

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
 COUNTY OF RICHLAND)
)
 IN THE MATTER OF:)
 Complaint 2013-146)
)
 Christopher Collins,)
 Respondent.)
)
 State Ethics Commission,)
 Complainant.)
 _____)

BEFORE THE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

DECISION AND ORDER

STATE ETHICS
 COMMISSION

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RECEIVED

This matter comes before the State Ethics Commission by virtue of a complaint filed by the Commission on June 20, 2013. On September 18, 2013, pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. § 8-13-320(10)(i)(Supp. 2012), the State Ethics Commission reviewed the above-captioned complaint charging Respondent, Christopher Collins, with three violations of Section 8-13-700(B) and probable cause was found.

Present at the Hearing on November 19, 2014 were Commission Members James I. Warren, III, Chair, Sandy P. Templeton and Sherri A. Lydon. Respondent was present and appeared *pro se*. Complainant was represented by Cathy L. Hazelwood, General Counsel. The following charges were considered:

COUNT ONE
PARTICIPATION IN A GOVERNMENTAL DECISION
SECTION 8-13-700(B), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED

The Respondent, Christopher Collins, a Charleston County School Board member, did in Charleston County, on February 8, 2010, unlawfully violate Section 8-13-700(B), by using his office to influence a government decision in which a business with which he is associated had an economic interest when Respondent voted to approve a lease agreement between the Charleston County School Board and Healing Ministries Baptist Church where he is employed as the minister in violation of Section 8-13-700(B).

COUNT TWO

**PARTICIPATION IN A GOVERNMENTAL DECISION
SECTION 8-13-700(B), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

The Respondent, Christopher Collins, a Charleston County School Board member, did in Charleston County, on November 26, 2012, unlawfully violate Section 8-13-700(B), by using his office to influence a government decision in which a business with which he is associated had an economic interest when Respondent voted to approve a lease agreement between the Charleston County School Board and Healing Ministries Baptist Church where he is employed as the minister in violation of Section 8-13-700(B).

COUNT THREE
**PARTICIPATION IN A GOVERNMENTAL DECISION
SECTION 8-13-700(B), S.C. CODE ANN., 1976, AS AMENDED**

The Respondent, Christopher Collins, a Charleston County School Board member, did in Charleston County, on February 25, 2013, unlawfully violate Section 8-13-700(B), by using his office to influence a government decision in which a business with which he is associated had an economic interest when Respondent participated in the school board's discussion on additional rental charges from Healing Ministries Baptist Church, where he is employed as the minister, for additional usage of space not previously approved in the lease agreement between the Charleston County School Board and Healing Ministries Baptist Church in violation of Section 8-13-700(B).

STATEMENT OF FACTS

1. The Respondent, Christopher Collins, is currently serving as a member of the Charleston County School Board (CCSB). Respondent is Pastor of Healing Ministries Baptist Church (HMBC).

2. Investigator Daniel Choate of the State Ethics Commission testified that minutes of the CCSB meeting of February 8, 2010 indicated that Respondent joined in a

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vote to approve the lease agreement between CCSB and HMBC. The lease agreement indicated that Respondent signed the lease agreement as a representative of HMBC. Investigator Choate testified that minutes of a CCSB meeting on November 26, 2012 stated that Respondent participated in a CCSB vote concerning the lease agreement between CCSB and HMBC. Finally, minutes of a CCSB meeting on February 25, 2013 stated that Respondent sought relief from additional rental charges due to additional usage of the space by HMBC. Respondent did not vote on the motion but he did participate in a discussion of the matter. There is no evidence that Respondent submitted a letter of recusal.

3. CCSB General Counsel John Emerson testified that he was present at the February 8, 2010, November 26, 2012, and the February 25, 2013 meetings. He recalled Respondent participating in and voting on matters pertaining to HMBC in the leasing of CCSB property.

4. Respondent advised that he did not perceive a violation of the Ethics Act on his part when he discussed matters at CCSB meetings concerning his church. He did not know that, due to his position with HMBC, the church was a business with which he was associated. Respondent testified that he asked, then CCSB chair, Greg Myers, who is an attorney, about renting the space for his church. He testified that at that time no one told him he could have a conflict and should not participate in the lease process. Only after various newspaper articles were written did he even know there was a problem. Further, Respondent testified that he did not recall ever receiving any Ethics Act training for new school board members.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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Based upon the foregoing Statement of Facts, the Commission concludes, as a matter of law:

1. During all times relevant, the Respondent, Christopher Collins, was a public official, as defined by S.C. Code Ann. § 8-13-100(27)(Supp. 2013).
2. The State Ethics Commission has personal and subject matter jurisdiction.
3. Section 8-13-700(B) prohibits a public official from using his official position on a matter in which he or his business has an economic interest.

DECISION

NOW, THEREFORE, based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the State Ethics Commission has determined based upon a preponderance of evidence that Respondent Christopher Collins is in violation of Counts One and Two of the Notice of Hearing. Count Three is dismissed.

THEREFORE, the State Ethics Commission hereby issues a written reprimand to Christopher Collins for his violation of Section 8-13-700(B) of the Ethics Reform Act,

AND, orders Respondent to pay a fine of \$150.00 to the State Ethics Commission within 30 days of receipt of the signed order,

AND IT IS SO ORDERED THIS 19th DAY OF December 2014.

STATE ETHICS COMMISSION



JAMES I. WARREN, III
HEARING CHAIR

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA