



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF CITY CIVIL SERVICE
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CITY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, CHAIRPERSON
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ANDREW MONTEVERDE

AMY TREPAGNIER
DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

Monday, March 2, 2026

Mr. Vashon Watson

Re: **Vashon Watson VS.**
Department of Public Works
Docket Number: 9761

Dear Mr. Watson:

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 - 3/2/2026 - 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, Sec. 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: Steve Nelson
William R. H. Goforth, Max V. Camp
Bruce Hamilton
file



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**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

**VASHON WATSON,
Appellant**

Docket Nos. 9761, 9762

v.

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS,
Appointing Authority**

DECISION

Vashon Watson appeals a two-day suspension imposed on July 7, 2025, by the Department of Public Works (DPW). (Ex. HE-1) Mr. Watson brings the appeal pursuant to Article X, Section 8 of the Louisiana Constitution and Civil Service Rule II, Sections 4.1 and 10.1. At all relevant times, Appellant had permanent status as an Operator III. (Tr. at 50, 70).

A Hearing Examiner, appointed by the Commission, presided over a hearing on November 13, 2025. 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 December 18, 2025, and controlling Louisiana law.

For the reasons set forth below, Mr. Watson's appeal is DENIED.

I. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Shannon Oldfield-Blanks, the Deputy Director of DPW, asked Roslyn Duplessie, the Program Analyst for DPW, to review the Samsara in-car video system to confirm Mr. Watson was driving to the locations assigned by Ms. Duplessie. (Tr. at 35). Ms. Duplessie assigned Mr. Watson specific locations in the City to conduct on-site inspections of 311 complaints, such as complaints about streetlights, street signs, and traffic lights. (Tr. at 8). Mr. Watson, who generally

drove a dump truck or a vacuum truck, was on a temporary special assignment with Ms. Duplessie. (Tr. at 9, 62). Mr. Watson drove a City-owned vehicle to the locations assigned by Ms. Duplessie. (Tr. at 51).

When Ms. Duplessie reviewed the Samsara in-car video, she noticed portions of the video flagged by the Samsara system based on failure to wear a seatbelt or use of a cell phone. (Tr. at 13). Ms. Duplessie is certified as an occupational safety specialist, and she was concerned about the distracted driving and failure to wear a seat belt. (Tr. at 30-31). Ms. Duplessie forwarded the screenshots to the Director of DPW. (Tr. at 14). Ms. Duplessie forwarded screenshots of the following incidents: (1) Mr. Watson using his cell phone on May 8, 2025, at 8:45 A.M. (Ex. DPW-1); (2) a photo Mr. Watson using his cell phone without wearing a seatbelt on May 14, 2025, at 7:34 A.M. (Ex. DPW-2) and (3) a photo of Mr. Watson driving the vehicle without a seatbelt on May 22, 2025, at 8:34 A.M. (Ex. DPW-3). Ms. Duplessie also provided the video of the May 22 incident. (Ex. DPW-4). In this video, Mr. Watson is looking out the window and then at his phone. (Tr. at 27). In addition, Mr. Watson's speed increases and he crosses the center line while he is looking at his phone. (Ex. DPW-4). The parties stipulated that the vehicle was in motion during all three of these flagged instances. (Tr. at 33).

Mr. Watson testified that he was using the phone for GPS navigation to locate the address of the 311 complaint or using the phone to talk to his supervisor or co-workers. (Tr. at 51). He also suggested he wore the lap belt but not the shoulder belt because the shoulder belt was not positioned correctly for his body. (Tr. at 21-22).

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).

2. The Appointing Authority must show the discipline was commensurate with the infraction

The Commission has a duty to decide independently from the facts presented in the record whether the appointing authority carried its legally imposed burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence that it had good or lawful cause for suspending the classified employee and, if so, whether such discipline was commensurate with the dereliction. *Durning v. New Orleans Police Dep’t*, 2019-0987 (La. App. 4 Cir. 3/25/20), 294 So. 3d 536, 538, *writ denied*, 2020-00697 (La.

9/29/20), 301 So. 3d 1195; *Abbott v. New Orleans Police Dep't*, 2014-0993 (La. App. 4 Cir. 2/11/15); 165 So.3d 191, 197; *Walters v. Dept. of Police of the City of New Orleans*, 454 So. 2d 106 (La. 1984). The Appointing Authority has the burden of showing that the discipline was reasonable and not arbitrary or capricious. *Neely v. Dep't of Fire*, 2021-0454 (La. App. 4 Cir. 12/1/21), 332 So. 3d 194, 207 (“[NOFD] did not demonstrate . . . that termination was reasonable discipline”); *Durning*, 294 So. 3d at 540 (“the termination . . . deemed to be arbitrary and capricious”).

B. DPW has Shown Cause for the Suspension of Mr. Watson

DPW has carried its burden of showing the occurrence of the complained-of activity. The screenshots and video entered into evidence as Exhibits DPW-1 to DPW-4 establish that Mr. Watson was using his phone while driving a City vehicle and that he failed to wear his seatbelt.

Failing to wear a seatbelt and use of a cell phone while driving a City vehicle impaired the efficient operation of DPW. Using a cell phone while driving is a distraction that posed a danger to Mr. Watson and other drivers. Failing to wear a seatbelt (even if Mr. Watson was wearing a lap belt) exposes Ms. Watson to more severe injury in the event of a vehicle accident.

1. The penalty of a two-day suspension is commensurate with the infraction

A two-day suspension is commensurate with Mr. Watson’s repeated use of a cell phone and repeated failure to wear a seat belt while driving a City vehicle.

C. Mr. Watson Failed to Carry his Burden to Show Discrimination based on Whistleblower Status

Civil Service Rule II, § 10.1 provides as follows:

No employee shall be subjected to discipline or discriminatory treatment by an appointing authority because he or she gives information, testimony or evidence in a prudent manner to appropriate authorities concerning conduct prohibited by law or regulation which he or she reasonably believes to have been engaged in by any

person(s). If the employee incurs such treatment despite this admonition, he or she shall have a right of appeal to this Commission.

The Commission applies the same standard to “whistleblower” action under Rule II, § 10.1 as to other discrimination appeals. *East v. Office of Inspector Gen.*, 2011-0572 (La. App. 4 Cir. 2/29/12), 87 So. 3d 925, 927. In disciplinary actions where the classified employee alleges discrimination, the burden of proof on appeal, **as to the factual basis for the discrimination**, is on the employee. La. Const. art. X, § 8(B); *East v. Office of Inspector Gen.*, 2011-0572 (La. App. 4 Cir. 2/29/12), 87 So. 3d 925, 927 (quoting *Goins v. Dep't of Police*, 570 So.2d 93, 94 (La. App. 4th Cir.1990)). *See also* Civil Service Rule II, §§ 4.4, 4.8.

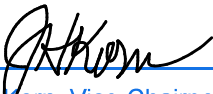
Mr. Watson argues that DPW retaliated against him for complaints of unlawful activity. When asked to identify the unlawful activity, Mr. Watson stated he informed the Civil Service Commission he had not received an evaluation on June 13 and that he had also met with City Councilmembers. (Tr. at 68-69). No record evidence exists of complaints of illegal activity by Mr. Watson.

Even if Mr. Watson had complained of illegal activity, he has failed to show causation under the more lenient *McDonnell Douglass* framework. *Balancier v. Sewerage & Water Bd. of New Orleans*, 2022-0255 (La. App. 4 Cir. 10/19/22), 351 So. 3d 439, 444–45. “[T]his Court employs the *McDonnell Douglass* framework for discrimination cases where there is a “mixed-motive” as to the employer's reason for terminating an employee.” *Id.* “Under that framework, once the defendant has shown a legitimate nondiscriminatory reason for terminating the employee, the burden shifts back to the plaintiff to show that the defendant's proffered justifications are unworthy of credence.” *Id.* Mr. Watson elicited testimony that Ms. Oldfield-Blanks asked Ms. Duplessie to review in-car video of only Mr. Watson, but Ms. Duplessie testified that she only

assigned Mr. Watson to these tasks. (Tr. at 35). Mr. Watson failed to carry his burden to show that DPW's reasons for imposition of a two-day suspension -- his use of a cell phone and failure to wear a seatbelt while driving a City vehicle -- were unworthy of credence.

Mr. Watson's appeal is DENIED.


WRITER:



[John Korn, Vice-Chairperson \(Feb 27, 2026 16:09:44 CST\)](#)

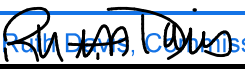
JOHN KORN, VICE-CHAIRPERSON

CONCUR:



[Brittney Richardson, Chairperson \(Mar 2, 2026 12:51:12 CST\)](#)

BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, CHAIRPERSON



[Ruth Davis, Commissioner \(Mar 1, 2026 13:56:57 CST\)](#)

RUTH DAVIS, COMMISSIONER