

***Before the School Ethics Commission
OAL Docket No.: EEC-01367-25
SEC Docket No.: C107-22
Final Decision (Settlement)***

**Erin Florio,
Complainant**

v.

**James Cignarella and Deborah Riley,
Millstone Township Board of Education, Monmouth County,
Respondents**

I. Procedural History

The above-captioned matter arises from a Complaint that was filed with the School Ethics Commission (Commission) on November 17, 2022,¹ by Erin Florio (Complainant), alleging that James Cignarella (Respondent Cignarella) and Deborah Riley (Respondent Riley) (collectively, Respondents), members of the Millstone Township Board of Education (Board) violated the School Ethics Act (Act), *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-21 et seq.* More specifically, the Complaint avers that Respondents violated *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(e)*, *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(g)*, and *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(j)* of the Code of Ethics for School Board Members (Code).

At its meeting on January 31, 2023, and after reviewing Respondents' Answer, the Commission voted to transmit the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) where Complainant would carry the burden to prove that Respondents violated the cited provisions of the Code.

At the OAL, the parties agreed to amicably resolve the matter and filed a fully executed settlement agreement, and the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) issued Initial Decision (Settlement) on May 15, 2025. At its meeting on June 17, 2025, the Commission reviewed the Initial Decision (Settlement), and at its meeting on July 22, 2025, the Commission voted to reject the Initial Decision (Settlement) and to remand the matter to the OAL for further review and consideration. On remand, the ALJ issued an Initial Decision (Settlement) on July 13, 2026, which concluded that the settlement agreement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and should be approved.

At its meeting on August 25, 2026, the Commission reviewed the Initial Decision (Settlement), and at its meeting on September 22, 2026, the Commission voted to adopt the

¹ On November 8, 2022, Complainant filed a deficient Complaint; however, on November 17, 2022, Complainant cured all defects and filed an Amended Complaint that was deemed compliant with the requirements detailed in *N.J.A.C. 6A:28-6.3*.

Initial Decision (Settlement) as its Final Decision. However, the Commission also voted not to take a position on the enforceability of the parties' written settlement agreement.

II. Analysis

In their fully executed settlement agreement, the parties set forth the terms of their settlement. More specifically, the parties agreed, in relevant part, that:

1. Respondent Cignarella acknowledges that he took individual action by forwarding information pertaining to Board communications to those who may not be entitled to it in violation of the Act.
2. Respondent Riley acknowledges that she took individual action by forwarding information pertaining to Board communications to those who may not be entitled to it in violation of the Act.
3. Respondents Cignarella and Riley further agree to verbally provide a private apology to the Petitioner.
4. The parties understand and agree that while this Agreement may be made publicly available, whether through the Commission or through the Open Public Records Act (OPRA), the Parties shall keep the terms of the Agreement confidential and not disclosed by any Party via any means or medium, whether privately or publicly. The response by any Party to any questions posed to any Party concerning the Complaint filed by Petitioner against Respondents shall be that the matter has been resolved and withdrawn by Petitioner. In the event that any Party to this Agreement affirmatively discloses the terms to this Agreement, whether privately or publicly, by any means or medium, the other Party or Parties may make their own disclosures. The Parties agree to waive any cause of action related to breach of this Agreement related to disclosure of the terms of this Agreement, except they shall not waive any such rights related to claims of defamation, harassment or other statutory, tortious, or other common law violations arising out of any such disclosure(s) of the terms of this Agreement.
5. The Parties, on behalf of themselves, agree that this Agreement fully resolves all claims of any nature, known or unknown, that were or could have been asserted against the Respondents, based on facts or events preceding the filing of the Complaint, including but not limited to any claims arising under the Act and the Code, any claims for litigation-related expenses, and mutually releases the Parties with respect to any and all such claims.

After reviewing the terms of the parties' settlement agreement, the ALJ found that the "settlement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and fully dispositive of all issues in controversy between the parties in this case." *Initial Decision (Settlement)* at 2. As such, the ALJ approved the settlement agreement. *Ibid.*

III. Decision

Following its review, the Commission does not find a reason why it should not defer to the parties' mutual decision to amicably resolve their dispute. The Commission adopts the *Initial Decision (Settlement)* as its Final Decision, but does not take a position on the enforceability of the parties' written settlement agreement.

Consequently, the above-captioned matter is hereby dismissed.

Mailing Date: September 22, 2026

Dennis M. Roberts, Chairperson

***Resolution Adopting Final Decision (Settlement)
in Connection with C107-22***

Whereas, at its meeting on October 22, 2024, the School Ethics Commission (Commission) voted to transmit the above-captioned matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a hearing; and

Whereas, at the OAL, the parties submitted a duly executed settlement agreement to the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) for review; and

Whereas, the ALJ issued an Initial Decision on July 13, 2026, concluding that the settlement agreement is voluntary, consistent with the law, and should be approved; and

Whereas, at its meeting on August 25, 2026, the Commission considered the Initial Decision and discussed adopting the Initial Decision as its Final Decision, but not taking a position on the enforceability of the parties' written settlement agreement, and dismissing the matter; and

Whereas, at its meeting on September 22, 2026, the Commission reviewed and voted to approve the within decision as accurately memorializing its actions/findings from its meeting on August 25, 2026; and

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, the Commission hereby adopts the within decision as its Final Decision, and directs its staff to notify all parties to this action of its decision herein.

Dennis M. Roberts, Chairperson

I hereby certify that this Resolution was duly adopted by the School Ethics Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on September 22, 2026.

Brigid C. Martens, Director
School Ethics Commission