



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

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CITY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
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AMY TREPAGNIER
DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Hon. Michael Bageris
935 Gravier Street, Suite 2110
New Orleans, LA 70112

Re: **Kortney Hickenbottom VS.
Juvenile Justice Intervention Center
Docket Number: 9665**

Dear Mr. Bageris:

Attached is the decision of the City Civil Service Commission in the above-referenced appeal.

This is to notify you that, in accordance with the rules of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit, State of Louisiana, the decision for the above captioned matter is this date - 9/2/2025 - filed in the Office of the Civil Service Commission at 1340 Poydras St. Suite 900, Orleans Tower, New Orleans, Louisiana.

If you choose to appeal this decision, such appeal must conform to the deadlines established by the Commission's Rules and Article X, 12(B) of the Louisiana Constitution. Further, any such appeal shall be taken in accordance with Article 2121 et. seq. of the Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure.

For the Commission,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Doddie K. Smith".

Doddie K. Smith
Chief, Management Services Division

cc: Dichelle Williams
Elizabeth A Weigand
Jay Ginsberg
Kortney Hickenbottom

file

**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

**KORTNEY HICKENBOTTOM,
Appellant**

Docket No. 9665

v.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE INTERVENTION
CENTER,
Appointing Authority**

DECISION

Appellant, Kortney Hickenbottom, brings this appeal pursuant to Article X, § 8(A) of the Louisiana Constitution and this Commission's Rule II, § 4.1 seeking relief from the Juvenile Justice Intervention Center's (JJIC) imposition of a 30-day suspension on October 3, 2024. (Exhibit HE-1). At all relevant times, Appellant had permanent status as a Senior Social Worker. (Tr. at 7; Ex. HE-1). A Hearing Examiner, appointed by the Commission, presided over a hearing on March 17, 2025.¹ At this hearing, both parties had an opportunity to call witnesses and present evidence.

The undersigned Commissioners have reviewed and analyzed the entire record in this matter, including the transcript from the hearing, all exhibits submitted at the hearing, the Hearing Examiner's report dated June 12, 2025, and controlling Louisiana law.

For the reasons set forth below, Ms. Hickenbottom's appeal is GRANTED.

¹ This matter was originally set for hearing on December 26, 2024, but Ms. Hickenbottom failed to appear. JJIC filed a Motion to Dismiss for Lack of Prosecution. The Commission denied this motion at its regular meeting on January 10, 2025, based on counsel's representation that he intended to request a continuance, but failed to do so. Counsel represented that Ms. Hickenbottom did not intend to abandon her appeal. This ruling was confirmed by a written order on January 16, 2025.

I. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On September 23, 2024, Senior Social Worker Korney Hickenbottom received a request from the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court to transport C.Y. to the court from his residence at the JJIC. (Tr. at 12,54-55). JJIC considered C.Y. high risk based on his history of aggression, incidents with staff, history in the juvenile system. and numerous escape attempts. (Tr. at 54). Ms. Hickenbottom called Supervisor of G. Jones in the Corrections Department about 12:30 P.M. to request assistance with the transport from a correctional officer. (Tr. at 54-55, 63). No correctional officer was available to help her transport C.Y. because all staff were assisting with lunch. (Tr. at 55-56).

JJIC policy requires the following precautions when youth are transported to court:

- Restraints are to be place [sic] on youth at their residential unit or location of movement start
- All movement should be 10-6ed while youth transition to court
- Restraints [sic] remain on until youth has **entered** the court back door
- Restraints are removed inside the back entrance and youth walks unrestrained to the defendant's table
- JJIC Staff sit behind defendant table
- Restraints are placed on prior to exiting back door of the court room
- Restraints are taken off upon return to final destination

(Ex. JJIC-1).

Ms. Hickenbottom proceeded to comply with the Juvenile Court's request. Ms. Hickenbottom testified that she could not wait 10-15 minutes for an officer because Juvenile Court expects an "immediate response." (Tr. at 65-66). Ms. Hickenbottom placed restraints on C.Y. in the residential unit and took him to the courtroom. (Tr. at 57-58). C.Y. was cooperative. (Tr. at 57). Pursuant to JJIC policy, Ms. Hickenbottom removed the restraints on C.Y. in a small room adjacent to the courtroom. (Tr. at 57; Ex. JJIC-1). At the hearing, C.Y. learned that he would be tried on charges as an adult. (Tr. at 58). When the hearing concluded, Ms. Hickenbottom tried to put restraints on C.Y. in the small room, but he was agitated and uncooperative. (Tr. at 59, 61).

Ms. Hickenbottom testified he was moving his legs around. (Tr. at 59). Unrestrained, C.Y. went back into the courtroom and sat at counsel table talking to his lawyer. (Tr. at 61). Ms. Hickenbottom again attempted to place restraints on C.Y. in the courtroom, but C.Y. was moving his legs. (Tr. at 60-61). Because of her earlier interactions with C.Y. that day, Ms. Hickenbottom believed she could de-escalate the situation. (Tr. at 71). C.Y. walked to the exit and then ran and jumped over the fence. (Tr. at 62). Because Ms. Hickenbottom's radio was not working, Ms. Hickenbottom used her cell phone to request assistance. (Tr. at 62-63).

During the investigation, Lee Reisman, the Superintendent of Youth Support Services for the JJIC, testified she assumed Ms. Hickenbottom decided to transport C.Y. on her own. (Tr. at 22). Ms. Reisman testified Ms. Hickenbottom, as the Court Liaison, should have had additional staff. (Tr. at 21). Ms. Reisman also testified that she never asked Ms. Jones if Ms. Hickenbottom requested assistance from a correctional officer with the transport. (Tr. at 31).

Ms. Hickenbottom testified that when a correctional officer assists her, the correctional officer places the restraints on the youth. (Tr. at 62).

II. ANALYSIS

A. Legal Standard for Commission's Review of Discipline

1. The Appointing Authority must show cause for discipline

“Employees with the permanent status in the classified service may be disciplined only for cause expressed in writing. La. Const., Art. X, Sec. 8(A).” *Whitaker v. New Orleans Police Dep't*, 2003-0512 (La. App. 4 Cir. 9/17/03), 863 So. 2d 572 (quoting *Stevens v. Dep't of Police*, 2000-1682 (La. App. 4 Cir. 5/9/01)). “Legal cause exists whenever an employee's conduct impairs the efficiency of the public service in which the employee is engaged.” *Id.* “The

Appointing Authority has the burden of proving the impairment.” *Id.* (citing La. Const., art. X, § 8(A)). “The appointing authority must prove its case by a preponderance of the evidence.” *Id.* “Disciplinary action against a civil service employee will be deemed arbitrary and capricious unless there is a real and substantial relationship between the improper conduct and the “efficient operation” of the public service.” *Id.* “It is well-settled that, in an appeal before the Commission pursuant to Article X, § 8(A) of the Louisiana Constitution, the appointing authority has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence: 1) the occurrence of the complained of activity, and 2) that the conduct complained of impaired the efficiency of the public service in which the appointing authority is engaged. *Gast v. Dep't of Police*, 2013-0781 (La. App. 4 Cir. 3/13/14), 137 So. 3d 731, 733 (quoting *Cure v. Dep't of Police*, 2007-0166 (La. App. 4 Cir. 8/1/07), 964 So. 2d 1093, 1094).

B. JJIC has not Carried Its Burden of Showing Cause for the Suspension of Ms. Hickenbottom

JJIC has failed to carry its burden of showing the occurrence of the complained-of conduct. JJIC disciplined Ms. Hickenbottom for allowing C.Y. to re-enter the courtroom and then failing to place restraints on him before he exited the building, along with issues about her notification to superiors about the escape. (Ex. HE-1). JJIC’s investigator erroneously assumed that Ms. Hickenbottom made the decision to transport C.Y. on her own. Ms. Hickenbottom testified that she requested the assistance of a correctional officer, and this testimony was un rebutted. Likewise un rebutted was her testimony that the request was denied because the officers were supervising lunch. The Commission finds that the presence of a correctional officer would have prevented C.Y. from resisting Ms. Hickenbottom, re-entering the courtroom, and ultimately escaping. The

Commission also credits the testimony of Ms. Hickenbottom that she was unable to reach the dispatcher with her radio, so she used her cell phone to contact G. Jones.

Ms. Hickenbottom's appeal is GRANTED. JJIC shall reimburse Ms. Hickenbottom for backpay during her 30-day suspension, along with all emoluments of employment. The discipline shall be removed from her personnel file.

WRITER:



[Brittney Richardson, Chairperson \(Sep 2, 2025 12:40:32 CDT\)](#)

BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, CHAIRPERSON

CONCUR:



[John Korn, Vice-Chairperson \(Aug 25, 2025 11:14:56 CDT\)](#)

JOHN KORN, VICE-CHAIRPERSON

DISSENT BY COMMISSIONER MONTEVERDE

I would deny the appeal. The parties stipulated that C.Y. was not restrained upon leaving the courtroom on September 23, 2024, and that C.Y. re-entered the courtroom unrestrained. (Tr. at 23). Ms. Hickenbottom violated JJIC policy governing transports of juveniles to court. (Ex. JJIC-1). Therefore, JJIC carried its burden of showing the occurrence of the complained-of conduct. (Ex. HE-1).

The majority excuses Ms. Hickenbottom's decision to transport an aggressive juvenile without a correctional officer because Ms. Jones, a JJIC supervisor, informed her no correctional officer was available during lunch. The majority then finds that the presence of a correctional officer would have prevented the occurrence of the policy violation. I agree that the underlying

problem is the lack of adequate staffing at the JJIC and that JJIC imposed discipline based on an erroneous assumption that Ms. Hickenbottom never requested assistance.

Ms. Hickenbottom testified that she was not authorized to transport juveniles alone. (Tr. at 8). Her decision to transport C.Y. alone was a “but for” cause of C.Y.’s escape. Even taking into consideration the underlying staffing issues, Ms. Hickenbottom’s decision to transport C.Y. alone resulted in the escape of a high-risk, violent, and aggressive juvenile. (Tr. at 8, 20-21). Court operations and education for JJIC residents were interrupted. (Tr. at 28). JJIC placed an administrative hold on the building for weeks while an investigation was conducted. (Tr. at 25). Law enforcement resources were expended apprehending the high-risk juvenile.

C.Y. would not have escaped if Ms. Hickenbottom had informed the Juvenile Court staff that she was unable to transport C.Y. without the assistance of a correctional officer instead of transporting him alone. Ms. Hickenbottom erred by complying with the Juvenile Court’s request when she knew she could not safely transport C.Y. The general risk to the public and the juvenile should outweigh the Juvenile Court’s request when the safety of the Appellant, the public, and the juvenile cannot be assured.

Because Ms. Hickenbottom requested the assistance of a correctional officer and the JJIC’s penalty failed to take this request into account, I would reduce the penalty to a 10-day suspension.



Andrew Monteverde, Commissioner (Aug 25, 2025 09:39:51 CDT)

ANDREW MONTEVERDE, COMMISSIONER