and working, all while caring for his mother. (Answer, ¶ 4). He added that he applied for licensure in New Jersey and Connecticut simultaneously and that he disclosed his convictions on the Connecticut application, which was approved. (Answer, ¶ 5). Ramo added that “it seems that I was thinking clearly some of the time, and not thinking

at all at other times. I did not intend to make a false declaration. I did not deliberately make a false declaration.” (Answer, ¶ 5).

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(e)*, on June 13, 2013, the Board sent Ramo a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that it appeared that no material facts were in dispute. Thus, Ramo 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 determined to take action against his certificates. It also explained that upon review of the charges against him and the legal arguments tendered in his defense, the Board would determine if Ramo’s offenses warranted action against his certificates. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Ramo was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. Ramo submitted a Hearing Response on July 5, 2013.

In his response, Ramo again admitted to being convicted of the crimes stated in the Order to Show Cause. (Hearing Response, p. 1). Ramo detailed his life growing up and talked about his business dealings before he was convicted. (Hearing Response, pp. 2-5). He discussed his guilty plea as well as his probation and treatment, both of which “had positive outcomes.” (Hearing Response, p. 7). Ramo also recounted the difficulties in raising his son because of various syndromes he had and how through Ramo’s guidance and teaching his son eventually attended Cornell University on a scholarship. (Hearing Response, pp. 7-9). Finally, Ramo stated that he hoped he had provided an explanation “without leaving the slightest trace of an excuse.” (Hearing Response, p. 9). He noted that he had never really forgiven himself and did not ask that of the Board. He only asked that the Board “grant me the privilege to continue to do what I have always wanted: to teach.” (Hearing Response, p. 9). In addition to his Hearing Response, Ramo requested to appear before the Board.

In testimony before the Board, Ramo stated that he was not disputing the Board’s material conclusions. He noted that he had greatly enjoyed teaching for the last three and one half years and hoped

that he had imparted some wisdom to some students. Ramo added that he wished he could have started a teaching career 40 years ago and hoped that the Board would allow him to continue to teach.

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Ramo's false certification regarding his convictions constitutes conduct unbecoming a certificate holder. At its meeting of January 17, 2014, the Board considered the allegations in the Order to Show Cause, Ramo's Answer, Hearing Response with accompanying submissions and his testimony. The Board determined that no material facts related to Ramo's offense were in dispute since he admitted to the conduct alleged in the Order to Show Cause. Thus, the Board determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.7(h)*. It is therefore ORDERED that the charges in the Order to Show Cause are deemed admitted for the purpose of this proceeding.

The Board must now determine whether Ramo's conduct, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, provides just cause to act against his certificates pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.5*. The Board finds that it does.

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:9-17.5*. "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.

In this matter, Ramo has entered a false answer in his application for certification. Ramo fully accepts responsibility for his actions and has offered an explanation about what led to his conduct. Although the level of stress and responsibilities Ramo undertook at the time of his application were daunting and could easily have led to his incorrect answer, nonetheless the Board believes that his conduct cannot go unremarked.

The Commissioner has long held that teachers serve as role models for their students and that status must be upheld at all times. However, although Ramo's actions here fall below that level, his sincere sense of remorse coupled with his cogent explanation of what transpired in his life during that

time period, militate against the revocation of his certificates. Thus, the Board believes that the appropriate sanction in this case is the suspension of Ramo's certificates.

Accordingly, on January 17, 2104, the Board voted to suspend Ramo's Teacher of Latin Certificate of Eligibility With Advanced Standing and his Teacher of Latin certificate for a period of six months. On this 27th day of February 2014 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the suspension of Elliot Ramo's certificates be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Ramo return his certificates to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Licensure, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing:

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.

RRH:MZ:th