



# CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF CITY CIVIL SERVICE  
SUITE 900 – 1340 POYDRAS ST.  
NEW ORLEANS LA 70112  
(504) 658-3500 FAX NO. (504) 658-3598

CITY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION  
BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, CHAIRPERSON  
JOHN KORN, VICE-CHAIRPERSON  
MARK SURPRENANT  
RUTH WHITE DAVIS  
ANDREW MONTEVERDE

AMY TREPAGNIER  
DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

Monday, June 23, 2025

Ms. Rowena Jones  
1340 Poydras St., Suite 600  
New Orleans, LA 70112

Re: **Trenella Sanchell VS.  
Sewerage & Water Board  
Docket Number: 9661**

Dear Ms. Jones:

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 - 6/23/2025 - 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: Ron Spooner, Interim  
Harrece Gassery  
Jay Ginsberg  
Trenella Sanchell

file



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Ms. Rowena Jones  
1340 Poydras St., Suite 600  
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Re: **Trenella Sanchell VS.  
Sewerage & Water Board  
Docket Number: 9670**

Dear Ms. Jones:

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

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Chief, Management Services Division

cc: Ron Spooner, Interim  
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Trenella Sanchell

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**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION  
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

**TRENELLA SANCHELL,  
Appellant**

**Docket Nos. 9661, 9670**

v.

**SEWERAGE & WATER BOARD,  
Appointing Authority**

**DECISION**

Appellant, Trenella Sanchell, brings this appeal pursuant to brings this appeal pursuant to Article X, § 8(A) of the Louisiana Constitution and this Commission's Rule II, § 4.1 seeking relief from an emergency suspension beginning October 1, 2024, and the termination of her employment effective October 24, 2025. (Exs. HE-1, J-1 at ¶ 2). At all relevant times, Appellant had permanent status as an Office Worker in the Credits and Collections Department of the Sewerage & Water Board. (Ex. J-1 at ¶ 1; Tr. at 42). A Hearing Examiner, appointed by the Commission, presided over a hearing on December 11, 2024. 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 March 28, 2025, and controlling Louisiana law.

For the reasons set forth below, Ms. Sanchell's appeal is DENIED.

**I. FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

The parties stipulated to the following facts:

1. Ms. Sanchell was at time of suspension and termination, and at all times set forth in the termination letter of October 25, 2024, a full-time employee of the Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans (SWBNO), in the Credits and Collections Department.

2. On Tuesday, October 1, 2024, Ms. Sanchell was called into a meeting in the office of her supervisor Sybil Buxton, with Ms. Buxton's supervisor Nicole Kelly also present; Ms. Sanchell was informed that an unnamed person had complained about her using in the workplace what the termination letter calls "inappropriate and obscene language."
3. In that meeting, no name was provided to Ms. Sanchell.
4. Subsequent to that meeting, Ms. Sanchell sent a text (attached) to some colleagues, including her supervisor Ms. Buxton.
5. October 1, 2024, was Ms. Sanchell's last day of work; at the end of that workday, Nicole Kelly called Ms. Sanchell into her office where Ms. Buxton was already present; Ms. Kelly informed Ms. Sanchell that she was being placed on emergency suspension because of the text that she had learned about from Ms. Buxton; Ms. Sanchell subsequently clocked out and left.
6. On October 24, 2024, Ms. Sanchell returned to SWBNO premises on invitation to a pre-termination meeting, in which Ms. Sanchell apologized for the text to Ms. Buxton, and relayed that she had previously apologized to those of her colleagues on the group text that she could reach.
7. Ms. Sanchell had been an employee of the SWBNO for four years, and before the suspension and termination, had never been formally disciplined before; her performance evaluations have been satisfactory or above, and she has never been placed on any formal Performance Improvement Plan.
8. SWBNO by letter dated October 25, 2024, terminated Ms. Sanchell for the reason stated in that notice.

(Ex. J-1). The text message Ms. Sanchell sent on October 1, 2024, read as follows:

I'm going to beat the fuck out of Sybil so I got council with her and Nicole cause supposedly somebody told Nicole I said out loud Thursday I DON'T GIVE A FUCK but she don't want call the person out I know it was Sybil trying to get me on cursing y'all I really feel like choking this bitch up But God knows she only made it worst for herself.

(Ex. J-2).

Ms. Buxton, Ms. Sanchell's direct supervisor, the subject of the threat in the above text message, testified she is now afraid of Ms. Sanchell. (Tr. at 40).

## II. ANALYSIS

### A. Legal Standard for Commission's Review of 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).

#### 1. 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 disciplining 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. The Sewerage & Water Board has Carried its Burden of Showing Cause**

The parties stipulated to the complained-of conduct, sending a threatening text message to her supervisor in a group chat. Threatening text messages impair the efficiency of the Sewerage & Water Board by making other employees feel unsafe at work.

**1. The discipline is commensurate with the infraction**

The undersigned Commissioners find that termination of employment is commensurate with Ms. Sanchell’s conduct under the Sewerage & Water Board’s Workplace Violence Prevention Policy, as quoted in the October 25, 2024, letter of termination.

Ms. Sanchell’s appeal is DENIED.

WRITER:

  
Brittney Richardson (Jun 20, 2025 18:01 CDT)  
BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, COMMISSIONER

CONCUR:



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JOHN KORN, VICE-CHAIRPERSON



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[Andrew Monteverde \(Jun 20, 2025 15:55 CDT\)](#)

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ANDREW MONTEVERDE, COMMISSIONER