

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
MARIA D. GOMEZ : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 2425-109

Maria D. Gomez (Gomez) is the holder of an Instructional Substitute credential, expiring February 8, 2028.

At its meeting of September 19, 2024, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information it received from the Department of Education (DOE) - Office of Student Protection (OSP) and the DOE - Office of Legal Affairs, Accountability & Compliance, including documents from the Superior Court of New Jersey, Cumberland County, regarding Gomez. On or about July 19, 2023, Gomez was indicted on one count of Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Caretaker (2nd degree), *N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(2)*; and one count of Cruelty & Neglect of Children (4th degree), *N.J.S.A. 9:6-3*. It was alleged that Gomez knew that the staff at the center she supervised were utilizing unsafe practices with children. It was also alleged that she admitted to knowing that staff were force feeding children, forcing the children to go to sleep, making the children stay in their chairs and forcefully maneuvering the children.

On March 22, 2024, Gomez pled guilty to an amended charge of Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Non-Caretaker (3rd degree), *N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(2)*. On May 10, 2024, Gomez was sentenced to 180 days incarceration in the county jail and two years of probation.

On March 23, 2024, OSP notified the Board that, as result of her conviction for Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Non-Caretaker (3rd degree), *N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(2)*, Gomez is permanently disqualified from continued employment with any school or institution under the supervision of the Department of Education, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.*

After reviewing the above information, the Board voted to issue an Order to Show Cause (OSC) to Gomez as to why her certificates should not be revoked at its November 1, 2024 meeting. On November 6, 2024, the Board sent Gomez the OSC by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested. The OSC provided that Gomez must file an Answer within 30 days pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(b)*. Gomez filed an Answer on November 30, 2024. *See Answer*.

In her Answer, Gomez admitted that she was indicted on the alleged charges but denied she was guilty. *Id.* at ¶ 3. She stated she was the Office Director in charge of building security, registration of students, licensing standards for New Jersey, food program for New Jersey Department of Agriculture, and reviewing staff credentials. *Ibid.* She denied that she engaged in any misconduct and insisted that she never authorized or encouraged forced feeding, forced sleeping, forcing children to stay in a chair, or forcefully maneuvering any child. *Id.* at ¶ 4. She admitted that she pled guilty and claimed it was because she was harassed by the county office who threatened her with 15 to 20 years in jail. *Id.* at ¶ 5. She also claims she took the plea agreement to “[s]top the harassment and move on with [her] life.” *Ibid.* She states she only served 3 month in jail. *Id.* at ¶ 6. Further, she claimed that she was not aware that OSP determined that she was disqualified from public school employment and asks the Board to reconsider the disqualification. *Id.* at ¶¶ 7-8. As there were material facts in dispute, the Board transmitted the matter to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) for a hearing as a contested case on February 13, 2025.

At the request of the Deputy Attorney General (DAG) representing the Board in this matter, the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) set a briefing schedule for the filing of a motion for summary decision. The Board’s motion was filed on July 11, 2025 and no opposition was filed by Gomez, although two extensions of time were provided to Gomez. The record closed on August 26, 2025.

On September 15, 2025, ALJ Tama B. Hughes issued an Initial Decision. *In the Matter of the Certificates of Maria D. Gomez*, OAL Dkt. No. EDE 03015-25 (Initial Decision, September 15, 2025).

Based on the undisputed documents presented in the motion for summary decision, the ALJ made findings of fact. *Id.* at 2. The ALJ found that Gomez was arrested and charged with Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Caretaker (2nd degree), *N.J.S.A.* 2C:24-4a(2), and Cruelty & Neglect of Children (4th degree), *N.J.S.A.* 9:6-3 on July 13, 2023, and that she was thereafter indicted on one count of each of those charges on July 19, 2023. *Id.* at 2-3. The ALJ also found that Gomez pled guilty to an amended Count One for Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Caretaker (3rd degree), *N.J.S.A.* 2C:24-4a(2) on March 22, 2024. *Id.* at 3. Further, the ALJ found that Gomez was sentenced to two years of probation, conditioned on 180 days in jail, along with miscellaneous fines. *Ibid.* And the ALJ found that Gomez was represented by counsel at the time of the plea and sentencing. *Ibid.* The ALJ also found that, in her Answer, Gomez claimed “she was in fact not guilty and only pled to the charges due to the threat by the prosecutor that she faced upwards of fifteen years in prison. *Ibid.*

Based on the above findings of fact, the ALJ concluded that this matter was appropriate for summary disposition. *Id.* at 4. The ALJ first found that Gomez’ claims in her Answer that the “sole reason she entered into a plea agreement was due to being harassed by the prosecutor with the threat of significant jail time” were “self-serving and disingenuous” as she was represented by counsel at the time. *Id.* at 6. The ALJ explained that to enter a guilty plea, Gomez not only had to sign the plea documents, but would also have had to lay a factual basis on the record under oath before the judge would accept the plea. *Ibid.* The ALJ also found that “[r]egardless of [Gomez’] motivation for entering a guilty plea, the fact remains that [she] pled to and was convicted of third-

degree Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Non-Caretaker.” *Ibid.* Further, the ALJ found that “the law regarding a conviction for endangering child welfare is simple and consistent. A guilty plea to a disqualifying crime prohibits a certificate holder from being a public-school teacher.” *Ibid.* Citing *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-7.1, the ALJ found that a guilty plea to endangering child welfare is one such disqualifier. *Ibid.*

The ALJ concluded that, based on Gomez’ conviction, the Board had just cause to revoke her certificates for unbecoming conduct. *Id.* at 7. The ALJ found that although Gomez requested a suspension rather than revocation based on her years of service, she failed to provide and mitigating factors, extenuating circumstances, contrition or any commitment whatsoever to improve. *Ibid.* And that her denial of knowledge or involvement in the allegations “raises specter of whether she was untruthful at the time she pled guilty under oath to child endangerment or in her answer to the OTSC[,]” finding that “[e]ither scenario is disturbing.” *Ibid.* In viewing the totality of the undisputed facts in this matter, the ALJ concluded that Gomez’ “actions and resulting conviction fall far short of the high standard of conduct expected of an individual who is entrusted with the care and custody of our school children and that her substitute teaching certification should be revoked.” *Id.* at 8. Gomez did not file Exceptions.

On October 24, 2025, the Acting Director and Chief ALJ of the OAL entered an Order extending the time for issuing the final decision in this matter through December 14, 2025, pursuant to *N.J.S.A.* 52:14B-10(c) and *N.J.A.C.* 1:1-18.8.

The Board must now determine whether to adopt, modify, or reject the Initial Decision in this matter. At its meeting of October 30, 2025, the Board reviewed the Initial Decision. After full and fair consideration of the Initial Decision and Exceptions, the Board voted to adopt the Initial Decision.

The Board has the authority to “issue appropriate certificates to teach or to administer” and “may revoke the same under rules and regulations prescribed by the State board.” *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38; *see also N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-3.2 and -4.4; *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 478 N.J. Super. 229 (App. Div. 2024), *cert. denied* 258 N.J. 143 (July 11, 2024). The Board may take action against a certificate holder on the basis of “demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher, or other just cause.” *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.4; *see also Morison*, 478 N.J. Super. at 246, 248 (explaining the Board is responsible for protecting schoolchildren from improper teacher conduct and may suspend or revoke an educator’s continued ability to serve as a teacher at any public school based on unbecoming conduct).

The Board’s long-standing belief is that teachers must serve as role models for their students. “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. A “violation of the implicit standard of good behavior which devolves upon one who stands in the public eye as an upholder of that which is morally and legally correct” may provide the basis for a finding of unbecoming conduct. *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228 N.J. 4, 14 (2017) (quoting *Karins v. City of Atlantic City*, 152 *N.J.* 532, 555 (1998)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The “elastic” concept of “conduct unbecoming” includes “conduct which adversely affects the morale or efficiency” of the public entity or “which has a tendency to destroy public respect for . . . [public] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services.” *In re Emmons*, 63 N.J. Super. 136, 140 (App. Div. 1960) (internal quotations and citations omitted); *see also Bound Brook Bd. of Educ.*, 228 N.J. at 13.

As noted above, after determining the undisputed material facts in the record, the ALJ

found that there was sufficient evidence presented by the Board demonstrating that Gomez engaged in conduct unbecoming of an educator resulting from her conviction for endangering the welfare of a child. The ALJ also found that revocation of Gomez' certificates was warranted. The Board agrees that Gomez' actions, guilty plea and resulting conviction to Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Caretaker (3rd degree), *N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(2)* fall far short of the high standard of conduct expected of an educator. Specifically, her guilty plea to the charges that she knew that her staff were force feeding children, forcing the children to go to sleep, making the children stay in their chairs, and forcefully maneuvering the children. Further, the Board agrees that Gomez' conviction for Endangering-Abuse/Neglect of a Child by a Caretaker (3rd degree), *N.J.S.A. 2C:24-4a(2)* disqualifies her from public school employment, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* As a result of Gomez' conduct, conviction, and disqualification from public school employment, the Board agrees that revocation of her certification is warranted. Thus, the ALJ's initial decision finding unbecoming conduct warranting revocation was proper.

Accordingly, on October 30, 2025, the Board voted to adopt the Initial Decision. On this 12th day of December 2025, the Board formally adopted its written decision to adopt the Initial Decision in this matter and it is therefore ORDERED that Maria D. Gomez' Instruction Substitute credential is hereby REVOKED, effective immediately.



Rani Singh, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing:
via certified and regular mail

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