



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

In the Matter of Kyle Eidson,
Woodbridge Township Fire
Department, Fire District 1

CSC DKT. NO. 2025-996
OAL DKT. NO. CSV 17273-24

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION
OF THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

ISSUED: September 2, 2026

The appeal of Kyle Eidson, Fire Fighter, with Woodbridge Township Fire Department, Fire District 1, of his release at the end of the working test period, effective October 5, 2024, was before Administrative Law Judge Michael R. Stanzione (ALJ), who rendered his initial summary decision on August 6, 2026. No exceptions were filed.

Having considered the record and the ALJ's initial decision, and having made an independent evaluation of the record, the Civil Service Commission (Commission), at its meeting of September 2, 2026, accepted the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of the ALJ as well as his recommendation to uphold the release at the end of the working test period,

The Commission makes the following comment. The burden of proof in an appeal of a release at the end of the working test period is on the appellant. *See N.J.A.C. 4A:2-1.4(c)*. In this regard, to be successful in such a challenge, the appellant would need to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the appointing authority effectuated the working test period in bad faith. *See N.J.A.C. 4A:2-4.3(b)*. In this matter, as found by the ALJ, the appellant has clearly not satisfied that burden.

ORDER

The Civil Service Commission finds that the action of the appointing authority in releasing the appellant at the end of the working test period was justified. The Commission therefore upholds that action and dismisses the appeal of Kyle Edison.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON
THE 2ND DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Cruz", is written over a horizontal line.

Mary Cruz
Acting Chairperson
Civil Service Commission

Inquiries
and
Correspondence

Shannon L. Dalton
Director
Division of Appeals and Regulatory Affairs
Civil Service Commission
P. O. Box 312
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0312

Attachment



State of New Jersey
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

INITIAL DECISION

OAL DKT. NO. CSV 17273-24

CSC DKT. NO. 2025-996

**IN THE MATTER OF KYLE EIDSON,
WOODBIDGE TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT.**

Brent R. Pohlman, Esq., for appellant Kyle Eidson (Methfessel & Werbel, P.C.,
attorneys)

Nicole M. Grzeskowiak, Esq., for respondent Woodbridge Fire District #1
(Hoagland, Longo, Moran, Dunst & Doukas, LLP, attorneys)

Record Closed: April 24, 2026

Decided: August 6, 2026

BEFORE **MICHAEL R. STANZIONE**, ALJ:

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

From October 28, 2024, to April 1, 2025, appellant Kyle Eidson, a probationary firefighter with respondent Woodbridge Township Fire Department, failed his working test period. May Woodbridge Township Fire Department terminate him? Yes. Employees may be terminated upon conclusion of their working test period if they fail to satisfactorily perform the duties of their employment. N.J.S.A. 11A:4-15; N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.1.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On October 4, 2024, respondent, the Woodbridge Township Fire Department (District), served appellant, Kyle Eidson, with a letter giving notice that he had failed to satisfactorily meet the objectives of the probationary firefighter program during his working test period.

On October 22, 2024, Eidson appealed the District's determination, and on November 27, 2024, the Civil Service Commission transmitted the case to the Office of Administrative Law, where it was filed as a contested case on December 6, 2024. N.J.S.A. 52:14B-1 to -15; N.J.S.A. 52:14F-1 to -23.

On March 3, 2025, a telephone prehearing conference was held with a follow-up scheduled for May 6, 2025. On May 6, 2025, a telephone prehearing conference was held. On June 10, 2026, a final prehearing telephone conference was held, and hearing dates were scheduled. On September 17, 2025, October 31, 2025, November 17, 2025, and February 5, 2026, I held the hearing but left the record open until April 17, 2026, for the parties to submit closing briefs. At the request of the parties, an extension was given to submit briefs. I received both parties' closing briefs and closed the record on April 24, 2026.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS OF FACT

The following is undisputed, and I, therefore, **FIND** the following as **FACT**:

1. Eidson was hired by the District for the position of firefighter on or about January 30, 2024. R-2.
2. Eidson completed Firefighter 1 and Firefighter 2 training as a volunteer with the Avenel Fire Company in July 2022. At no time while serving as a volunteer firefighter was Eidson ever subject to any discipline.

3. As part of the District's probation period for its firefighters, recruits first begin with an approximately one-month-long pre-academy training during which the District reviews with its recruits the skills they will learn at Fire Academy. Next, recruits attend the Fire Academy Program together, which lasts approximately ten weeks. Finally, once recruits complete the Fire Academy, they return to the District for post-academy training, which lasts for approximately twelve weeks divided into six weeks of fire-suppression training and six weeks of training in the Fire Prevention Bureau.
4. Each day, the officers who led the training submitted training remarks to the administration, which included Chief Balog, Deputy Chief Weber, and Deputy Chief Minkler, Jr. These training remarks summarize the training conducted that day and address each recruit's strengths and weaknesses.
5. As part of the Recruit Training Program, Eidson was issued a helmet. This helmet was the property of respondent, and recruits were expected to wear their helmets and fasten them under their chin with a clip when doing their training evaluations.
6. On February 12, 2024, during pre-academy training, recruits took part in a drill in which the recruits took turns advancing and retreating with a charged hose line, among other things. Captain Walsh noted that Eidson needed to work on retreating with the charged hose line and instructed Recruit Eidson to fasten the chin strap on his helmet. R-2.
7. Post-academy training began for Eidson and the rest of his recruit class in May 2024.
8. Various fundamental skills of a firefighter must be performed during post-academy training, including but not limited to forcible entry, reverse lay, and forward lay.

9. “Forcible entry” is when firefighters must force entry into a door or window. For training on this skill, the District uses a training prop called the “Blue Door,” which is secured with pieces of wood. Ibid. Firefighters must force the door open with either a hydro-force tool or via traditional forcible entry, which involves a flathead axe and a Halligan bar.
10. A “reverse lay” describes a skill by which a firefighter must establish a water supply by bringing the hose from the fire engine that is at the fire to a water source, i.e., a fire hydrant.
11. A “forward lay” describes a skill whereby a firefighter establishes a water supply by approaching a fire hydrant, taking the supply hose or large-diameter hose off the rear of the fire engine, and wrapping the hose around the hydrant before the fire engine proceeds to the fire.
12. Eidson’s performance during a June 26, 2024, forcible-entry drill was captured on security-camera video. R-3.
13. The retesting of Eidson began on September 10, 2024. That day, two evolutions were tested. R-2.
14. On September 11, 2024, Eidson underwent a single reevaluation evolution, which was a forcible-entry drill, the purpose of which was to demonstrate proficiency in advancing and operating an inch-and-three-quarter hose line for firefighting purposes, maintaining effective water delivery over a duration of two minutes. This was a two-person drill that was done with permanent employee Firefighter Rivera.
15. Eidson did not accomplish the task and meet the objective of the first evolution on September 11, 2024.
16. Eidson failed to complete the District’s post-academy training program for Specialized Training for Emergency Professionals (STEP) firefighter.

17. Following the September 2024 retest of Eidson, Chief Balog, Deputy Chief Weber, Deputy Chief Minkler Jr., and Deputy Chief Mastanduno had a meeting regarding the retest and Eidson's performance during the retest.
18. Battalion Chief McGrath testified that based on his observations during training, he would not be able to send Recruit Eidson to work the interior of a structure fire.
19. Chief Balog recommended to the Board of Fire Commissioners that Eidson be terminated.
20. On October 4, 2024, by way of correspondence from Chief Balog, Eidson was advised that effective October 5, 2024, the District had terminated his employment in light of his "inability to meet the objectives of the probationary firefighter program."
21. Since his termination, Eidson has not been employed or self-employed in any capacity.

Testimony

Kyle Eidson began his career in the fire service as a volunteer with the Avenel Fire Company. Eidson began his application for employment with the Woodbridge Fire Department by taking the State Civil Service exam, following which he sent his scores to respondent. Eidson was placed on the firefighter list for respondent. Approximately one month after being placed on the firefighter hiring list for the respondent, Eidson was notified that he was being extended a recruit position.

After appellant was hired by respondent and passed his physical, he underwent approximately one month of in-house training at the Woodbridge Fire Department prior to being sent to the fire academy. Appellant's pre-fire academy in-house training began on or about January 30, 2024, and continued through February 23, 2024.

Appellant was very physically fit during the term of his employment with respondent. He felt he was physically fit from participating in the in-house training program, attending the fire academy, and working out on his own. Appellant began his post-fire academy in-house training on May 2, 2024.

Deputy Chief Robert Minkler Jr. oversaw Respondent's Training Division during the relevant time. Deputy Chief Minkler is a certified level two instructor and has been working for the District since November 2003.

New recruits are put through a STEP firefighter training program following their attendance at the fire academy. Applicants for the position of firefighter must undergo a physical examination. The physical requires them to drag or pull dummies to simulate victims, raising, lowering, and climbing ladders and stairs, and doing fire department tasks. Deputy Chief Minkler noted that recruits wear personal protective equipment (PPE) for training evolutions for safety purposes and to acclimate to real-life events.

During a June 26, 2024, forcible entry drill captured on security camera video, Eidson took longer than expected to flake out the hose line and became entangled when the hose line got wrapped around his air pack. The video depicts Eidson failing to meet the objective of the training, which was to breach the door with traditional forcible entry tools. The video reflects that during this training exercise, Eidson falls forward on the ground, and his helmet comes off and lands on the ground. Notably, Eidson did not have his chin strap secured, which caused his helmet to come off during training. The video then shows Eidson getting up, fixing his helmet, and failing to fully enter the simulated structure even though six minutes and forty-three seconds elapsed. Minkler, Jr., in reviewing the video, opined that firefighters are expected to be able to forcibly enter this type of prop door prior to the six-minute and forty-three-second mark.

Deputy Chief Minkler opined that the reasons that Eidson was terminated and was not granted permanent employment were because of an alleged inability to complete forcible entry, reverse lay, and forward lay drills.

Captain Michael Walsh is also a certified instructor and has been employed by the District since March 2015. On February 12, 2024, during pre-academy training, during a drill in which recruits took turns advancing and retreating with a charged hose line, Captain Walsh noted that Eidson needed to work on retreating with the charge hose line and instructed Eidson to fasten the chin strap on his helmet.

During hot weather or warm weather, it is the respondent's policy and procedure that after a firefighter has utilized two air bottles as part of their SCBA equipment, they would be given rehabilitation and rest. Furthermore, firefighters would not be permitted to undertake additional firefighting activity after utilizing two SCBA bottles during warm-weather or hot-weather events without being cleared to return to work by their rehabilitation officer or an ENT. Captain Walsh recognized that during Eidson's post-academy STEP training program, there was hot weather, which required that both Eidson and other recruits be given periods of time to cool off, hydrate, and get out of the elements.

He was not involved in the September 2024 re-evaluation of Eidson.

Deputy Chief Mastanduno served as battalion chief during Eidson's 2024 training and was promoted to deputy chief on September 4, 2024. Deputy Chief Mastanduno is a certified level two instructor and has been working for the District since November 2003.

Mastanduno advised Chief Michael Balog, Deputy Chief Minkler, Jr., and Deputy Chief Weber that Recruit Eidson was not properly using his radio, was exhibiting unsafe practices, had failed to secure his chin strap when training, and needed to work on his strength and endurance.

Eidson did not have his radio on his person during his first evolution of holding the 150' 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " cross-lay. He had it placed on the ground. When called on the radio, he saw that Eidson bent down to pick up the radio while still holding onto the line. After the evolution was completed, he told him never to do something that is unsafe like that. While removing the 5" from the hose bed to wrap the hydrant during the first evolution, Eidson's

helmet came off. This happened because Eidson did not have his chin strap secured around his chin. His chin strap was up over his helmet.

Eidson needed to work on getting stronger and developing stamina. Eidson was easily fatigued after completing the second evolution.

Eidson was warned about his chin strap at the end of the day. He was advised that Deputy Chief Mastanduno knew Captain Walsh had discussed this issue with him. It was explained to Eidson that if Mastanduno saw this happen again, further discipline would ensue.

On May 30, 2024, which was the twentieth day of the post-academy training program, Mastanduno observed Eidson's performance during training and expressed serious concerns. There were still ongoing issues with Eidson's demeanor, listening, and helmet chin strap.

Captain Michael Geiger is a certified instructor who has been employed by the District since June 2012. On May 7, 2024, after doing five evolutions in the morning and only three evolutions in the afternoon, Captain Geiger noted that Eidson needed to work at a better pace for all evolutions and needed to do more cardio and endurance training.

On May 9, 2024, after the morning break, the recruits went to practice deploying the front bumper line. Eidson was the hydrant guy, and after seeing how fast he was moving, Geiger decided to have him do it again. Recruit Eidson was not moving at a pace that Geiger would like to see him move if we had a real structure fire. He took his time getting water. After the second time going, recruit Eidson was better but still had a hard time getting water quickly.

On May 14, 2024, recruit training involved a review of forcible entry skills and training on the forcible entry door prop. Geiger observed that Eidson needed to "improve on door prop" and needed to "improve on forcing inward swinging doors."

Geiger testified that at the conclusion of the post-academy training program, Eidson did not meet the objectives of the program because he “just could not complete that reverse lay, still struggled with that, and his cardio.”

Battalion Chief Keith McGrath is a certified instructor who has been employed by the District since June 2012. McGrath was promoted to the rank of battalion chief in August 2024. McGrath had the opportunity to observe Eidson during post-academy training on a few occasions. He was not a regular observer.

On June 27, 2024, McGrath noted that Eidson, during a drill, which was the reverse lay, was instantly winded. While hooking up the hose to the hydrant, he appeared to be grunting and out of breath. Eidson was asked if he was ok. he stated he was fine. Eidson ran to complete the hookup at the intake and was hunched over and struggling. At this time, the evolution was ended. This was following a fifteen-minute break.

On July 1, 2024, McGrath noted his concerns that Eidson was not progressing and had been given advice and tips to increase his stamina. McGrath believed that based on his observations during training, he would not be able to send Eidson to work the interior of a structure fire.

Battalion Chief Mark Minkler was first hired by respondent as a firefighter in August 2005. He was promoted to the rank of deputy fire chief in September 2024.

Minkler testified that on August 2, 2024, Eidson recognized that he was sloppy in his execution of a training exercise and admitted to him that if he had to complete another exercise, he did not think he could. When Minkler asked Eidson if he would be able to respond to a call after coming back from fighting a fire, Eidson stated to him that he didn't think he could trust someone else's life with his life. This statement concerned Minkler, as firefighting is a strenuous activity with no time-outs.

Deputy Chief Stephen Weber was first hired by respondent as a firefighter in January 2010, was promoted to the rank of deputy chief in 2023 and is a certified level two fire instructor. Weber was responsible for preparing the post-academy training STEP

program. The post-academy training manual for respondent was prepared by Weber and Minkler, Jr. J-1.

Weber stated Eidson was unable to meet the objectives at the end of the post-academy STEP training program and that a meeting was held with him, Chief Balog, and Deputy Chief Minkler, Jr., to discuss with Eidson his deficiencies. Eidson was unable to perform the following tasks: a forward lay, a reverse lay, the Milton Avenue drill, and a simulated garage fire, and failed to meet conditioning standards.

Eidson was provided with the New Jersey Civil Service Commission guide for preparing for the physical fitness or physical performance test in an effort to support him. Weber further clarified that the reason for Eidson's termination was because of deficiencies with a forward lay, reverse lay, Milton Avenue drill, and simulated garage fire, and failure to meet conditioning standards. Weber testified at first that the respondent had a physical performance test. However, he later clarified his testimony and stated that when he referred to a physical performance test, he was referring to the New Jersey Civil Service Commission PPT exam, which is the physical performance test that is performed for firefighters who are in the certification process to move forward with the hiring. This is a pre-hiring exam, and Eidson did pass this exam.

Following the September 2024 retest of Eidson, Chief Balog, Deputy Chief Weber, Deputy Chief Minkler Jr., and Deputy Chief Mastanduno had a meeting regarding the retest and Eidson's performance during the retest. It was determined that the mistakes that are being made are repetitive mistakes that have been going on from the beginning. The same issues of endurance and situational awareness continued to occur in regard to Eidson.

Retired Chief Michael Balog was the chief during the relevant period. He was a level two instructor and worked for the District from August 2005 until his retirement on January 1, 2026. Each day, the officers who led the training submitted training remarks to the administration, which included Balog.

Balog, in reviewing the June 26, 2024, video, noted that he witnessed this exercise and Eidson's breathing was labored; he had trouble catching his breath, and his movement slowed down. Eidson was rapidly inhaling and exhaling, and he had his hand on his knees to recover. The training exercise was stopped, and Eidson did not complete the drill. Eidson's pace was poor. And the time of six minutes and forty-three seconds is unacceptable even if he had breached the door.

Balog was responsible for saving the video recording. R-3. He did not save any other training videos. Balog further testified that he was responsible for drafting the Woodbridge Fire Department document of employee counseling. R-4. Balog testified that this document sets forth all the specific reasons or alleged deficiencies in Eidson's job performance during the probationary period. Balog was not present for any of the reevaluation process that Eidson went through in September 2024.

Additional Findings

As the fact finder, I was able to observe the demeanor, tone, and physical actions of the appointing authority's witnesses. They testified clearly and convincingly about their observations of the appellant and his performance. The testimony of each was consistent with that of the other and bolstered by the submitted evidence. They also testified professionally and without equivocation concerning the working test period and what it required. I find their testimony to be credible.

I was also able to observe the demeanor, tone, and physical actions of the appellant during his testimony and throughout the proceeding. The appellant presented himself as less persuasive. Given the absence of compelling evidence supporting the appellant's assertions, his testimony is afforded less weight than that of the appointing authority's witnesses.

Having considered the testimony and documentary evidence and the credibility of the witnesses, I **FIND** the following additional **FACT**:

1. Appellant's performance did not meet the objectives of the program. Kyle Eidson did not show the necessary improvement in his performance or in his conditioning throughout his testing and training to meet the standards of a firefighter.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The purpose of a working test period is to permit an appointing authority to determine whether an employee satisfactorily performs the duties of their employment. N.J.S.A. 11A:4-15; N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.1(a). During the working test period, an employee must perform the duties of the title. N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.1(c). An appointing authority may terminate a probationary employee's employment if it in good faith determines the employee's performance during the probationary period was not satisfactory. Dodd v. Van Riper, 135 N.J.L. 167 (N.J. 1947), 171; N.J.S.A. 11A:4-13(a). Where the appointing authority terminates an employee's employment due to the employee's failure to satisfactorily perform during the probation period, the question is "whether the authority exercised good faith in determining that the employee was not competent to perform satisfactorily the duties of the position." Briggs v. Dep't of Civ. Serv., 64 N.J. Super. 351, 356 (App. Div. 1960). The employee bears the burden of proving the appointing authority terminated the employee's appointment to the title in bad faith. N.J.A.C. 4A:2-4.3(b). The Civil Service Commission provides for the ability to terminate an employee at the end of the working test period. N.J.S.A. 11A:4-15(c). For entry-level firefighter positions, this period is twelve months. N.J.S.A. 11A:4-15(a).

The evaluation process involves the following steps. The appointing authority observes the firefighter's performance throughout the working test period and documents their findings in progress reports. N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.3. The employee must be provided with copies of all progress reports, ensuring transparency and an opportunity for improvement. N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.3. At the end of the working test period, the appointing authority determines whether the firefighter has satisfactorily completed the probationary period. If the performance is deemed unsatisfactory, the firefighter may be separated from service. N.J.A.C. 4A:4-5.4. The New Jersey Civil Service Commission evaluates whether a termination during the working test period was made in bad faith by examining

whether the appointing authority exercised good faith in determining that the employee was not competent to satisfactorily perform the duties of the position. The burden of proof lies with the employee to demonstrate bad faith on the part of the appointing authority. N.J.A.C. 4A:2-4.3.

Eidson consistently failed to perform skills that were critical to the performance of the job of firefighter. His inability to complete the training drills required of a STEP firefighter presented safety issues that formed the basis for the termination of his employment. These skills are real-life tasks faced by the District's firefighters during real-life calls in the performance of their duties. Firefighters need to have the stamina and the ability to keep going and complete the next task.

Throughout the course of the training program, Eidson struggled. Notably, these skills, including a forward or reverse lay and forcible entry, and those tested by the Milton Avenue drill and garage drill, are skills that advance a hose line, establish a water supply, and enable firefighters to breach a door to enter a structure. They must occur prior to entering a structure fire. Eidson could not complete the necessary steps and was fatigued to the point of being unable to continue working the next stages of a fire once firefighters entered the building.

Eidson was provided feedback on his performance by Captains Walsh and Geiger, as well as the other officers who participated in recruit training. R-2. As a result of Eidson's unsatisfactory performance, the chief met with Eidson in July 2024 and identified and reviewed the drills he had been unable to perform, provided him with a manual containing exercises to help him build his endurance, and advised him he would be retested in six weeks.

During Eidson's retest, he either failed or continued to struggle with each of the evolutions. He did not demonstrate sufficient progress or improvement. For each evolution, Eidson was provided with instructions for the retest.

The retests showed Eidson failed to make measurable progress with the retested tasks. He made mistakes, some of which were repeated. He was winded and needed breaks after doing the work.

After being advised of the corrective action plan and being provided six weeks to practice and prepare, he could not perform at the level required. Respondent's leadership observed that Eidson failed to progress in his skills and that he simply did not have the endurance or conditioning the job of firefighter demands. These deficiencies could not be overcome, and the decided outcome was termination.

Therefore, I **CONCLUDE** that Eidson must be terminated for his failure to satisfactorily complete his training tasks to the level of a firefighter.

ORDER

Given my findings of fact and conclusions of law, I **ORDER** that Eidson is terminated from his position as a firefighter for Woodbridge Township Fire Department.

I hereby **FILE** my initial decision with the **CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION** for consideration.

This recommended decision may be adopted, modified, or rejected by the **CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**, which by law is authorized to make a final decision in this case. If the Civil Service Commission does not adopt, modify, or reject this decision within forty-five days, and unless such time limit is otherwise extended, this recommended decision shall become a final decision in accordance with N.J.S.A. 52:14B-10.

Within thirteen days from the date on which this recommended decision was mailed to the parties, any party may file written exceptions with the **DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF APPEALS AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS, UNIT H, CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION, 44 South Clinton Avenue, PO Box 312, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0312**, marked "Attention: Exceptions." A copy of any exceptions must be sent to the judge and the other parties.

August 6, 2026

DATE


MICHAEL R. STANZIONE, ALJ

Date Received at Agency:

Date Mailed to Parties:

APPENDIX

Witnesses

For appellant:

Kyle Eidson, appellant

For respondent:

Deputy Chief Robert Minkler Jr.

Deputy Chief Michael Mastanduno

Captain Michael Walsh

Captain Michael Geiger

Battalion Chief Keith McGrath

Battalion Chief Mark Minkler

Deputy Chief Stephen Weber

Retired Chief Michael Balog

Exhibits

Joint:

J-1 Training Manual

J-2 Email from appellant regarding throwing hydrant bag

For appellant:

P-1 Appellant's Training Certification

P-2 Appellant's Hazmat Certification

P-3 Appellant's Incident Safety Officer Certification

P-4 Appellant's Traffic Incident Management Certification

For respondent:

- R-2 Respondent's packet of evaluations/training remarks regarding petition
- R-3 Respondent's surveillance video
- R-4 Appellant's counseling session