

**COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S MERIT BOARD**

**Sheriff of Cook County**

vs.

**CORRECTIONAL OFFICER  
VERNITA JONES  
STAR #15983**

)  
)  
)  
)  
)  
)  
)

**Docket No. 2179**

**DECISION**

This matter to be heard pursuant to notice before Dr. Byron T. Brazier, Board Member, on February 22, 2022, March 1, 2022, May 3, 2022, and June 23, 2022. the Merit Board finds as follows:

**Jurisdiction**

**Vernita Jones**, hereinafter referred to as the Respondent, was appointed a Cook County Correctional Officer on April 17, 2006. Respondent's position as a Correctional Officer involves duties and responsibilities to the public; each member of the Cook County Sheriff's Merit Board, hereinafter Board, has been duly appointed to serve as a member of the Board pursuant to confirmation by the Cook County Board of Commissioners, State of Illinois, to sit for a stated term; the Board has jurisdiction of the subject matter of the parties in accordance with 55 ILCS 5/3-7001, *et seq*; and the Respondent was served with a copy of the Complaint and notice of hearing and appeared before the Board with counsel to contest the charges contained in the Complaint.

As a threshold matter, a proceeding before the Merit Board is initiated at the time the Sheriff files a written charge with the Merit Board. 55 ILCS 5/3-7012. A document is considered filed, in this case with the Merit Board, “when it is deposited with and passes into the exclusive control and custody of the [Merit Board administrative staff], who understandingly receives the same in order that it may become a part of the permanent records of his office.” See *Dooley v. James A. Dooley Associates Employees Retirement Plan*, 100 Ill.App.3d 389, 395 (1981) (quoting *Gietl v. Commissioners of Drainage District No. One*, 384 Ill. 499, 501-502 (1943) and citing *Hamilton v. Beardslee*, 51 Ill. 478 (1869)); accord *People ex rel. Pignatelli v. Ward*, 404 Ill. 240, 245 (1949); *in re Annex Certain Terr. To the Village of Lemont*, 2017 IL App (1st) 170941, ¶ 18; *Illinois State Toll Highway Authority v. Marathon Oil Co.*, Ill. App. 3d 836 (1990) (“A ‘filing’ implies delivery of a document to the appropriate party with the intent of having such document kept on file by that party in the appropriate place.” (Quoting *Sherman v. Board of Fire & Police Commissioners*, 111 Ill. App. 3d 1001, 1007 (1982))); *Hawkyard v. Suttle*, 188 Ill. App. 168, 171 (1914 (“A paper is considered filed when it is delivered to the clerk for that purpose.”)).

The original Complaint in this matter was filed with the Merit Board’s administrative staff on May 2, 2019, and the amended complaint was filed on October 21, 2021. Regardless of whether or not Merit Board Members were properly appointed during a given term, the Merit Board, as a quasi-judicial body and statutorily created legal entity, maintained at all times a clerical staff not unlike the Clerk of the Circuit Court. (“Administrative Staff”). These Administrative Staff members receive and date stamp complaints, open a case file, assign a case number, and perform all of the functions typically handled by the circuit clerk’s office. Just as a timely filed complaint would be accepted by the circuit clerk even if there were no properly appointed judges sitting on

that particular day, so too was the instant Complaint with the Administrative Staff of the Merit Board. Accordingly, the Complaint filed commencing the instant action, was properly filed, and will be accepted as the controlling document for calculating time in this case.

**Background:**

1. In approximately 2007, Respondent began dating an individual by the name of [REDACTED] (“[REDACTED]”). (R.250). And that the relationship between Respondent and [REDACTED] lasted from approximately 2007-2018. (R.250)

2. On May 02, 2019, the Sheriff filed a Complaint alleging that Respondent failed to report to the Cook County Sheriff’s Office and/or CCDOC that she was associated with [REDACTED]. On October 20, 2021, the Sheriff filed an Amended Complaint additionally alleging that Respondent either falsely advised the Sheriff that her relationship with [REDACTED] had ended in January 2019, or in the alternative had resumed her relationship with [REDACTED] and failed to report to the Cook County Sheriff’s Office and/or CCDOC that she was associated with [REDACTED].

3. On February 28, 2022, the Merit Board began conducting hearings, between February 28, 2022, and June 22, 2022, before Commissioner Byron Brazier. Both parties were represented by counsel and had a full and fair opportunity to present evidence.<sup>1</sup>

4. On January 23, 2018, Executive Director [REDACTED] (“Director [REDACTED]”) submitted a Complaint register against Respondent. (Exhibit 4, R.44, R.180).

**STATEMENT OF FACTS**

According to the original and the amended complaint, and by direct testimony of the Sheriff’s

---

<sup>1</sup> The hearing in this matter was conducted on four separate dates: February 28, 2022, March 1, 2022, May 3, 2022, and June 23, 2022.

witnesses and the respondent, that during or about 2007, RESPONDENT began an approximately eleven-year romantic relationship with Mr. [REDACTED] ("Mr. [REDACTED]"), a person RESPONDENT knew or should have known was a convicted felon and had a particular reputation in the community for present or past involvement in felonious or criminal behavior. And from the time RESPONDENT began a romantic relationship with Mr. [REDACTED] until March 23, 2016, RESPONDENT failed to report to the Cook County Sheriff's Office ("CCSO") and/or the CCDOC that she associated with Mr. [REDACTED], a person whom she knew or should have known was a felon and had a particular reputation in the community for present or past involvement in felonious or criminal behavior.

On or about December 10, 2012, and on January 10, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was identified by the Chicago Police Department as a member of [REDACTED] street gang, a "[REDACTED]" And that on August 12, 2017, while driving RESPONDENT's automobile, Mr. [REDACTED] was pulled over and arrested for a felony, Aggravated Unlawful Use of a Weapon (Possession by a Felon). Mr. [REDACTED] had a loaded handgun under the driver's seat of RESPONDENT's vehicle and approximately 2.5 grams of cannabis in the cupholder of the center console of RESPONDENT's vehicle. RESPONDENT's vehicle was ordered towed by the arresting officer, who reported Mr. [REDACTED]' residence to be [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Maywood, Illinois. The original and amended complaint also included the following:

1. That on August 12, 2017, Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in CCDOC for the sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) time.
2. That on January 9, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was arrested for selling narcotics. The arresting officer reported Mr. [REDACTED]' residence as [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Maywood, Illinois.
3. That on January 10, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in CCDOC for the seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) time. Mr. Chairs was housed in CCDOC Division 6 until January 17, 2018.

4. That on January 10, 2018, at approximately 7:34 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on the Securus telephone system, while Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in the CCDOC. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately five (5) minutes. RESPONDENT called Mr. [REDACTED] "Baby," and told him she would "look in the system" regarding his court date. RESPONDENT explained to Mr. [REDACTED] why he cannot be released until he goes to court. RESPONDENT told Mr. [REDACTED] that she would be at work the next day and would see him, though they don't know where in CCDOC Mr. [REDACTED] will be. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] discussed the possibility of Mr. [REDACTED] getting his bond reinstated or being released to house arrest (electronic monitoring). Mr. [REDACTED] raised the fact that he is a convicted felon, but RESPONDENT replied to Mr. [REDACTED] that he is still eligible.
5. That on January 11, 2018, at approximately 5:59 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT called Mr. [REDACTED] "Baby," and they conversed for approximately seventeen (17) minutes, during which time RESPONDENT told him that she will have to find out whom she knows in Division 6, and that RESPONDENT will go see CCDOC Inmate Services the next day to get things for Mr. [REDACTED]. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] recounted how they saw each other earlier that day. Mr. [REDACTED] told RESPONDENT that Mr. [REDACTED] is the only [REDACTED] on deck, and RESPONDENT said she knew. Mr. [REDACTED] expounded that everyone else on the deck is older [REDACTED] and there is no other [REDACTED]
6. That on January 12, 2018, at approximately 5:35 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on the Securus telephone system on a tier in Division 6 of the CCDOC. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately twenty-three

(23) minutes. RESPONDENT told Mr. [REDACTED] that she is "ready for him to come home," and that she has slept without him for two weeks. RESPONDENT told Mr. [REDACTED] she is always going to be there for him, and that the reason for this trouble is for him to be with her. Mr. [REDACTED] told RESPONDENT that he thought that his people were on the gang-banging deck, and RESPONDENT said that some are upstairs.

7. That on January 12, 2018, at approximately 9:01 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a Securus telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately thirty-five (35) seconds.
8. That on January 13, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was moved to a different tier within Division 6.
9. That on January 13, 2018, at approximately 7:15 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a Securus telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately twenty-nine (29) minutes. RESPONDENT told Mr. [REDACTED] that RESPONDENT called a lieutenant and had Mr. [REDACTED] moved to a different tier in Division 6. After RESPONDENT questioned the nature of the relationship that Mr. [REDACTED] had with the female who possesses and answers Mr. [REDACTED]'s phone and told [REDACTED] that the female did not talk to RESPONDENT when she came to court, Mr. [REDACTED] had RESPONDENT call the phone and Mr. [REDACTED] repeatedly told the female who answered that RESPONDENT was his "girl." RESPONDENT told Mr. [REDACTED] that she always misses him. As the call concluded, they told each other they love each other.
10. That on January 16, 2018, at approximately 7:20 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a Securus telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately thirty-nine (39) seconds.

11. That on January 16, 2018, at approximately 7:30 p.m., RESPONDENT accepted a Securus telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately five (5) minutes. RESPONDENT explained to Mr. [REDACTED] why he was not released on house arrest, yet.
12. That on January 17, 2018, at approximately 8:27 a.m., RESPONDENT accepted a Securus telephone call from Mr. [REDACTED] on a tier in Division 6. RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] conversed for approximately eleven (11) minutes. RESPONDENT had Mr. [REDACTED] put the tier officer on the phone, and RESPONDENT told the tier officer to take care of her family member, making sure that the tier officer knew RESPONDENT by her voice. RESPONDENT allowed Mr. [REDACTED] to use RESPONDENT's phone number to enroll in electronic monitoring using Mr. [REDACTED]' mother's name, who lives with them at [REDACTED].
13. That the Securus telephone system recorded the eight (8) telephone conversations between RESPONDENT and Mr. [REDACTED] from January 10, 2018, through January 17, 2018, while Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in Division 6, as described in paragraphs 15-18 and 20-23 above.
14. That on January 17, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was placed on electronic monitoring in the home he shared with RESPONDENT at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in Maywood, Illinois.
15. That on February 2, 2018, Mr. [REDACTED] was moved to a residence in the City of Chicago under electronic monitoring.
16. That on May 24, 2018, with her union representative present, RESPONDENT was interviewed and provided an audio-recorded statement to investigators from the Cook County Sheriff's Office of Professional Review ("OPR").

17. approximately That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT admitted to investigators from OPR that RESPONDENT was in a relationship with Mr. [REDACTED] and lived with him for ten (10) years.
18. That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT admitted to investigators from OPR that RESPONDENT did not notify a direct supervisor or the Cook County Sheriff's Office ("CCSO") that Mr. [REDACTED] was in CCDOC custody.
19. That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT falsely reported to investigators from OPR that RESPONDENT did not talk to Mr. [REDACTED] by phone through Securus while he was in custody in the CCDOC.
20. That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT falsely reported to investigators from OPR that if she spoke to Mr. [REDACTED] on the phone, it was just a hello and then she would pass the phone to his mother.
21. That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT falsely reported to investigators from OPR that Mr. [REDACTED] never informed RESPONDENT that there were "shanks" (sharp, knife-like weapons made in jail) on the tier where Mr. [REDACTED] was housed.
22. That on May 24, 2018, RESPONDENT falsely reported to investigators from OPR that RESPONDENT was not living with Mr. [REDACTED] while he was on electronic monitoring at her home at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Maywood, Illinois.
23. It was further reported that on or around June 3, 2019, Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in Illinois Department of Corrections ("IDOC"), Jacksonville Correctional Center.
24. That on Mr. [REDACTED]' Phone Numbers Allowed to Call ("PAN") list at IDOC, RESPONDENT is registered as Mr. [REDACTED]' wife, Nita [REDACTED].



25. That from around June 18, 2019, until around February 11, 2020, during the pendency of this Merit Board proceeding, RESPONDENT had at a minimum 604 Securus telephone calls with Mr. [REDACTED] while Mr. [REDACTED] was incarcerated in IDOC, Jacksonville Correctional Center.
26. That during those Securus telephone calls with Mr. [REDACTED] from around June 18, 2019, until around February 11, 2020, RESPONDENT referred herself as Mr. [REDACTED]' wife.
27. That during those Securus telephone calls with Mr. [REDACTED] from around June 18, 2019, until around February 11, 2020, RESPONDENT constantly said she loves Mr. [REDACTED].
28. That RESPONDENT falsely claimed that her relationship with Mr. [REDACTED] ended when it did not or in the alternative, secretly resumed her relationship with Mr. [REDACTED] with the full knowledge of Mr. [REDACTED]' criminal records.

The testimony provided by the respondent concerning being separated from Mr. [REDACTED] and that the relationship did not resume (R.278), that the respondent was going through a difficult time in her relationship with [REDACTED] and that she would tell him anything he wanted to hear to keep the peace and keep things quiet because the relationship had become toxic. (R.195,259), and that Respondent informed Inv. [REDACTED] that she was under a doctor's care at the time of the interview and under a lot of medication because of her situation with [REDACTED] (R.195,203,273), and in or around April 2017, Respondent was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD"), severe anxiety, panic disorder and depression. (Respondent's Exhibit 4, R.270,271), and that Respondent was diagnosed with PTSD because of the trauma caused by [REDACTED] during the time Respondent and [REDACTED] were in a relationship. (R.272), and that during the OPR interview, Respondent testified that she was not in a good mental state (R.277). However, where the respondent's situation is unfortunate, it had absolutely nothing to do with her reporting her

relationship with [REDACTED], who she should have known was a convicted felon. By the preponderance of evidence, the Respondent's testimony is inconsistent with the facts presented in this case through direct testimony as well as audiotapes. In addition, the ongoing relationship, while [REDACTED] was in the custody of the IDOC only verifies the inconsistency of her testimony to OPR and in the trial. It is also inconceivable that she did not know that her husband or significant other was not involved in criminal activities especially while maintaining contact after being convicted and in the custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections as well as living with him over ten years.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the evidence presented, and after assessing the credibility of witnesses and the weight given by the evidence in the record, the Board finds, by a preponderance of the evidence, that Respondent Vernita Jones did violate the Cook County Sheriff's Department Rules and Regulations of the Sheriff's Department listed in the original and the amended complaint especially including the following:

CCDOC GENERAL ORDER 3.8 (effective: October 1, 1998)  
ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT, in its entirety, including but not limited to, the following subparts: I, IIA and IIB, III A4 and B18, D6 and G.

#### **RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR ALL SWORN AND CIVILIAN CCSO EMPLOYEES**

- A. Compliance with Laws, Ordinances, and Regulations
  2. Employees shall comply with lawful rules, Sheriff's Office written directives, verbal orders, SEAM articles, and political prohibitions issued by the proper authorities.

B. Conduct on and off duty.

CCSO employees shall:

1. Maintain a professional demeanor while on duty and will not engage in off-duty behavior that would reflect negatively on the CCSO.
2. Conduct themselves on and off-duty in such a manner to reflect favorably on the CCSO. Employees, whether on or off duty, will no engage in conduct which discredits the integrity of the CCSO, its employees, the employee him/herself, or which impairs the operations of the CCSO. Such actions shall constitute conduct unbecoming of an office or employee of the CCSO.
4. Maintain a level of conduct in their personal and business affairs that is in keeping with the highest standards of the law enforcement profession. Employees will not participate in any incident that:
  - a. Involves moral turpitude or impairs their ability to perform as law enforcement officers; or
  - b. Causes the CCSO to be brought into disrepute.

D. Prohibited associations, establishments, and activities.

CCSO employees shall not:

9. Except in the performance of official duties or where unavoidable because of Family Relationship, engage in regular or continuous

associations or dealings with persons whom they know, or should know, are persons who are:

- a. Under criminal investigation or indictment; and/or
- b. Who has a reputation in the community or department for present or past involvement in felonious or criminal behavior.

H. Reporting violations.

2. It shall be the responsibility of every employee to immediately report to OPR and his/her immediate supervisor (or a supervisor of his/her choice within his/her Chain of Command) verbally and in writing, any fact or situation which may give rise to or be construed as corrupt, illegal, or unethical behavior, and/or a possible conflict of interest.
3. This shall include but not be limited to reporting anything which could impair the employee's performance of his/her duties in a fair and impartial manner.

**Order**

Wherefore, based on the foregoing, it is hereby ordered that Respondent Vernita Jones shall be terminated from the Cook County Sheriff's Office effective May 2, 2019.

**JOHN J. DALICANDRO**, Chairman  
**BYRON BRAZIER**, Vice-Chairman  
**VINCENT T. WINTERS**, Secretary  
**KIMBERLY PATE GODDEN**, Board Member  
**TERRENCE J. WALSH**, Board Member  
**MARLA M. KAIDEN**, Board Member  
**WADE INGRAM SR.** Board Member



Telephone: 312-603-0170  
Fax: 312-603-9865  
Email: Sheriff.MeritBoard@ccsheriff.org

**COOK COUNTY**  
**SHERIFF'S MERIT BOARD**  
69 West Washington - Suite 1100  
Chicago, IL 60602

Vernita Jones  
Correctional Officer  
Docket No. 2179

This Decision is adopted and entered by a majority of the Members of the Merit Board:

John J. Dalicandro, Byron Brazier, Kimberly Pate Godden, Terrence J. Walsh, Marla M. Kaiden and Wade Ingram Sr.

Not Present: Vince T. Winters

DISSENT

The following Members of the Merit Board dissent from the Findings and Decision of the majority of the Board.

[NONE]

DATED AT COUNTY OF COOK, STATE OF ILLINOIS, THIS 20<sup>th</sup> DAY OF OCTOBER, 2022.